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Paul Jordan

The Modern Fairy Tale:
Nation Branding, National Identity
and the Eurovision Song Contest
in Estonia

Politics and Society
in the Baltic Sea Region 2

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Politics and Society in the Baltic Sea Region is a series devoted to contemporary social and political issues in the countries surrounding the Baltic Sea. A specific focus is on current issues in the Baltic states and how these relate to the wider regional and geopolitical challenges. Open to a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences as well as diverse conceptual and methodological approaches, the series seeks to become a forum for high-level social science scholarship that will significantly enrich international knowledge and understanding of the Baltic Sea region. All books published in the series are peer-reviewed.

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Preface

This work was inspired by my doctoral research at the University of Glasgow which raised a number of interesting questions about the states of the Baltic Sea region and the Former Soviet Union and their relationship to, and engagement with, the European Union as well as the broader constructions of Europe and the geopolitical categories of East and West. During my studies I developed a keen interest in the Baltic region and Estonia in particular. I was interested in why the Baltic states, and especially Estonia, progressed so rapidly towards EU membership whilst other EU aspirant countries appeared to lag behind. These developments also raised questions regarding identity construction in the context of the return to Europe of post-communist countries. It was during this time that international image came to be used by national governments as they sought integration into various European geopolitical power structures such as the EU and the Council of Europe. How were these elite level discourses on image received by the population as a whole within the context of alleged “plural society” states, home to ethnically diverse populations? My interest in these issues dovetailed with my own personal interest in the phenomenon of nation branding as well as events such as the Eurovision Song Contest, which I first started attending in 2000. My personal engagement and experience of the event meant that I saw first-hand the scale of the production and the significance of the event for a number of countries. Whilst the volume of literature on nation branding and also the ESC are steadily increasing, detailed empirical studies remain few and far between.

This book would not have been possible without numerous individuals who deserve my thanks. First and foremost I would like to thank David Smith at the University of Glasgow, who was the supervisor for my PhD and has always supported and encouraged me in my work. It has been a privilege working under his guidance and expertise. I would also like to thank the editorial team at the

University of Tartu Press, in particular the series editor Eva-Clarita Pettai, who not only provided me with this opportunity to publish my work, but also gave excellent advice during the writing process and invested much time and energy (and patience!) during the editorial process – tänan teid väga! A special thank you to Lea Kreinin for her Estonian language tuition and enthusiasm towards my research. I would also like to express my gratitude to Göran Bolin, Per Ståhlberg, Nikolas Glover and Louis Clerc for their stimulating conversations and ideas about nation branding. I have been incredibly fortunate to have worked with some truly inspiring people during my doctoral research and during the writing of this book. I would like to thank the respondents who took time to be interviewed for this work and who, in many cases, put me in touch with other people of interest. In Tallinn I would like to thank my colleagues at Estonian Television, Enterprise Estonia, the Estonian Institute and in Kyiv I would like to thank CFC Consulting. Though I owe much to their knowledge and expertise, any shortcomings or mistakes in this work remain mine alone. In particular I would like to thank my colleagues at the Eurovision Research Network; Karen Fricker, Phil Jackson and Brian Singleton – I will always be grateful for your encouragement and enthusiasm (gin and Fanta anyone?). I have also met some fantastic people through attending the Eurovision Song Contest who have always been so supportive of my work as ‘Dr Eurovision’ and who have gone onto become firm friends outside the bubble of the contest. On a personal note I thank my non-Eurovision friends who I am sure have, at times, grown tired of my discussions concerning the ESC! Special mention goes to my friend Susan Forster who, while we may not always see eye to eye, has always been on my side and was a source of great support during my formative years and continues to be a dear friend. I think Marion would be very proud of us. Last but certainly not least, my thanks go to my parents Betty and Tommy for all their support and encouragement (emotional and financial!) as well as to my sister Kate and her husband Phil for their love, support and endless cups of tea! Finally, I would like to dedicate this book to my niece and nephew, Izzy and Evan, who never fail to make me smile.

Introduction

The primary aim of this book is to offer a new perspective on current debates concerning the relationship between nation and state as well as the political management of international image in today's Europe through an examination of the debates on nation branding and the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). More specifically, it aims to examine the implications that these concepts and practices have for broader questions relating to European integration and the nation state. This work aims to advance critical thinking about contemporary nation branding and its relationship to, and influence on, nation building. This will be done with particular focus on the role that the Eurovision Song Contest has played in illuminating the more salient issues of European identity politics. Until recently, this has been an area which has lacked scholarly attention. This book aims to fill the gap.

The conceptual framework proposed here links modern forms of nation branding with broader issues of nation building and identity politics in the post-Soviet context. At the centre of this will be the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) and its emerging role as a platform for especially post-communist nation branding. A thorough examination of the particular Estonian case as well as a later comparative analysis of two other cases, one post-Soviet, the other Western, will further strengthen the key arguments of this study that nation branding and indeed the ESC are far from innocuous and an analysis of the key debates that they engender reveals interesting insights into nation and state building processes. The book also contextualises the ESC and demonstrates that while it continues to be seen as a piece of light entertainment, the conflicts and tensions played out on the Eurovision stage reveal much about the constructed nature of both national and European identities. It is argued in this book that the emergence of nation branding as a tool in redefining national image is evidence that we do not live in a post-nationalist world. While the

body of literature on nation branding and indeed the ESC is steadily growing, there have been few studies that use extensive empirical data from different cases in the field.

As the Soviet Union dissolved and newly independent states emerged from its ruins, many of the successor states looked to an uncertain and unpredictable future. The particular geopolitical and economic context of post-Soviet communism in which state independence was restored makes the Estonian case study especially interesting and unique. The restoration of independence in 1991 made the country keen to project and build its image on the world stage. Estonian victory in the Eurovision Song Contest in 2001 came at a decisive moment in EU accession negotiations and the government launched a nation branding strategy, *Welcome to Estonia: Positively Transforming*, in order to capitalise on the publicity gained through hosting the ESC in 2002. In much of the current literature on nation branding, states and nations are viewed as similar to goods which can have a brand attached to them. However, in the case of the nation (as a political community and social entity) this brings into focus questions of power such as who decides/purports to speak on behalf of the nation? How does this fit in with the notion of popular sovereignty which is supposedly at the heart of the national project? Branding a nation is thus inevitably a more fraught project than the branding of commercial goods. It is especially so when the brand, so to speak, is a work in progress within the context of a rhetorical and institutional Return to Europe.

This book seeks to problematise the relationship between nation branding and nation building. In the Estonian case, a country with diverse populations, with differing understandings of national identity and recent history, the building of both national solidarity and the national brand were orchestrated simultaneously. I argue that this created a tension that allows us to better understand how both concepts are connected. The launch of Brand Estonia took place within the specificities of the rhetorical and institutional return to Europe. It is therefore interesting to observe how these tensions and difficulties have been represented in terms of projecting an external image of the country and its identity to a wider global audience. The question of how these issues have been negotiated lies at the heart of this book.

As noted earlier, the book pays particular attention in this context to the role of the Eurovision Song Contest and the way in which this event contributes to the nation branding process as well as wider identity politics, especially, but not only, among the young nation states that emerged from the rubbles of the Soviet Union. As will be shown in the later discussion, the ESC represents a

shared sense of viewership, a sense of togetherness as part of a viewing routine of ritual. This apparent sense of community therefore allows individuals to imagine a real connection with other members of different nation states. The ESC can be considered to be a symbol within European popular culture in that it forms a traditional ritual in television broadcasting, it has become to use Eric Hobsbawm's famous term, an "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm, 2002, p. 142). Public events, whether they are a ceremony commemorating war dead, a national holiday or large-scale international competitions, foster identity building. Whilst the ESC continues to be criticised for the quality of the songs and alleged partisan voting, it still attracts large viewing figures and the debates that the contest engenders have reflected or even shaped attitudes towards what it means to be European. Eurovision has therefore become a site of identity creation and an event where cultural struggles over the meanings of identity are constructed and contested. An examination of the ESC offers a unique opportunity to explore where countries see themselves in the international system; participating countries have used the contest to project certain images of themselves on the European stage, and shape how they are perceived by their European others and by themselves (Jones & Subotic, 2011, p. 544). Participation in the ESC is therefore a declaration of Europeanness (Jordan, 2011, p. 21) whilst the event has itself become a symbol signifying Europe itself (Fornäs, 2012, p. 189). The EU flag is arguably one of the more recognisable symbols in Europe today. Whilst Billig (1995) argues that many such symbols are often overlooked, Eglitis asserts that the power of symbols should not be underestimated, particularly in the context of newly independent nations. She makes reference to the return to Europe discourses which became a "symbolic landscape" and reflected "the power of space and place" (Eglitis 2002, p. 183). I argue that the Eurovision Song Contest has been used by participating nations in the same way; it is an event which many post-communist nations entered following the collapse of state socialism, some of which lie outwith the traditional boundaries of Europe, in order to present a certain narrative of nationhood to the international audience. Events such as the Eurovision Song Contest have an effect on how people conceive what Europe is about or what it means to be European. However a struggle remains over the identification of Europe and Europeanness, this is played out through the ESC.

Methodology

Research that aims to scrutinise any part of identity can only be an inexact process. Identities are dynamic. The methodology used to investigate issues such as national identity needs to be appropriate and an awareness of the potential limitations of the research design is necessary. The use of qualitative interview research, as done in this study, continues to be a subject of debate; it has been asserted that the data gathered using qualitative methodology is hardly distinguishable from journalism (Strauss, 1998, p. 28). Yet, the value of qualitative interviews lies in the fact that they place emphasis on the way in which individuals interpret their social reality; interviews capture and deconstruct meanings attached to social phenomena by particular actors at specific moments in time. They therefore add an invaluable additional perspective to the study of identity construction and the meanings attached to such identities.

This empirical work is primarily based on an analyses of perspectives from “above”, namely the viewpoints of political figures, opinion leaders and individuals involved in the development of Brand Estonia and the Eurovision Song Contest. The aim is to ascertain what visions of the national political community or nation state were propagated by elites in the country. The elite level can loosely be defined as politicians, journalists and opinion leaders. Among the people interviewed as part of my original research were Mart Laar, the former Prime Minister of Estonia, Signe Kivi, Minister of Culture in Laar’s government and Evelin Ilves, who was the manager of the Brand Estonia campaign and is the current First Lady. Moreover, other respondents were drawn from a large sample using a snowballing technique, an established method for sampling and in this case, the only practical means of gaining access to these elites.

Yet, the elite-level provides only one perspective. Much of the recent literature on issues of nationhood and nationalism in the post-Soviet region has stressed the need to examine issues at the “ordinary” level. Rogers Brubaker, in his work on Transylvania (2006, p. xiv), argues that a perspective from “below” is needed if we are to truly understand the nature of identity processes in these countries:

Ethnicity and nationalism could best be understood if studied from below as well as above, in microanalytic as well as macroanalytic perspective. From a distance it is all too easy to “see” bounded and homogenous ethnic and national groups, to whom common interests, perceptions, intentions and volition can be attributed. Up close, on the other hand, one risks losing sight of the larger contexts that shape experience and interaction. The study of large- and mid-scale

structures and processes remains indispensable, but I came to believe that it must be complimented by research pitched at a level close to everyday experience if one is to avoid unwarranted assumptions of “groupness” and capture the way ethnicity actually “works.”

In following Brubaker’s assertion, the elite-level data collected for this book was therefore complemented with insights “from below”, acquired through another set of in-depth interviews with members of the public in Estonia. These included students, pensioners and civil servants, for example. Ideally a randomised sample would have been used so that bias may be reduced, since interviewees are likely to suggest like-minded people. However, given that I was working in isolation in the field at the time, a fully randomised sample was not feasible. I therefore used my extensive network to facilitate access to public level respondents. Given my arguably curious status as an outsider, living and studying in Estonia at the time, people were keen to meet with me and public level access was straightforward. In order to ensure that I had access to a wide range of people of different ages, backgrounds and locations, I also advertised for respondents in universities in Tallinn and Tartu as well as local meeting places in Narva. This not only meant that the risk of bias was reduced; it also provided a unique and different perspective since the majority of respondents from Narva were Russian speakers. This then allowed me to examine the inherent tensions that nation branding in Estonia has engendered. All interviews were carried out in 2007/2008 and designed to allow the respondent to give as much of their opinion as possible in order to allow some flexibility and scope to bring in new ideas and angles.

In total, 78 interviews were conducted over a period of nine months. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. In a minority of cases respondents requested that their views be not recorded. This was upheld. In these cases, detailed notes were made and the use of email contact became very important. Email was a quick and effective method for confirming quotes and clarifying points made in interviews which were not recorded. In addition to interviews, I also analysed a variety of print and online media. This provided an important insight into media discourses concerning the image of Estonia and the Eurovision Song Contest. The two Estonian national daily newspapers, *Postimees* and *Õhtuleht* were used alongside official documents from the archives of Estonian Television. All Estonian language sources were translated by a native Estonian speaker.

The major strength of this work lies in the range of interviews that I conducted in person, with key political figures and decision makers behind both Brand Estonia and the Eurovision Song Contest. The public level respondents provide a more nuanced perspective. Nonetheless, I do not claim that these views are entirely representative of the views of the Estonian public. The main intention of this research was to examine the nature of debates concerning nation branding at an elite level. The select views of the public, therefore, provide but a snapshot of perspectives from the ground, views of a particular subject, at a specific point in time. These interviews highlighted significant disparities between the elite and the public level respondents and as such provide a unique insight into the way the Estonian national image is constructed, articulated and contested through both nation branding and the Eurovision Song Contest.

Structure of the book

The Modern Fairy Tale explores the ways and means in which nation branding practices were used to promote an image of Estonia at a specific moment in the country's history; the run-up to EU accession. The next chapter provides a theoretical background on nation branding and the contemporary debates in the field. In particular, this chapter problematises the relationship between nation branding and nation building with nation branding being dependent on certain political discourses. In the Estonian case, the development and launch of Brand Estonia coincided with a wider process of nation and state building in a post-Soviet context.

Chapter two provides an in-depth analysis of Brand Estonia, launched by the Estonian government in 2002 to capitalise on the publicity garnered from hosting the Eurovision Song Contest. It describes the political context in which Brand Estonia was launched. The chapter explores the nature of the debates that the campaign engendered through interviews with key figures involved in the project and analyses the messages behind the campaign images.

Chapter three describes the way in which the Eurovision Song Contest has come to be used by host nations as a platform for nation branding. It details the history of the competition and provides an analysis of the event in a post-Cold War context. Through a series of case studies it argues that whilst the ESC is officially a non-political event, it is inherently politically charged and as such

has the capacity to illuminate wider debates on nationhood and nationalism in Europe today.

Chapters four and five are devoted to an analysis of the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia. The Estonian case study has much to teach us about the way in which national identity is both articulated and contested. It also serves as an empirical reminder that nationalist politics remains a potent force in an EU accession context, intruding on even the most unlikely situations; the Eurovision Song Contest.

Chapter six, using mainly secondary literature, provides a comparative afterthought to the empirical Estonian chapters. Using two case studies, Ukraine and Finland, it explores the discourses on nationhood and national identity that the Eurovision Song Contest has engendered. In particular it examines the nature of the debates concerning Ukraine's staging of the 2005 event and provides a rich insight into the nature of the Orange Revolution and accompanying debates on nation and state building. It also explores the role that the ESC has played in terms of constructing and articulating national identity in Finland since the Cold War.

1. Nation building and nation branding in the post-Soviet context

Rogers Brubaker in his much acclaimed *Reframing nationalism* argues that the fundamental question concerning nation building is not “what is a nation?” but “how is nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalised within and among states?” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 16) Immediately after the collapse of state communism in Eastern Europe, governments of successor states were to concern themselves with new state formation and nation-building. As part of the process of constructing new state institutions, the political elites in the region attempted to gain legitimacy for their own claims to power, by invoking a particular vision of what constitutes the nation. How the various republics would negotiate their newly found sovereignty and identities was unclear as they sought to renegotiate their geopolitical positions in a post-communist, post-Soviet context. National and ethnic identities were re-forged, and in many cases, integration into wider European institutions such as the European Union was sought. This return to Europe discourse was prevalent throughout the Baltic Sea region and manifested itself across diverse spheres of society from the political level to the sphere of popular culture. Part of the process of constructing “the nation” involves establishing the state within the wider geopolitical context, asserting the state on the world stage. One of the ways in which nation states have done this is to engage in nation branding and image building initiatives.

Nation branding, the phenomenon by which governments engage in self-conscious activities aimed at producing a certain image of the nation state (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010, p. 82), can be understood as a commercial practice which has emerged since the end of the Cold War as a means for a nation state to redefine and reposition itself within the master narrative of globalisation (Jansen 2008). In the case of Estonia, the launch of a nation branding campaign

coincided with the wider process of nation and state building following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of independence. I argue that nation building and nation branding, both distinctly different, were orchestrated simultaneously in Estonia and that this created a tension. In Estonia, the nation state or brand, to use the term loosely, was a work in progress and the creation of it took place within the specificities of the rhetorical and institutional return to Europe. This chapter, by way of an introduction to the main case study, explores nation building in the post-Soviet context and its relationship to, and influence upon, nation branding.

Imagining the nation

A debate on nation branding raises many questions concerning the identity and legitimacy of the nation state since they are modern fictions with clear political intentions disguised as ancient myths but without any old mythological background (Fornäs, 2011, p. 18). Discussions concerning national identity and statehood in turn poses the question of what a nation actually is. Benedict Anderson famously described the nation as an “imagined community”, a construction of the post-industrial age. Anderson argues that the nation is imagined since members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (2006, p. 6). In order to keep a state together in the modern world populations have a shared feeling of belonging, bound together by loyalty toward the same institutions, symbols and values. However as Pål Kolstø argues, creating a common identity does not necessarily imply that all inhabitants of the nation state must have the same ethnic identity. National identity may, and in many cases, must be political rather than cultural (Kolstø, 1999, p. 1). Discourses on nation building set the agenda for inclusion or exclusion from a particular nation state. T titular citizens of ethnic states hold membership automatically through their ethnic affiliations, whereas citizens from non-titular groups can be seen as (more or less explicitly) members of a second order (Kolstø, 2002, p. 106). Some argue that nation states are not natural entities; “they clothe and enclose an existing or developing political and economic framework” (Grillo, 1980, p. 8). Keane (1995, p. 182) sheds further light on this issue by arguing that, historically, the nation did not refer to the whole population of a region but only to those classes which had developed a sense of identity based upon language and history and had begun to act upon this.

If the nation is constructed then logic dictates that national identity is too. National identity “infuses citizens with a sense of purposefulness, confidence and dignity by allowing them to ‘feel at home’” (Keane 1995, p. 186). A nation is a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture as well as a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (A.D. Smith, 1999, p. 12). What constitutes a national identity in a country that consists of populations with differing understandings and interpretations of recent history, language and culture is therefore problematic. Arguing with many of the modernist theorists that national identity is constructed, I also assume that it is a learned attribute. What is it that makes someone Scottish, Irish, British or Estonian? As such identities can be contested. Whilst there is inevitably a tolerance of difference, that difference or diversity is only tolerated if it does not compromise or threaten the sense of self of the titular population, or their ownership of the nation. As the Soviet Union disintegrated, it forced changes in the political space and the identities within the new Soviet successor states. The rediscovery of the national self represents a symbolic break from the past which in turn aids the development of the new independent state. As in other Soviet successor states, after the passage to independence, ruling elites embarked on a process of forging a national identity by (re)constructing the discursive boundaries of nationhood (Wolczuk, 2000). Nation building in the post-Soviet region was therefore fraught with tensions, complexities and contradictions.

History and language are potent tools for political elites in nation states, that otherwise seek to legitimise and secure dominance of the titular nationality in the political sphere. Those who share the same language and understandings of the past would be included in the imagined community of the nation whilst those who do not would be, to varying degrees, excluded. If we take Linz and Stepan’s argument, the dominant, titular nationality comes to be privileged in state symbols and institutions. They argue that a nation state is a state in which the dominant nation’s language becomes the only official language and the only acceptable language for state business and education, the religion of the nation is privileged and the culture of the dominant nation is enshrined in state symbols (Linz & Stepan, 1996) Effectively, nation building represents a state-controlled means of socialisation. These practices are evident in all states, something which is often overlooked in literature relating to the so-called “new Europe”. Western European discourses concerning nation building and nationalism in Eastern Europe are often Orientalist. George Schöpflin highlights the tendency to see Western European nations and nationalism as intrinsically “good” and

Eastern as “nasty and brutish”, terming it “Hans Kohnism” (Schöpflin, 2000, p. 4). According to Daina Eglitis (2002, p. 8), “every epoch produces its own notions and understandings of social change and the transformation of the East European and post-Soviet space is no exception.” Multiple identities play a role in discourses surrounding national identity, particularly in the territories of the Former Soviet Union as well as within narratives of nationalism more generally. Taras Kuzio (2001) and Stefan Auer (2004) highlight that different definitions of “nationalism” and levels of inclusion and exclusion are a phenomenon in all societies, both East and West. The recent debates concerning the independence referendum in Scotland exemplify this. Daina Eglitis (2002) and David Smith (2001) have highlighted the role of the European institutions such as the Council of Europe and the European Union in “normalising” ethnic relations in newly restored states. Given the various nation building practices which have prevailed since the early 1990s, the region can be characterised as a region of “living nationalism.” The narrative of the nation is rarely so straightforward and this work exemplifies the more salient discussions concerning nationhood and national identity in the post-Soviet and Baltic Sea regions. Nation branding effectively brings questions concerning nationhood and belonging to the foreground of the debate, even though this is never the aim of such campaigns. These tensions lie at the heart of this book.

Nation building in the Baltic Sea Region

The collapse of communism in Europe led to a massive political, economic and social paradigm shift. In the case of the Former Soviet Union, state building was intrinsically linked with nationhood and competing discourses on national identity. After 1991 some 25 million Russian speakers found themselves residing outside the borders of the Russian Federation. During Soviet rule the demographics of the Baltic states changed dramatically. For example, in Estonia, in 1945, ethnic Estonians constituted 94% of the population. However, as a result of the continuous immigration of Russian speakers into Estonia from other parts of the Soviet Union, the share of ethnic Estonians fell to 61% by 1989 (D. Smith, 2001, p. xxiii). Russian became increasingly spoken across the republic with large majority of ethnic Estonians proficient in Russian whilst only 12% of non-Estonians were fluent in the titular language (Trapans, 1991, p. 77). Essentially this led to polarisation in society as well as growing resentment amongst Estonians that the nation was under threat.

The rejection of the Soviet past is consistent with discourses in the Baltic states that depict the Soviet period as illegal and as representing an artificial separation of these countries from their Western European neighbours (A. Smith, 2000, p. xi). For political elites in these republics Soviet rule and the presence of a sizeable Russian speaking population living within the state came to be viewed through the prism of post-colonialism. Such narratives had a profound effect on nation building practices in the region and essentially meant that issues of national identity and belonging became contested and politicised. This construction of the other in relation to the Russian speaking minority affected the very foundation of the nation and state building processes taking place in the region. Political elites drew upon elements of historical justice to enact restrictive citizenship laws, and effectively othered the country's Russian speaking minority. This rhetoric of the other arguably under-pinned many of the policies implemented by successor governments in various Former Soviet Republics, namely Estonia and Latvia. This was particularly the case in terms of the (restrictive) citizenship and language laws enacted in both these states.

Nation building in the Baltic Sea region in the 1990s represented the competition for power in which various national elites sought to naturalise their own particular model of state institutions and gain legitimacy for their own claims to power. They did this by invoking a particular vision of what constitutes the national political community and by propagating this amongst the population through speeches, interviews and within the wider media to create an "imagined community", to use Anderson's term, amongst the state's population. Politicians drew on various cultural raw materials such as language, ethnicity and religion. This satisfied the cultural dimension of the nation building project. In terms of citizenship, political elites effectively set the stage for deciding who belongs to the nation state at the legal level. Language was a key to this part of the nation building process and the implementation of one official state language can be seen as a way of distancing the countries from the Soviet past. Knowledge of the official language of the republic became a key requirement in the process of obtaining citizenship. Language therefore became a powerful tool in the renegotiation of state and citizenship boundaries, essentially establishing who belonged to the political community and who did not. Nation building practices in post-Soviet Estonia and Latvia in particular can be categorised as processes of de-Sovietisation where political elites effectively removed physical symbols from the Soviet era, dissolved previous political institutions and replaced them with new national symbols (G. Smith, 1998, p. 13), providing a new normality. Normality in this context represented

anything which was “not Soviet” or “not Communist” (Eglitis, 2002, p. 8). Eglitis goes further to examine the concepts of spatial and temporal normality. The former represents the location of transformation. In the Baltic case, this meant orientation towards Western Europe. Eglitis argues that notions of normality are intrinsically linked with security and prosperity and that this was said to have been found in the process of returning to Europe. Eglitis cites the apparent rush to join European institutions and structures such as the EU and NATO, which may offer the desired economic and security guarantees which were sought, as proof of this (*Ibid.*, p. 18). Eglitis’ concept of temporal normality, on the other hand, suggests more nationalistic undertones since it emphasises restoration of the infrastructure of the interwar republics. This narrative highlights the danger of integration of Russian speakers rather than the perils of non-integration. Whilst spatial normality depicts Russia as the other, in the sense that NATO membership is a goal in order to attain security guarantees, it recognises the possible dangers posed by the non-integration of Russian speaking minorities (*Ibid.*, p. 17). However the propagation of normality failed to take account of the fact that the Europe of which the Baltic states were a part of before World War II had changed (D. Smith 2001 p. xiii). This would later bring its own challenges for Estonia and Latvia in particular, which had to come to terms with the Soviet past and a large resident Russian minority whilst at the same time aspired to join the EU, an organisation that emphasised respect for minority rights. The return to Europe discourse also suggests that since Soviet rule was illegal, so too was the presence of Russian speakers who had immigrated to the republics during that time.

In the case of the Baltic states, both the East and Soviet rule represent the other; a period of captivity (Neumann, 1999, p.162). Othering did not just manifest on the legal level, it impacted upon the speeches of political elites. In 1989, Estonian politician Tiit Made was quoted in a Swedish newspaper as saying that Russian people were “untamed and wild and tended to spread like a blob over every territory they can find” (Neumann, 1999, p. 107). Such language invokes an image of Russian speakers in Estonia as colonisers, uncivilised and untrustworthy. The other is not a straightforward paradigm however, there are several others which are functional at the same time and are not constructed in wholly negative terms. Pille Petersoo (2007, p. 129) highlights that otherness of Baltic Germans continues today although they are not seen as a threat to Estonian identity while post-WWII Russian speaking immigrants to Estonia are. Similarly, in Estonia, the similarities between the Finnish and Estonian languages tend to be highlighted while the differences between both languages

and Russian are flagged. The role of the other therefore serves to flag both difference and commonality in a bid to affirm a collective sense of identity. Merje Kuus (2004, p. 484) argues that since the EU and NATO have expanded, to include many post-communist nations, rather than diminishing boundaries, they are effectively reinforced; the other is therefore re-inscribed. This rhetoric has manifested strongly in the discourses surrounding the expansion of the Eurovision Song Contest and will be discussed in chapter three.

Nation branding in context

In today's globalised world, one important part of guaranteeing sovereignty and stability, building up viable economic structures, and ensuring state legitimacy is to expand international links and attract inward investment. To do this, the country first has to be known on the map and have the reputation of a reliable partner. In this context nation branding campaigns and popular culture media events such as the Eurovision Song Contest have significance attached to them, especially by the newly-sovereign nations as they seek to negotiate their position on the world stage. On the surface, nation branding might seem benign, another manifestation of marketing in a globalised world. However, I argue in this book that nation branding upholds the nation state as the primordial marker of identity. This then raises questions concerning ownership of that identity. Nation branding is an exercise in the sale of the nation state and the commodification of national identity and with this come questions, particularly where nation branding coincides with the process of nation building.

The origins of nation branding can be traced back to the late nineteenth century world fairs and international exhibitions which drew large crowds keen to witness the staging of national culture (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 4). Most typically, nation branding is used to promote tourism, foreign investment and boost exports (Dinnie, 2008, p. 7). Nation branding essentially communicates a nation's policies and culture to an international audience; the public face of international diplomacy. The logic behind nation branding is that every nation is a brand and as such it can be strategically marketed in order to attract inward investment and improve the overall image of a country. Moreover, in addition to the key goals of attracting tourists, stimulating investment, and boosting exports, nation branding can also have further reaching effects. Thus some claim that the process can help restore international credibility, increase currency stability and therefore investor confidence as well as even consolidating

nation building itself (Dinnie, 2008, p. 17). Nation branding can be seen as a manifestation of soft power. Where military force or economic sanctions represents a hard form of power, soft power relates to attitudes and influence over others, cultural persuasion (Nye, 2003, p. 545). This is exactly what nation branding aims to do. Nation branding represents a desire by the countries concerned to make people want to pay attention to their particular nation state, their achievements as well as building belief in its qualities. As a practice it seeks to manage the image and reputation of a country and help consumers, namely the wider public, differentiate between and identify within countries. Nation branding operates in the same way that traditional public relations does in that it is a practice which is undertaken by governments to persuade the overseas public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about a nation state (Aronczyk, 2008, p. 42).

Nation branding is largely undertaken by a narrow, elite group of consultancy agencies, the majority of which are based in the UK. Melissa Aronczyk (2013, p. 12) claims that this is no coincidence since the expert knowledge and knowledge experts related to nation branding reflect a deep-rooted and on-going paternalism, as well as a very particular idea of the terms of conditions of “global nationalism.” In recent years the cause of nation branding has been championed by individuals such as Simon Anholt, who argues that lesser known emerging nations have no other option but to use soft power, namely nation branding (Anholt, 2005, p. 13). Anholt goes as far to say that the demands of a globalised economy mean that nations *need* branding and that it is a process in which states have little choice in:

So much of the wealth of nations in the globalised economy derives from each country's ability to export branded goods, and because so much of the wealth to survive and prosper now comes from the “added value” of branded goods and services, the competitiveness of nations and the branding of countries is the only way forward; it has become an immutable law of global capitalism [...] whether we like it or not, the international promotion of each country's culture is essential for the renewal and regeneration of culture [...] demand must be created for culture as products (Anholt, 2005, p.140).

Whilst Anholt has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the field of nation branding, his work should not be read uncritically since he has a vested interest in promoting nation branding as a successful initiative and continues to profit from this. Anholt has certainly been successful in generating business for his consultancy activities and he continues to advise national governments

on their nation branding strategies.¹ He appears to have won the argument that smaller countries need to “punch above their weight” through culture, image and branding; cases such as Ireland exemplify this. It was in this context that Enterprise Estonia launched their Brand Estonia campaign with the slogan, *Welcome to Estonia: Positively Transforming*, to capitalise on the publicity that Estonia garnered from hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002.

The lines defining nation branding are somewhat blurred however, when governments contract private firms to develop and propagate their nation brand. This is something which nation branding consultants such as Anholt shy away from. Whilst nation branding as a phenomenon is attracting an increased amount of scholarly attention, much of the existing literature has been written by those involved in the industry themselves. While there has been some studies which have been written from a critical viewpoint, the conflicting narratives of branding a nation have often been forgotten. Whilst nation branding is an internationally-focussed phenomenon, it is a practice which has the capacity to illuminate the more salient narratives of national identity and, in some cases, reflects the nationalist rhetoric of politicians. Moreover, the perspective of the public living in the states that are engaged in the process of nation branding has all too often been neglected. Despite the lack of theoretical agreement on nation branding, it remains a process in which governments continue to buy into. In the past decade dozens of countries have launched nation branding campaigns. Advertisements on international channels such as BBC World and CNN for *Incredible India*, *Amazing Azerbaijan* and Malaysia’s *Truly Asia*, are not uncommon. All have followed the same pathway with stakeholders from the government and private sector involved in brand development.

Nations are not homogenous entities and nation branding effectively suggests that a particular state can be marketed as such. If the nation can be understood as a public space then using marketing techniques from the private sphere, such as branding, to promote a particular image of the nation is a provocative undertaking. If we take Sue Curry Jansen’s argument that “nation branding transforms national identity into intellectual property” (2008, p. 121), an inherent tension between nation branding and nation building emerges. As Bolin and Ståhlberg state:

If yesterday’s nation builders were able to focus on building social solidarity, this is hardly possible today when the nation also has to be branded for global

¹ See www.simonanholt.com for a list of current work.

attraction (or consumption). The two logics of nationalism and nation branding exist simultaneously. The question is to what extent these two logics compete or reinforce each other [...] what happens when the logics of nation branding and nationalism are blurred? (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010 p. 97).

Nation branding transforms a civic image such as the flag, something which belongs to all, and revered by many, into something calculated and therefore contested. Nation branding can be a particularly fraught process particularly where international image is concerned. India is one such example of a country which has engaged in the process of nation branding in order to manage its own international image on its own terms. Brand India, with the slogan *Incredible India*, was developed with two aims in mind; to market India as an international tourist destination and to promote the country as an option for trade and investment (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010). Brand India was a controversial initiative within the country itself since it promoted the country internationally as a rising superpower despite it being home to more of the world's poor than any other country (Hannerz, 2007). Thus, there is incongruence between the image that nation branders seek to project and the pragmatic realities facing the nation, or people living in those countries being branded. In the case of Germany, nation branding has been used in an attempt to overcome the legacies of the past. The Land of Ideas campaign was initiated by members of the German government in 2006 to capitalise on the international media attention garnered from Germany hosting the FIFA World Cup that year. Key messages in the campaign presented Germany as “cosmopolitan”, “future-orientated” and “progressive” (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 148). The German case study highlights how nation branding has the capacity to illuminate some of the more sensitive paradigms of nationhood and in particular the legacy of post colonialism. Nation branding therefore goes some way to shed light on how the nation is constructed in a particular political context.

The rise of nation branding, particularly among newly sovereign nations, can be seen as a response to questions of ontological security in that a nation only exists in as much as it is recognised to be a nation on the international stage. Christopher Browning (2011, p. 6) argues that nationalism and ontological security are intrinsically linked; both are driven by the desire of a community to justify itself and legitimise its position and standing, at a minimum protecting what has been achieved, but ultimately seeking to enhance one's standing and credentials. Nation branding offers countries legitimacy; allowing governments to control how the nation state is viewed, either through repairing damaged reputations as a result of economic or political legacies, deflect unfavourable international attention or control and manage impressions

in the context of unforeseen events (Aronczyk, 2013, p. 16). I would therefore argue that if nation branding is also used for the purposes of damage limitation, then it is calculated and not as innocuous as it first might seem. Some might question the ability of branding to live up to its promises and argue that the monolithic, hierarchical and reductive nation of branding communication makes it antithetical to democratic governance (see Kaneva, 2011, p. 15). Aronczyk (2008, p. 43) argues that nation branding is merely an updated form of nationalism since “by employing the symbolic resources and resonance of nationalist discourse which perpetuate the nation state as a necessary frame of identity, allegiance, and affiliation, nation branding maintains and extends the nation as a legitimate entity in the context of globalised modernity.” In this context nation branding can be seen as a process which plays to paradigms of “us and them” or one which appeals to tourists whilst engendering a sense of pride in the citizens of that particular nation. Michael Billig argues that much nationalism is salient, even “banal”, and often unspoken. He points to examples such as the flag flown outside a garage forecourt or on a public building, part of the routine of everyday life (Billig, 1995, p.19). According to Billig such symbols represent a reminder of the nation, albeit one which is to a large extent unnoticed. I argue that nation branding is the same, on the surface such campaigns appear harmless, frivolous and even glamorous. However, they do represent a very deliberate attempt to manipulate thinking about a particular nation state, its culture and its people. This raises questions of belonging, since only those included and accepted as part of the nation state will ever be represented in nation branding campaigns. Would a Romanian nation branding campaign ever include Roma people? Would an Israeli branding campaign include Arabs? Branding a nation is controversial and highly politicised since by defining a nation in such narrow terms this effectively constructs boundaries within the state. How can one brand reflect the diversity and plethora of identities and opinions of a society? *What* is being branded and *by* whom and *for* whom? These questions lie at the heart of this book.

The Eurovision Song Contest as a platform for nation branding

The Eurovision Song Contest is often an event which is dismissed as musically and culturally inferior and until recently it has lacked scholarly attention. However it deserves attention in view of its longevity, annual audience and

significance for many countries. Celebrating its sixtieth year in 2015, the Eurovision Song Contest is one of the largest television and media events in the world. According to Dayan and Katz (1992, p. 1) media events are “high holidays of mass communication” and the Eurovision Song Contest is one example of such an event. They argue that media events can be defined on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels. Syntactic because it is something which interrupts the routine of daily life, it monopolises the media coverage at the time that the event is taking place. It can be seen as a media event on a semantic level given that it represents an occasion or a “historic” ceremony with reverence. Finally, Dayan and Katz argue that the Eurovision Song Contest is a media event on a pragmatic level in that it enthral large scale audiences who view them in a festive style (*Ibid.*, p. 9–14).

Many studies on the Eurovision Song Contest have focussed on fandom and how the ESC has been transformed from a three hour television show to a year-long interest. Especially Peter Rehberg (2006), Dafna Lemish (2004) and Singleton, Fricker and Moreo (2007) have, moreover, focussed on fandom mostly from the perspective of sexual identity, linking the ESC to homosexuality and gay pride. There have been a limited number of academic studies which have examined the ESC from the perspective of national identity construction. Recent scholarship has addressed constructions of national identity through the ESC; Baker (2006) has examined the nationalist elements of Croatian entries, while Pajala (2013) uses the contest to discuss Finland’s geopolitical position in Europe. There has, however, been little in the way of scholarship linking the ESC to the issue of nation branding. Whilst there is a growing body of literature on the contest as well as nation branding more generally, few use detailed case studies and much of the work on nation branding in particular has been written by practitioners involved in the business itself.

Irrespective of whether the Eurovision Song Contest contributes anything to the advancement of music *per se*, it does provide a remarkable and unique example of an annual exchange of goods and opinions between countries. It is arguably the only international forum in which a given country can express an opinion about another, free of any economic and governmental bias (Fenn et al., 2006, p. 578). Göran Bolin argues that the ESC is the modern television equivalent of the World’s Fairs of the early 20th century (Bolin, 2006, p. 191). Like Fornäs, Bolin argues that the ESC has become a discursive tool in the definitions of Europeanness and political strategies of Europeanisation, including nation branding. The Eurovision Song Contest, like the World’s Fairs of the 19th Century, is a showcase for elements of national culture and identity,

allowing countries to market themselves to a wider audience on their own terms, through both participation and by hosting the event. The crucial difference is that whilst the World's Fairs were delivered predominantly by the strongest nations, Eurovision has recently been dominated, to a certain extent, by relatively weak (politically-speaking) nations. This has infused further tensions and controversies into discourses surrounding the expansion of the event.

The song contest is the post-industrial equivalent to the World's Fairs of high industrialism [...] the World's Fairs were promoting the then new nation-states in the same way as new nation states use the Eurovision Song Contest as a vehicle for constructing themselves. This is especially evident if one looks at the newly founded sovereign states recently freed from Soviet rule. And it is quite clear that these popular culture events have the power and the ability to reshape the geopolitical map of Europe and are also used in this way by the new member states of the European Union [...] new nations also need to prove to the rest of the world their ability to produce large-scale events (Bolin, 2006, p. 203).

The Eurovision Song Contest shares many characteristics with other large-scale, international media events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, but also annual entertainment events that are broadcast internationally such as the Academy Awards or the MTV awards. The ESC is similar to sports events in the sense that it is a competition between nations rather than between actors as at the Academy Awards. It has also been linked to international charity events such as Live Aid given the scale of the broadcast. However, Bolin notes that whilst these charity events are politicised to a certain degree, they are more humanitarian rather than nationalism-based which, he argues, makes the Eurovision Song Contest unique in its genre (Bolin, 2006, p. 190). Mega-events are "large-scale cultural events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance" (Roche, 2001, p. 1). Indeed, the Eurovision Song Contest is a mega event which puts the host city/country in the spotlight and, as will be argued in chapter three, one which can be used as a tool for nation building. However, as with the case of many mega-events, it also has the capacity to divide since minority groups often remain marginalised. These issues are routinely played out through the Eurovision Song Contest. The seriousness in which many new entrant countries approach the event, particularly through hosting, also demonstrates the significance of it as a platform for nation branding; it is an opportunity to showcase the nation state.

Estonia won the Eurovision Song Contest in May 2001, the first post-communist participant to do so. The victory was immediately seized upon by the

then Prime Minister, Mart Laar, who according to the newspapers proclaimed to a jubilant crowd waiting to welcome the victorious team back to Tallinn “We demolished the Russian empire by singing; now we are not knocking on the door of Europe but will simply walk in singing.” (Leivak 2001b) Immediately after Estonia won, Laar was reported to have said “now the name Estonia will be on everyone’s lips” (Guha, 2002). Thus, the symbolic link to the image and EU accession of the country was made from the outset. Estonian officials had to confirm in June 2001 whether they would be staging the event in Tallinn in 2002. Given that the wider (Western) European press had already reported that Estonia was “too poor to host Eurovision” (Poole, 2001), there was pressure on Estonian Television to ensure that the event was successfully staged in Tallinn. Failure to host the event would have undoubtedly been damaging to Estonia’s international standing, cultivating an image of Estonia as a “poor Former Soviet republic” rather than prospective EU member, or as Göran Bolin suggests, “a poor Eastern relative of the EBU” (Bolin, 2006, p. 191). It is with this background that the preparations for the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest began. Estonian Television not only had to prove that it was capable of producing a slick international television show but also had to do this against a backdrop of uncertainty in terms of technical expertise and infrastructure and in front of the gaze of the international media. Closer analysis of the content of ESC 2002 provides a unique insight into both the construction of Estonian national identity and the self-image of the country as well as the reinforcement of the other, namely Russia and the Soviet past. This raises questions of power; who decided what narratives of the Estonian nation were fit for broadcast and how was this received within the host country? This tension is explored in this work through an analysis of the debates surrounding Brand Estonia and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia.

2. Brand Estonia: Nordic with a twist or twisting nationalism?

As outlined in chapter one, nation branding is dependent on certain political discourses and in the Estonian case, the development and launch of Brand Estonia coincided with a wider process of nation and state building which took place within the specificities of the institutional and rhetorical return to Europe. For the majority of newly sovereign countries the return to Europe paradigm essentially represented a clean break from the communist past and the beginning of membership of long-standing European institutions and frameworks (A. Smith, 2000, p. 2). The return to Europe discourse not only signalled the practical long-term goals of membership of European economic and political institutions, it also orchestrated the re-direction of trade flows away from the former Soviet Union towards Western Europe. Ultimately, it was perceived by ruling elites in Estonia at the time that this was the most stable way of guaranteeing security and sustainable development for the country (Rüütel, 2003, p. 197).

Estonian nation building in the context of the Return to Europe

The return to Europe discourse was also a symbolic element of wider nation building processes in the Baltic Sea region. The use of the word *return* was particularly important since it re-inscribed the fact that many countries, including Estonia, which became part of the Soviet Union following World War II, were independent and integrated with the West during the interwar period, further discrediting Soviet rule. Myths and symbols are an integral part of any nation

building project for it is in the symbolic sphere where national political elites attempt to consolidate their power over the state. I argue that for Estonian political elites, the return to Europe became a symbol of de-Sovietisation; EU accession was a guarantee of security and stability against a potentially hostile neighbour. The Estonian political elite consistently emphasised the necessity of European integration throughout the 1990s, Lennart Meri, who went on to become President of Estonia, highlighted the importance of Europe to the country in one of many speeches he gave on the subject:

Europe is to the Estonians more than a geographical concept: Europe is our programme. Not because we regard ourselves as better Europeans but because we know what the price is of being absent from Europe (Meri, cited in Lehti 2003, p. 38).

Estonian political elites cultivated an image of the country as a small Baltic state, historically part of the Nordic sphere of influence, “the little country that could” to use former Prime Minister Mart Laar’s slogan. EU accession essentially meant that the issue of the Russian minority in Estonia came to the foreground of the political debate. Essentially, the return to Europe discourses forced the Estonian government to provide some concessions to the Russian speaking minority in return for wider European integration. This can be seen in the fact that the original terms of the Law on Aliens were significantly relaxed. Furthermore, in 1998, it was ruled that children born in Estonia to non-citizens after 1991 were to be given automatic Estonian citizenship. Essentially the return to Europe discourses forced the Estonian government to walk a tightrope between national assertion (i.e. Estonian-led state building processes), on the one hand, and the demands of European integration on the other. Politicians in Estonia sought to integrate with Europe by joining Western European organisations such as the Council of Europe which emphasised respect and tolerance towards minorities whilst at the same time seeking to ensure ethnic Estonian dominance in the political sphere. It was no easy task and yet one in which Estonia managed to strike a balance. Mart Laar claims that the citizenship laws drafted in Estonia were “the most liberal citizenship law in Europe” (Laar, 2002, p.296). This is a somewhat dubious statement given the conditionality and language restrictions placed on obtaining Estonian citizenship. However, given that the Estonian authorities were in a sense providing non-Estonians with a choice; to meet the requirements and obtain citizenship or go without, they may be considered to be liberal, or at

least on a par with many other European Union countries. Laar asserts that the Estonian Citizenship Act corresponds to the European standard and that the only difference between citizens and non-citizens is that citizens can vote in national elections.

It was especially important to make such people face the reality. It was essential for them to understand that the Soviet Union was gone forever and that they were living in an independent country (Laar, 2002, p.296).

Controversy arose after the Law on Aliens was adopted in June 1993. The law stipulated that people residing in Estonia with Soviet or Russian passports had one year to apply for new residence and work permits. If they failed to do this then they would be deemed to be illegal immigrants and therefore subject to deportation. The law was also controversial because it did not distinguish between persons who had been resident in Estonia all their lives and those who had recently arrived. Such a law was potentially divisive and caused alarm both inside Estonia and within the various European political structures which Estonia aspired to be a part of. In effect, it had the potential to stall Estonia's so-called return to Europe, something the Isamaa government at the time were keen to avoid. Evidence of this came in the form of liberalisation of the language requirements for citizenship. A basic working knowledge was stipulated rather than the previous ambiguous guidelines and the Law on Aliens was amended to extend residence permits to military pensioners as well as granting automatic citizenship to children born in Estonia to non-citizens (although this did not happen until 1998). In May 1993, despite protests from Russia over alleged human rights violations relating to the citizenship issue, Estonia was admitted to the Council of Europe (Raun, 2001, p. 252). This lends credence to Smith's assertion that, in the eyes of the Estonian government, social stability, foreign investment and membership of the Council of Europe counted for more than strict restorationism (D. Smith, 2001, p. 86). In other words, the spatial discourse of normality took precedence over the temporal discourse of normality, to use Eglitis' term. It was at this point that multiculturalism entered the debate in Estonia and came to be used in relation to the Russian speaking minority. Multiculturalism is a contested concept. Whilst Estonia can be considered to be a plural society state, it is also one which remains enmeshed within an avowedly post-colonial network of identity political discourses encompassing the Estonian state, its Russian speaking population, the Russian Federation and the governments of the EU and other Euro-Atlantic organisations. Part of the

process of discursively constructing the nation is to establish its coordinates in time and space and to situate it in relation to external entities (EU, Russia, USA, CIS) as well as larger geopolitical categories, essentially putting the country on the map. Whilst Estonia had made great strides throughout the 1990s, in terms of international relations, economic reform, and integration into the various European power structures, the country still remained relatively unknown and poorly understood in Europe and the world at large. It was in this context that Enterprise Estonia launched their Brand Estonia campaign with the slogan, *Welcome to Estonia: Positively Transforming*, to capitalise on the publicity surrounding Estonia hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002.

The little country that could

The political context in which Brand Estonia was launched is important since the initiative, like the political processes which took place in the country following independence, essentially represented the othering of the Soviet past in Estonia. In its quest for EU membership, Estonia set itself on a course to prove its so-called “European credentials”, cultivating an image of Estonia as an economic trail blazer. In his very first Presidential address to the people of Estonia in 1992, Lennart Meri highlighted the significance of Europe to Estonia and stated that the recent elections had brought an end to the Soviet past. “Estonia has chosen the free, European, democratic road [...] Estonia’s integration into Europe is of importance to us” (Meri, 2009, p. 17). Buoyed by the attention the country was receiving as a result of robust economic reforms, the then Prime Minister, Mart Laar, began to actively court global attention in an attempt to bolster Estonia’s reputation in the world. In order to attract foreign investment, Estonia needed international attention and so the government undertook a campaign to promote the country internationally. Using money from a World Bank Loan, the Estonian government bought a supplement in *Newsweek* magazine. The headline bore the slogan “Estonia: The Little Country That Could” which represented the challenges Estonia had faced and the progress, against the odds, it had made in economic transformation. The deal also included several follow-up articles on Estonia, further promoting the country as a place of stability and a place for foreign businesses to invest in.

In 1997, Estonia was invited to join accession talks, ahead of neighbouring Latvia and Lithuania. According to Mart Laar (2002, p. 304) Estonia is like Finland, a Nordic country since both are similar geographically, linguistically

and culturally as well as in terms of their recent history (Laar, 2002, p. 58). The Finnish development model was consistently flagged as entirely comparable to Estonia. Finnish television which was watched in northern Estonia also played a role in highlighting the differences between the two countries (Laar 2002, p. 304). It allowed Estonians to see the development gap which had emerged between the two countries during Soviet times and allowed Nordic culture to permeate the iron curtain in Estonia. According to Laar, both had similar levels of economic development before 1940. Therefore, the situation Estonia faced in 1991 and the disparities with its more prosperous Finnish neighbour only served to further repudiate the Soviet past since it was considered that Estonia would have been on the same economic level as Finland had the country not experienced such a cruel fate. This further added impetus to the European integration project, which took on an even deeper significance in this context. Throughout his Presidency, Lennart Meri emphasised Estonia's so-called Nordic identity, representing a clean break from the Soviet past, but also highlighted Estonia's rightful place in Europe. "We have been a very active member of the Nordic community [...] there are a lot of emotional ties and legal ties which makes us much more of a Nordic country than it is usually believed" (Meri, 1995). Arguably the term Nordic became more widely used and strategically and advantageous than the term Baltic. It was in this context that Enterprise Estonia launched the Welcome to Estonia campaign which amongst other things served to promote Estonia's Nordic temperament.

Nation branding in practice

As discussed in chapter one, on the surface, nation branding operates in the same way that traditional public relations does, in that it is a practice which is undertaken to persuade overseas public, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders to maintain a certain point of view about a nation state. Nation branding can effectively be seen as a public relations exercise for governments, it is a communication strategy which allows governments to manage and control the image they project to the world. In the case of Estonia the campaign was managed by Interbrand, a global branding consultancy which also developed the *Cool Britannia* campaign in the UK. Branding consultants such as Simon Anholt and Wally Olins argue that nation branding is needed in the globalised world, at a time when the nation state as an entity is said to be waning in importance. According to Olins, having a strong identity in the

world means that a product is identifiable and that the same tools which are used to create product brands are the same tools used to build nations (Olins, 1990, p. 15). However, such arguments by branding consultants fail to acknowledge that nation and state building and indeed the politics of nationalism are still very much alive, no more so than in the post-Soviet region. The lines defining nation branding are somewhat blurred when governments contract private firms to develop and propagate their national brand. Moreover, nation branding upholds the notion of the nation-state as the primordial framework for identity, in-line with nationalist discourses on statehood. Aronczyk (2008) goes as far to say that nation branding affects the moral basis of national citizenship. Therefore, the context in which nation branding operates affects the way in which national identity is communicated, understood and contested. As such, nation branding is a highly politicised activity. This conclusion seems especially relevant in the Estonian case.

According to Aronczyk (2008) there are four steps in the development of a nation branding campaign. The first is an evaluation where the external perceptions of the country are identified. The second involves developing the message of the campaign in order to alter perceptions. The third involves identifying the methods by which to communicate this message. The fourth and final stage is to implement the campaign outlined. The audience for nation branding campaigns can be categorised into three broad overseas groups: businesses, politicians and tourists (Marat, 2009). One of the challenges of nation branding is to develop an idea or slogan which can reach out simultaneously to these three groups. Kazakhstan's *Heart of Eurasia* campaign serves as one example where all three groups were the targets (Marat, 2009). Name recognition is also a part of the branding process. However, this is something which is more difficult to foster, particularly when increasing numbers of nation states are promoting similar style campaigns. In the case of Kazakhstan, the film, *Borat* provided the country with that recognition albeit one which the government of Kazakhstan considered to be detrimental to the country's international image. It was within that context that the *Heart of Eurasia* campaign was launched (Marat, 2009).

If nation branding can be viewed as an exercise in public relations then the historical case of Lithuania and the contemporary example of Russia can be seen as an illustration of this. After World War I the Lithuanian National Council enlisted the support of Edward Bernays who successfully lobbied on their behalf to the US government calling for them to recognise Lithuanian independence (Cutlip, 1990). Whilst Russia does not have a formal nation branding campaign

per se, the launch of news channel Russia Today can be seen as an effort on the part of Russia to promote a more positive international image to a global audience (Evans, 2005). Similarly, Russia has used popular culture events such as the Eurovision Song Contest to manage its own image on its own terms and as with the case of the 2009 contest, reflected a stronger more confident nation (Jordan, 2009). In this sense, nation branding campaigns and practices aimed at image building; undertaken throughout the world, usually with similar goals, mean that the launch of Brand Estonia was nothing unusual. However, this chapter seeks to shed light on elite-level identity debates at a crucial time in Estonian history through a critical analysis of Brand Estonia. I argue that in the Estonian case, the logics of branding and nationalism were somewhat blurred.

Welcome to Estonia: Positively Transforming

The Brand Estonia project was commissioned by Enterprise Estonia in 2001 in order to capitalise on Estonia hosting the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest in Tallinn. Enterprise Estonia is an Estonian government agency which promotes Estonian business interests internationally. Brand Estonia had the aims of achieving greater direct foreign investment for the Estonian economy, expanding Estonia's tourist base beyond Scandinavia and also broadening the scope for Estonia's export market (Dinnie, 2008, p. 230). Enterprise Estonia commissioned Interbrand to conduct a six month study in order to ascertain the strength of Estonia's image abroad. The research project included interviews with more than 1,400 tourists in the UK, Germany, Finland, Sweden and Russia. The research found that the perception of Estonia became weaker the further from the country; Germany and the UK were deemed to have the least understanding of Estonia compared to Finland for example. Enterprise Estonia's study also found that many respondents considered the "Baltic" regional grouping for Estonia to be "limiting and potentially limiting" and that understanding Estonia as a Nordic country would be more fitting "temperamentally and geographically" (Enterprise Estonia, 2002, p. 51). In particular the description of the term "Baltic" as "limiting" is interesting and reflects the distancing of Estonia from the other Baltic states by Estonian politicians in the run-up to EU accession talks. Thus, the essence of Brand Estonia can be seen as entirely in keeping with the rhetoric of nationalist politicians and remarks made by politicians such as Lennart Meri, Mart Laar and Toomas Hendrik Ilves stating that Estonia is a Nordic country.

Estonia's brand essence was captured in two words "positively transforming"; highlighting the post-Soviet transition in Estonia which was described as "revolutionary, positive and a welcome change against all odds" (Dinnie, 2008, p. 233). "Positively transforming" therefore connected what was going on inside Estonia to the outside world, to those being targeted and encouraged to invest in Estonia. Alongside the positively transforming slogan, a logo was also devised, "Welcome to Estonia", in the shape of the country itself. Brand Estonia was launched in May 2002 to coincide with Tallinn staging the Eurovision Song Contest. Promotional items with the Brand Estonia logo were given to delegates and the assembled press at the event itself and posters were unveiled in major transit locations across Europe, such as airports and train stations.

A group of brand narratives were also included in the project outline in order to articulate the "positively transforming" essence to the world (Dinnie, 2008, p. 233). The first, "a fresh perspective", highlighted Estonia's versatility to the investor. The second narrative highlighted that Estonia had a "radical, reforming and transforming attitude". The third such narrative promoted Estonia as having "a Nordic temperament and environment". Crucially this section boldly stated that Estonia "has always been part of the web of Northern Europe [...] an accident of history links us in the minds of most people with the East instead of the West" (Enterprise Estonia, 2002, p. 65). Therefore, by focusing on the Nordic influence on Estonia it not only distances Estonia with the Soviet past but also Baltic regionalism. The fourth and penultimate narrative defined Estonia as "a resourceful self-starter by nature", and an attractive place for overseas businesses to invest. The final narrative was entitled "A European society" and presented Estonia as a juxtaposed country between East and West with a "deep heritage rooted in European tradition", therefore offering Estonia's geopolitical position as an advantage. Each of these narratives was then translated into verbal and visual branding manifestations. Posters featuring the "Welcome to Estonia" logo and "Positively Transforming" slogan appeared on billboards abroad, at airports with the logo being added to the side of Estonian Air aircraft. T-shirts and other merchandising were also made available.



Figure: The Brand Estonia logo ©Brand Estonia / Enterprise Estonia

A critical analysis of Brand Estonia: Imagery

In the introductory chapter of the Brand Estonia report, the concept of Estonia as a Nordic nation was reinforced further; “Nordic with a twist”. The report emphasised that the choice of images to represent Estonia in the campaign were deliberately designed to capture the brand essence of Estonia as Nordic: “All photographs capture the feeling of Estonia as a country with a powerful and charismatic personality, essentially, Nordic with a twist” (Enterprise Estonia, 2002, p. 94). The choice of colours was also deliberate, since “this is another way of saying that Estonia shares a similar pastel-centred colour palette with our Nordic neighbours” (*Ibid.*, p. 127). Thus images used in the campaign used mostly light pastel colours as well as arguably more stereotypical Nordic images; blonde hair, blue eyes, an enchanting Hanseatic old town. Moreover, clean, minimalist and modern architecture with clean surfaces was presented to depict a cool Nordic climate as well as to suggest Estonia’s belonging to the Western European, moreover, Nordic realm. Arguably all nation branding campaigns seek to depict the country in a positive light through scenes of culture, innovation, natural beauty. When Brand Estonia is compared to such campaigns as *Malaysia: Truly Asia* or *Amazing Azerbaijan*, to name some

examples, the choice of images, such as an airport scene, does appear to be somewhat curious in comparison. Given the wider political developments in the country and in the context of EU accession negotiations, Brand Estonia can be seen as a manifestation of geopolitics, neatly packaged for international consumers. Perhaps more tellingly, the Brand Estonia report also included a section titled “What they think of us” which was based on international research conducted by Interbrand in order to gain an insight into Estonia’s international image.

The review of images used in the Brand Estonia campaign also reveals a development over time as early images used in the the image collage that accompanied the report depicted Lenin, heavy polluting industry and a country with an antiquated workforce. It is precisely these negative stereotypes, portraying Estonia as a troubled Soviet successor republic, which Estonian politicians had been trying to dispel since independence. The Brand Estonia campaign can therefore be seen as a project which was itself a part of the return to Europe process and involved the distancing of Estonia from its Soviet past while presenting the country to the international community as Nordic. This is exactly what political elites such as Mart Laar and Lennart Meri had been doing since independence. Newspaper articles and images in the 1990s reflected, indeed, much concern, particularly among the elites in the country, about Estonia’s international image and more crucially, what the outside world thought about the country. An analysis of Brand Estonia through interviews with key the decision makers behind the campaign provides further insight into the Estonian sense of self, its relationship to and influence on, nation building and nation branding.

A critical analysis of Brand Estonia: Interviews with elites

Unlike many nation branding campaigns, where private consultancy companies work with relative autonomy, Brand Estonia was developed by Interbrand in consultation with political elites in the country. The prime minister at the time, Mart Laar, sanctioned the initiative and Evelin Ilves, current First Lady of Estonia was installed as the Project Manager. Given that the launch of the campaign was timed to coincide with Estonia hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in May 2002, the then Minister of Culture, Signe Kivi, was also a consultant to the project. During interviews conducted for this book, elite level respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of Brand Estonia, viewing it as

an appropriate campaign for promoting the country. EU accession and the Eurovision Song Contest were recurring themes in the interviews. Estonian elites highlighted that there was a need at the time to do something to promote the image of Estonia and to capitalise on the attention the country was getting as a result of winning the Eurovision Song Contest in 2001. Hosting the contest in 2002 together with the on-going EU accession talks which were also generating media coverage internationally. Riina Kionka, who was the Estonian Ambassador to Germany at the time of the campaign launch, recalled that branded materials were used effectively in embassies and at events promoting Estonia abroad.

I was using these materials in Berlin in order to help sell the country. This was one of my major aims, to sell the country in Berlin. It was very effective, it helped a lot, all the stickers, t-shirts, all of this stuff was very effective. People would see it and they would identify. It was on Estonian Air, every place. They produced a lot of brochures and information sheets which we passed out at various meetings. I think these materials were helpful for raising awareness about Estonia (Riina Kionka, Interview, 11.08.2008).

However, the media narratives concerning Brand Estonia were less than positive, and the public level respondents interviewed for this study were overwhelmingly critical of the campaign (this will be discussed later in this chapter). Following the ESC in 2002 and the collapse of Mart Laar's government, the Brand Estonia campaign was considerably scaled down. I asked all elite level respondents about the criticism of Brand Estonia and gave them an opportunity to respond to the accusation from the media and public that the campaign was simply a waste of money. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mart Laar blamed his successors for any failure associated with Brand Estonia. "The government after me cancelled this promotion campaign. This was a bad mistake [...] it needed to continue" (Mart Laar, Interview, 12.11.2007). He concedes that people viewed it as a waste of money but did not offer evidence of any counter arguments he might have launched against the critics at the time:

When you promote your country, the people can have very different opinions and it is always more complicated because people think other slogans are always better. It means the government must have the courage to do unpopular decisions even knowing the campaigns will not bring a lot of popularity at home [...] It always takes time for the results to land in the pockets of people. People looked outside the country not understanding how to get the results [...] it was not popular and seen as a waste of money and when you are a politician you

want to take popular decisions. Sometimes when you start to measure it with direct money you don't immediately see how to earn it back. It comes back but in different ways [...] the programme for promoting a country is a long lasting process [...] you must invest for years and years and decades and decades (Mart Laar, Interview, 12.11.2007).

Media criticism of Brand Estonia was levelled rather unsurprisingly at the Project Manager for the campaign, Evelin Ilves, who effectively became the public face of the initiative in Estonia, and as a consequence, the focal point for condemnation. Like Laar, she deflects any apparent failure of the campaign and even goes as far to suggest that the Estonian public simply did not understand the concept of marketing.

Lots of people didn't like it; they said it was strange and not something Estonian. I think the problem was the basic lack of knowledge. People just did not know what is marketing, branding, how do these things work? It was something which was quite new for ordinary people and politicians as well [...] when we introduced our project [...] it was so hard to explain what is branding, why we need it, how it works (Evelin Ilves, Interview, 20.11.2007).

Signe Kivi, the then Minister of Culture echoed the rhetoric of both Laar and Ilves and stated that she believed the campaign was not given a chance since the media focussed on the price tag which in turn influenced public opinion.

It was widely criticised as the budget was large and many people saw it as a waste and this view was promoted in the media. However I think it was a very important campaign and I was pleased with it. Evelin Ilves was the head of it and worked hard on it [...] It was important to start something professional to promote Estonia since we were so unknown in the world. This campaign was only one way of promoting Estonia – it is a long-term campaign which will take many years and a lot of money. In my view it was not a waste of money as it was based on solid research and I just don't think it was given a chance to succeed (Signe Kivi, Interview, 26.11.2007).

Further analysis of these interviews demonstrates that the Estonian political elite buy into the argument appropriated by branding consultants such as Wally Olins and Simon Anholt that the promotion of a country is a long-term programme of work and requires considerable investment over a sustained period of time. Mart Laar's assertion that investment in nation branding "comes back in different ways" is not only difficult to qualify, it also deflects criticism of the

campaign that he approved. Figures such as Simon Aholt in particular, have revolutionised the way that governments think about the international image of a country, offering them a solution for economic development in the future through nation branding. The mantra that continuous investment is needed, has not only been internalised by politicians such as Mart Laar and Signe Kivi, but also plays into the interests of branding consultants themselves.

Elite level respondents, in their defence of Brand Estonia, apportion blame for any apparent failure of the campaign to negative media coverage and a lack of understanding of basic marketing principles amongst the Estonian public. They did not offer any counter defence at the time of the campaign or in interviews for this work. Arguably the aims of the campaign were not effectively communicated to the public, with hindsight this is plain to see. Pille-Triin Männik, who was a Programme Coordinator for the Tallinn 2011 European Capital of Culture, believes that the lack of communication was a major downfall in the development of Brand Estonia.

Something went very wrong in the internal communications. I don't think it was such a big disaster but at the time, the result is the logo and the whole concept linked to it is not actually bad, it just got very bad publicity, probably a communication error at some stage and there was a whole discussion about the campaign, it got very much stuck on the price tag and this is what people remember. This was also a time when the quality of life was not very high so it was painful to see that sum being mentioned on the campaign or on a logo, there might have been some negative attention towards it because it was not designed in Estonia actually (Pille-Triin Männik, Interview, 13.08.2008).

From the outset, the director of Interbrand's London office, Penny Harris, was keen to point out that the company were aware of their position as an outsider and aimed to be sensitive to the views of the Estonian public. "We are very sensitive to the fact that we are an outside company, but we hope we can provide objectivity and an international viewpoint that will help achieve the best solution" (Gunter 2001). The responses given in this book highlight that attempts at sensitivity on the part of Interbrand were not internalised amongst a significant proportion of the Estonian population. Rather unsurprisingly, Interbrand considers that the campaign was not only a success internationally but also domestically and contends that it promoted a new commonality between ethnic Estonians and Russian speakers who responded favourably to the campaign (Jansen 2008).

A critical analysis of Brand Estonia: Public-level interviews

As stated in the introduction, this book does not aim to provide a detailed account of Estonian public opinion. The strength of this work lies in the unique interviews conducted with key political figures, broadcasters and decision-makers behind both the Brand Estonia campaign and the Eurovision Song Contest. However, the public level interviews that were conducted in Estonia do provide an insight into popular opinion at the time, a snapshot of the feelings of a section of the Estonian population at a particular moment in time. An analysis of the views of some members of the Estonian public provide an interesting insight into not only how Brand Estonia was received internally but also highlights some of the more salient narratives of national identity in a post-Soviet context. Public level respondents widely criticised the campaign and in particular the logo, *Welcome to Estonia*. Many of those interviewed commented upon the type-face of the logo, stating that it resembled something from the 1970s which was at odds with their understanding Estonia as a forward-looking Nordic country. It also appears that many respondents did not believe the campaign to be value for money. The budget for the enterprise was 13.31 million kroons, approximately £650,000 (Jansen, 2008). Moreover, the use of a UK-based company, Interbrand, caused much consternation among those members of the public that were interviewed.

It was a total waste of money. They [Interbrand] got a lot of money and they came up with a stupid logo (Margit, Interview, 17.11.2007).

What does it [the logo] actually mean? It doesn't make you think about anything. Words that you don't really associate with anything. It reminds me of adverts from years ago [...] embarrassing. (Riina, Interview, 08.04.2008).

I thought it was garbage [...] the company in England saw them coming really. They just did a half-assed job of it and charged full prices. It was the tax payer who paid of course (Maimu, Interview, 08.04.2008).

This sort of rhetoric was repeated by many respondents and a sense of confusion about the aims of the project, along with frustrations at the perceived lack of value for money and a finished product. Many public level respondents had the impression that the campaign simply stopped without any follow-up after 2002. This further consolidated the view that the project had not worked and

was a waste of resources in the eyes of the public. However not all respondents were so dogmatic in their approach. Whilst many continued to express dissatisfaction with Brand Estonia, there were some who believed that there was a genuine need to promote the country.

Nobody can argue that Estonia didn't need a campaign. The question is whether the campaign was properly done, whether it was effective enough or appropriate for the task at hand (Meelis, Interview, 08.04.2008).

As highlighted earlier, Interbrand considered the Brand Estonia campaign to be a success in terms of uniting Russian speakers and ethnic Estonians. On the contrary, many Russian speakers interviewed for this book did not have a connection to the representations of the country portrayed through Brand Estonia, shedding further light on the way in which Estonian identity is constructed, internalised and in this case, contested.

I think the idea of promotion is good but [...] I did not like this brand trademark [...] too old-fashioned [...] I understand maybe I have a different understanding of things since I speak Russian (Dmitry, Interview, 23.11.2007).

Interestingly, whilst public level respondents were overwhelmingly critical of the campaign, they identified with Estonia as a Nordic country suggesting that the logo was the main point of contention and not deemed to be fitting in with this Nordic identity. On the other hand, Russian speakers appeared to be almost apathetic in their response to Brand Estonia. The response quoted above, “maybe I have a different understanding”, is telling and suggests that differences between ethnic Estonians and Russian speakers run much further than just language and citizenship. An analysis of nation branding therefore illuminates “top-down” or official/elite and “bottom-up” public/ground-level perspectives on nationhood and nation-building and as such, shows that branding a nation is far more problematic than the current literature suggests.

Is nation branding merely a more palatable version of nationalism?

The debates presented in this chapter concerning Brand Estonia have highlighted the difficulties in branding nation states, such as Estonia, holding

populations with different national identities and understandings of their recent history. If we take Bolin and Ståhlberg's argument that nation branding has become "a historically specific form of producing images of the nation" (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010 p. 79), then this raises questions relating to the relationship between nation branding and national identity. *What* exactly is being branded and *by* whom and *for* whom? In the case of Estonia it is the "positively transforming", post-Soviet EU applicant which was branded *by* a British company, Interbrand, *for* the international community, namely existing EU member states.

The two logics of nationalism and nation branding exist simultaneously. The question is to what extent these two logics compete or reinforce each other [...] what happens when the logics of nation branding and nationalism are blurred? (Bolin & Ståhlberg, 2010 p. 97).

According to Aronczyk (2013, p. 28) nation branding is merely an updated form of nationalism since by employing the symbolic resources and resonance of nationalist discourse, which perpetuate the nation state as a necessary frame of identity, allegiance, and affiliation, nation branding maintains and extends the nation as a legitimate entity in the context of globalised modernity. This raises a pertinent question for this study, which *version* of national identity is promoted? In the Estonian case, it is arguably the ethnic Estonian paradigm of nationhood but how does this then fit in with the discourses of multiculturalism from Estonian politicians, which coincided with the launch of the Brand Estonia campaign? In this context nation branding can be seen as a process which plays to paradigms of "us and them", in the same way that nationalism works. Nation branding is both reactive and proactive, it aims to draw attention away from a negative past while emphasising the present opportunities that a country can offer the international community into the future. However, by defining a nation in such narrow terms, it effectively constructs boundaries within the state. How can one brand reflect the diversity and plethora of identities and opinions of a society? Many cultural stereotypes concerning nations have evolved over time and they arguably cannot be eradicated through a focused marketing campaign (Fan, 2006, p.10). In the case of Estonia, does the othering of the Soviet past not simply put further distance between ethnic Estonians and Russian speakers? The apathy towards the campaign emanating from Russian speakers, as opposed to a more dogmatic response from ethnic Estonians, suggests that this is indeed the case.

The Estonian case is especially interesting in that the Nordic narrative of the nation depicted through Brand Estonia was largely internalised by ethnic Estonians and yet it was the use of an overseas company and the logo which caused most consternation amongst the public-level respondents. Brand Estonia came to be viewed as a label or brand imposed from above, but more crucially, from outside the country rather than something organic. The interviews in this chapter demonstrate that Brand Estonia was not the “national feel-good campaign” that Aronczyk claims (2013, p. 144). The responses from Russian speakers interviewed for this work suggests that their understanding of Estonian national identity is different, perhaps weaker than that of their Estonian counterparts. Moreover, the distancing of the country from its Soviet past may not have sat well with them. This sheds further light on the “Two Estonias” debate. An analysis of Brand Estonia has highlighted that the debates go further than just “winners and losers” of the transition, but cross-cuts into other areas of social life, namely identity politics. This perceived incongruence between ethnic Estonian national identity on the one hand, and the branding of the nation state on the other, highlights a fundamental tension between nation branding and nation building.

Nations are complex entities and nation branding as a practice strips them down to a simplified representation in a bid to enhance the marketability of a state. Nation states are not consumer products, so can they really be branded and marketed in the same way? Proponents of nation branding such as Simon Anholt argue that they can be; nations must compete for visibility in an increasingly crowded and globalised environment (Anholt, 2005). Critics question the viability and desirability of branding something as complicated as national identity, which at the same time, can be used as a tool for airbrushing histories, memories and rituals which underpin and encapsulate the nation. In the case of Brand Estonia, it is this airbrushing of the Soviet past which is particularly interesting. Whilst nation branding campaigns may appear to be frivolous, they are in fact calculated. Such programmes attempt to shape and control perceptions of a place, traditionally thought of as a public space, the nation state. The typical methodology behind nation branding campaigns has been to undertake market research to ascertain what particular image a country has. Marketing strategies are then developed on the basis of this to reinforce positive images and distract from any negative ones. Umberto Eco’s term to describe the methodology behind such campaigns as “ur-fascist” (Eco, 1995, p. 12) might on the surface appear to be a step too far, however, when the

wider political context is considered, nation branding as a practice does not appear to be so meaningless.

The depictions which formed the basis of Brand Estonia were based on the ethnic narrative of the nation and, by doing so, were in tune with the rhetoric from Estonian politicians during the 1990s, namely that Estonia was Nordic and that the Soviet past needed to be buried. The continuous reinforcement that Estonia was “Nordic with a twist” and “positively transforming” suggests that Brand Estonia was essentially a platform for the othering of the Soviet past. This was entirely in-tune with the more nationalising elements of ethno politics in Estonia during that time. Brand Estonia promoted what Estonia *is*, but by doing so, highlighted what Estonia is *not*, in effect representing a friendlier face of nationalism to a global audience. What makes one country Nordic and another not? Could it be that there is no claim to call Estonia Nordic other than for the purposes of PR? It could be argued that Estonia was so proactive in marketing the country as a Nordic state that any attempt by its neighbours would risk charges of plagiarism should they have adopted the same strategy. If we take the criteria defined by Lagerspetz (2003) of geographical location, historical ties, linguistic affinity, Lutheran faith, social development (the Nordic model), Nordic cooperation, legal and administrative tradition and gender equality, then Estonia can be considered to be more Nordic than its neighbours. Amongst respondents interviewed for this work, the term Nordic sat far better with them than post-Soviet which is a reflection not only of Estonian national identity but is also a product of Estonian nation building.

Concluding remarks

The main aim of Brand Estonia was to attract inward investment into the country. However, the wider rhetoric from respondents concerning this campaign has drawn out some of the more salient narratives of identity politics. Since too many variables are at play, it is unlikely that an accurate measure of the impact of the Brand Estonia campaign, or any other nation branding campaign for that matter, will emerge. For the Estonian political elite it appears that Brand Estonia in 2002 was best forgotten. Yet nation branding is a process which countries continue to buy into to varying extents. In 2008, the campaign was briefly re-launched with the slogan “Positively Surprising”. One of the main criticisms of nation branding is that the slogans can be used to describe almost any location. This is not the case with the Estonian campaign; Brand

Estonia reflected the rhetoric from nationalist politicians at the time, it was not a generic message, it reflected what was going on in Estonia at a specific moment in time. The development of Brand Estonia reflected, and was arguably part of, the wider return to Europe discourse propagated by Estonian politicians at the time. The elite level interviews have highlighted the importance of image building for Estonian politicians in a post-Soviet context as well as demonstrating the internal dimensions of state and nation building. As part of the wider process of European integration, Estonian politicians sought to present the country as a European or Nordic nation in an attempt to distance the country from its Soviet past. If we take the criteria for defining a country as Nordic as outlined by Landgrén and Lagerspetz, Estonia can credibly call itself Nordic. An inherent tension appears though when nation branding campaigns reflect the rhetoric of nationalist politicians. Brand Estonia was a very deliberate attempt to convey a certain narrative of the nation to the international community and to control perceptions of the state. In the Estonian case, nation branding was a tool for soft nationalism and therefore not as innocent as it first might seem.

3. The Eurovision Song Contest: Nation building and nation branding

When the head of the jury in Bosnia Herzegovina calls, we suddenly get the feeling that the Eurovision Song Contest is something more than the world's oldest television programme. When he says "good evening Oslo" from his war-devastated capital and is met by spontaneous applause from the concert hall, then we really understand the whole idea behind the programme (The official programme of the 41st Eurovision Song Contest 1996, NRK, p. 4).

Since its inception the Eurovision Song Contest has provoked fierce debates concerning national identity and what it means to be European. The ESC is a symbolic contact zone between European cultures but it is also a site where the meanings of what Europe is, and what it means to be European, are both enacted and contested (Fricker, 2009). This chapter outlines a political history of the ESC. In particular, it will focus on how the contest has been a discursive tool in nation building and, in more recent years, nation branding. Eurovision essentially provides a platform for the performance of the nation and participation is arguably affirmation of a nation's European credentials. This raises questions concerning how nationhood is articulated. Europe in 2014 is a fractured entity politically, economically and socially. The meanings of what it is to be European are constantly evolving, yet the ESC has continued to endure and as such is a unique lens through which nationhood and the politics of identity can be analysed.

The Eurovision Song Contest: A brief history

The inaugural Eurovision Song Contest took place on 24 May 1956 and was established by Marcel Baison of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). The contest

was modelled on the popular Italian San Remo Music Festival, a competition of original songs which was founded in 1951. The EBU was founded in 1950 and is a confederation of state broadcasting organisations with 74 active members. The EBU is not just confined to European networks, other members include national broadcasters in the Middle East and further afield.² The ESC is the organisation's highest profile event; however, the EBU network also transmits major international events such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup through the Eurovision Network. The founding of both the EBU and ESC therefore reflects attempts by Western European governments to unite in the wake of World War II. Although the Eurovision Song Contest is officially a non-political event, its history can be seen as part of the Cold War process of fashioning Europe as a unified bloc (Fricker et al, 2007). In this context the "Europe" referred to here is the West; the ESC can be seen as an event uniting Western European countries in terms of popular culture and one which, with the exception of Yugoslavia, did not include any communist nations. With the establishment of Intervision, the Eastern European equivalent of Eurovision, the divide between Western Europe and communist East became more apparent. The Intervision Song Contest which began in 1977 and ran until 1980, with an all-communist entrant list, with the exception of Finland, was an attempt by Eastern European broadcasters to emulate the very successful Eurovision Song Contest. Finland participated in this event as well as in the Eurovision Song Contest; the country's peripheral geopolitical position was therefore reinscribed, reflecting a dual-vector approach towards both East and West.

In 1993, following the collapse of state communism in Europe, the EBU merged with the International Television and Radio Organisation (OIRT), its once Eastern European equivalent,³ which was responsible for organising Intervision. The development of both the EBU and ESC represents a mirror image of the growth of the European Union, which has also continued to expand its membership eastwards since the fall of communism. The ESC therefore both constructs and deconstructs barriers between East and West. Marko Lehti and David Smith (2003) and others (Kuus 2004, p. 473; Määlksoo, 2009, p. 656) argue that the imagined East/West divide still exists today within an EU accession context. This is exemplified by the rhetoric surrounding the Eurovision Song Contest which provides a useful mirror of these trends and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

² The contest is also broadcast in Australia and New Zealand.

³ Similar to the EBU in the West, the OIRT was an East European network of radio and television broadcasters with the primary purpose of establishing ties and securing an interchange of information between those various organisations responsible for broadcasting services.

The original idea behind the contest and still its defining feature today, is that nations (whose television companies are active members of the EBU) submit original songs which are performed and televised live. This is followed by voting to determine the “best” European song of the year. The first contest only included seven participating countries, each submitting two songs. Since then only one song has been entered by each competing nation. In 2008, a record 43 countries participated in the event. Eurovision represents one of the major television spectacles in Europe given the scale of the production and annual viewing figures. The contest is broadcast in Australia and Japan amongst other countries and it is estimated by the EBU that 100 million viewers watch every year, though it is popularly believed that the total is over 200 million or higher (Fricker et al, 2007).

One of the main aims of the ESC was that it would act as a catalyst for pioneering new broadcasting techniques (BBC 1992). Such developments are evidenced in the introduction of colour broadcasting in 1968, more elaborate stage designs, computerised scoreboards in the 1980s, the introduction of satellite links with the jury spokespersons in 1994 and virtual reality in 1996. The contest was broadcast on the internet for the first time in 2000. Other significant changes in the contest’s history have concerned language rules. Between 1973 and 1977 countries were permitted to sing in the language of their choice. From that point until 1999 participants had to perform in their national language. This therefore reflects an effort on the part of the EBU to promote identity articulation at a national level as well as the international. Today each national entry can be performed in any language, including imaginary languages as evidenced by Belgium in both 2003 and 2008; which in itself can be seen as a reflection of the contested nature of Belgian linguistic identity. In 1999, the use of a live orchestra was abandoned and has never returned to the contest since. However, one of the largest changes in the competition’s history has been the eastward expansion of the contest which has attracted renewed interest in the contest, and renewed controversies.

The re-integration of Eastern European countries into the mainstream of Europe led to a relegation systems being introduced in 1993 before the current semi-final qualification rounds from 2004 onwards. In 1996, in response to pressure from Germany, which had been relegated as a result of its poor showing in the event in 1995, a pre-selection featuring 29 countries was organised in which the top 22 songs would proceed to the live final (O’Connor, 2007, p. 138). Of those relegated, Germany was one of them, 1996 would be the first and to date, only time that Germany has not participated in a Eurovision Song Contest final. The absence of Germany and the expansion of the ESC meant that the EBU were faced with a logistical challenge balancing the interests of existing participants

with the aspirations of new entrant countries from Eastern Europe. Following on from this a “Big Four” rule was introduced in 2000, later re-named “Big Five” with the return of Italy to the contest in 2011 for the first time since 1997. This rule effectively ensured that the largest financial contributors to the competition, Germany, France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom all had guaranteed places in the Eurovision finals every year. The Big Five rule represents a response to the eastward enlargement of the competition, a symbolic appeasement on behalf of the EBU to its western broadcasters in the wake of further eastward enlargement. The Big Five rule is therefore a reflection of the tensions between eastward enlargement and the need for Western financial security.

Eurovision provides an arena for the discussion and analysis of pan-European identities. In this context Switzerland, a founding Eurovision nation, provides a good example as its complex identity was manifested in the way it presented itself on the Eurovision stage. Switzerland last won the contest in 1988, when Céline Dion, a French-Canadian, took the prize with a song written by Turkish songwriter, Atilla Şereftuğ. In recent times they have opted for a girl band from Estonia, Vanilla Ninja in 2005 and an international group Six4One in 2006. The entry that year was written by German songwriters Ralph Siegel and Bernd Meinunger. The group, Six4One consisted of six performers from across Europe; Malta, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sweden, Switzerland, Israel and Portugal. Switzerland, as a united country, representing its national identity in the Eurovision Song Contest is therefore a construct. The group Six4One can therefore be considered to be reflective of the complexities concerning Swiss identity.

Eligibility to participate is not determined by geographic inclusion within the continent of Europe, despite the inference in the title of the competition. Rather entry to the event is dependent upon the national broadcaster being a full and active member of the EBU. Several countries which are geographically outwith the boundaries of Europe have competed; namely Israel and Azerbaijan since 1973 and 2008 respectively. Morocco in North Africa took part in 1980. In addition, Turkey and Russia, which are both transcontinental countries with most of their territory outside of Europe, have competed respectively since 1975 and 1994. Thus, Europe as a socio-political construct (Made, 2003, pp.183–184) is not just mirrored in the ESC but also effectively reinforced.

The Eurovision Song Contest: A tool for nation building

The Eurovision Song Contest has reflected the changing map of Europe in the wake of the collapse of communism. Although officially it is a non-political event,

the contest has reflected wider political events; the 1990 contest, held in Zagreb after the collapse of the Berlin Wall is a strong example of this. The event featured songs which made reference to Berlin's Brandenburg Gate (Norway), Ireland's "Somewhere in Europe"; Austria pleaded for "No More Walls", Germany's effort was called "Frei Zu Leben" ("Free to Live") whilst the winner from Italy called for a united Europe (Gambaccini, 1998, p. 114). Yugoslavia took part in the Eurovision Song Contest from 1961 until 1992 and was the only Eastern European and communist country to do so. The mere participation may be seen as a form of nationalist politics and protest as a result of Tito's refusal to submit Yugoslavia to Soviet political and cultural dominance (Vuletic, 2007, p. 83). Yugoslavia participated in the Eurovision Song Contest for the final time in 1992 and the following year Bosnia Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia all made their debuts. In 1994, Russia, Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania all made their respective debuts, the largest ever influx of new countries to the contest since the inaugural competition in 1956. The rush of new countries to enter the Eurovision Song Contest in the wake of the collapse of communism can be seen as a reflection of the wider return to Europe discourse which prevailed in the post-communist and Baltic Sea region. In this context, as the Estonian case exemplifies, participation in the ESC was seen as a rite of passage for prospective EU members keen to assert their European credentials in a global setting. The return to Europe rhetoric essentially meant throwing off Soviet rule and re-emerging on the world stage, fully integrated with European and global geopolitical structures. Estonia, after becoming a full member of the EBU in 1993, another manifestation of the Return to Europe, was eligible to take part in qualifying rounds for the ESC that year. For Estonia, Eurovision provided a platform, not only showing that they were a "normal" independent country and an integral part of Europe, but also one which enabled it to compete on a level playing field with the major western powers. Participation in Eurovision is therefore confirmation of a country's European credentials and a performance in Europeanness itself (Borneman & Fowler, 1997). However, what it means to be European is open to question and therefore open to debate, which in turn makes an analysis of the ESC all the more interesting. Lauristin highlights the various "signposts" which identify a "return" to Europe and cites hosting Eurovision successfully as one of them (Lauristin, 2009). In this context the ESC has become a cultural ritual and a discursive tool in defining a nation, as Ilmar Raag, former chairman of Estonian Television expands:

In the beginning of the 1990s Estonia used every possibility to go to the West; this was a policy across the board. Estonia tried to become members of almost every international organisation; the European Union, Council of Europe,

European Broadcasting Union. In the European Broadcasting Union the biggest and most outstanding project is the Eurovision Song Contest. It was almost natural for Estonia to take part in order to show themselves as active members of this organisation and also to show to the rest of Europe and the world that Estonia is free (Ilmar Raag, Interview, 13.11.2007).

Year	Debut country
1956	Belgium, France, Germany ⁴ , Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Switzerland
1957	Austria, Denmark, United Kingdom
1958	Sweden
1959	Monaco
1960	Norway
1961	Finland, Spain, Yugoslavia
1964	Portugal
1965	Ireland
1971	Malta
1973	Israel
1974	Greece
1975	Turkey
1980	Morocco
1981	Cyprus
1986	Iceland
1993	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia
1994	Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia
1998	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
2000	Latvia
2003	Ukraine
2004	Albania, Andorra, Belarus, Serbia and Montenegro ⁵
2005	Bulgaria, Moldova
2006	Armenia
2007	Czech Republic, Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia
2008	Azerbaijan, San Marino

Table 1: Countries entering the ESC for the first time, 1956–2008 ⁴ ⁵

⁴ Before German reunification in 1990 West Germany participated, representing the Federal Republic of Germany. East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) did not compete.

⁵ Serbia and Montenegro participated for the first time in 2004 however after the union was dissolved in 2006 they both entered as separate entities in 2007.

Arguably one of the strongest examples of the ESC being used as a platform for nation building is the participation of Bosnia Herzegovina in 1993. At the time of the 1993 contest the war in the Balkans was raging and this was given particular attention in the songs from Bosnia Herzegovina and Croatia, which, along with Slovenia were making their debut at the competition that year. At a press conference, a member of the Bosnian delegation highlighted the significance arising from participating in the event for the country:

We have many problems to come here [to Eurovision]. We go out from the surrendered city, running across the runway in the middle of the night, through grenades, through snipers. We risked our lives to be here to show the whole of the world that we are just normal, peaceful people in Bosnia Herzegovina and that we just want to live in peace and to do our jobs (*Why Not Millstreet?* [TV] RTE 1993).

The delegation from Bosnia Herzegovina sought to portray their country as an ordinary European state despite news reports in the wider press suggesting otherwise. The entries from both Croatia and Bosnia Herzegovina reflected the turmoil in each country. The ESC is thus significant in terms of both demonstrating national sovereignty to a pan-European audience and also representing a return to normalcy, as highlighted by Eglitis in chapter one. The Bosnia Herzegovina entry was entitled “Sva Bol Svijeta” (*Pain in the world*). The Croatian effort, “Don’t ever cry”, had similar undertones and told the story of a young man, Ivan, who died in the war (Vuletic, 2007, p. 97). Furthermore, Slovenia which had largely escaped the bloodshed of the war made no reference to the conflict in their Eurovision debut.

Gender, sexuality and ethno-nationalist politics in the Eurovision Song Contest

The ESC has routinely been used as a platform for political statements, reflecting the rhetoric of conflict. The Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 is one such example. Greece withdrew from the contest in 1975 when it was announced that Turkey would enter, and neither country took part in the same contest until 1978 (Gambaccini, 1998, p. 69). The Greek entry of 1976, “Panaghia Mou, Panaghia Mou” (*My Lady, My Lady*) was a direct protest against the Turkish invasion. The lyrics included references to napalm ruins and fields of refugees. It shows how symbolic the contest is in terms of nationalist politics as neither

country was willing to share the same stage. Greece and Cyprus have become infamous for awarding each other the maximum twelve points every year whilst giving very few, if any, to Turkey. When Cyprus broke with tradition in 2003 and awarded eight points to Turkey, it did not go unnoticed when the spokesperson declared 'Europe, peace to Cyprus, Turkey eight points' (Melani Steliou, Eurovision Song Contest 2003). Thus the political relevance of the gesture was flagged, representing a change in the way the relationship between Cyprus and Turkey is imagined. It is noteworthy that this occurred at a time when both sides of the divided island were moving closer together as a result of the on-going peace talks. Although following this, some Greek-Cypriots accused the state-run broadcasting authorities of rigging the vote (Soloman, 2007, p. 140). Similarly, points exchanged between Greece and Turkey have increased in recent years and this has been attributed to the so-called "earthquake diplomacy"⁶ of 1999 (Polychronakis, 2008).

Israel's participation in the ESC not only highlights the socially constructed nature of the Europe in which Eurovision operates but also the highly politicised image that the country presents through participation. In 1998, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority (IBA) selected a trans-gender artist, Dana International, to represent Israel at Eurovision. This caused uproar in the country, with ultra-Orthodox Jews, considering Dana International to be peripheral to their ideal of national identity (Raykoff, 2007, p. 11). Others such as composer, Svika Pikk, highlighted the fact that it was a chance to promote Israel as a liberal and tolerant country, changing the way the Middle East is imagined. Politician Shlomo Ben-Izri claimed that the decision "symbolised the sickness of a secular Israel" (BBC News, 10.05.1998). Such discourses show how seriously some nations approach the ESC; a Eurovision entry is seen as representative of the entire nation. The IBA defended their choice, "we should be seen as a liberal, free country that chooses songs on their merits not on the basis of the body of a man or woman" (Raykoff, 2007, p. 11). Furthermore, the 1999 Eurovision Song Contest in Jerusalem was dogged by controversy. The interval act featuring Dana International singing below Jerusalem's historic city walls caused further outrage to ultra-Orthodox Jews, who were also incensed at religious lyrics being used in the performance. The rules of the ESC state that a full dress rehearsal must take place on the Friday evening before the contest. This violated the traditions of the Jewish Sabbath where all activity is

⁶ A series of earthquakes in both Greece and Turkey in the summer of 1999 saw the two countries cooperate in a humanitarian capacity, the experience is said to have improved relations between the two countries.

forbidden from sunset on Friday through to Saturday evening, again provoking angry reactions from conservatives despite the fact that, officially, Israel is a secular state. A compromise was reached, the IBA held the rehearsal in private. The Israeli entrants of 1999, four-piece boy band Eden, with the song, “Happy Birthday”, was a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the state of Israel. At the 2000 contest, Israeli representatives, Ping-pong, waved Syrian flags during rehearsals. Israel and Syria were officially in a state of war at the time and Israel’s then Deputy Education Minister, Shlomo Yahalom, called for the group’s participation to be banned claiming that they failed to represent national values (BBC News, 11.05.2000). The waving of the Syrian flag during rehearsals on Israel’s Independence Day, 10 May, in particular, caused further upset to officials, who publically boycotted the group leaving them to cover their own expenses. Despite threats from the Israeli delegation to ban the group from performing altogether, they appeared at the 2000 ESC and waved the Syrian flag along with the Israeli flag in a call for peace. The case of Israel has shown how the Eurovision Song Contest often touches on sensitive subjects such as gender identity, sexuality, religion and politics. Indeed, in Israel and Jerusalem, these issues often intrude on even the most unlikely of situations. The reaction of some officials in Israel has shown how seriously they regard Israel’s image. Such controversies therefore represent a struggle in Israel between secularism and religious freedom.

Gender and sexuality were issues which came to the foreground in Slovenia in 2002 when the transvestite act, Sestre, were chosen to represent the country. It was the choice of a jury who overruled the public vote and was seen by some as promoting an image of Slovenia which was peripheral to the traditions of a Catholic country and so street protests ensued. The debate reached the European Parliament with Louise van der Laan of the Public Liberties and Civic Rights Committee openly questioning Slovenia’s commitment to human rights. Van der Laan was “very shocked to learn that in Slovenia there is again a debate relating to sexual minorities. That the issue of gay rights is coming up, confirms to us that, perhaps, Slovenia is not yet ready for EU membership” (BBC News, 05.03.2002). Sestre went on to perform in Eurovision in 2002. This episode further serves as evidence of the seriousness that some countries take of their image, and for that matter, Eurovision itself.

In 2009, a series of disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan unfolded throughout the live broadcasts of the semi-finals and final. During the semi-finals, an introductory “postcard” leading into the Armenian performance depicted, amongst other monuments, a statue located in Stepanakert, capital

city of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, which constitutes a part of Azerbaijan. The statue was built in Soviet times to celebrate the Armenian heritage of the area. The delegation from Azerbaijan complained to the EBU that the video clip was unacceptable based on the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan, and it was subsequently edited out for the broadcast of the final. In retaliation, the presenter of the Armenian votes held up a clip-board with the monument's picture on it multiple times as she read off the votes. In the background, a screen in the capital's main square could also be seen to display the disputed monument. In August 2009, the BBC reported that several people had been questioned in Azerbaijan after their votes for Armenia were traced by mobile phone service providers. According to the BBC "one man was accused of being unpatriotic and a 'potential security threat' after he sent a text backing Armenia's song [...] the Azerbaijani authorities said people had merely been invited to explain why they voted for Armenia" (BBC News, 18.08.2009). The issue was investigated by the EBU and whilst they found no evidence to pursue the affair, a clause preventing telecom communication providers from disclosing personal information was added to the rules of the contest. The 2013 contest held in Malmö, Sweden was not without controversy after footage emerged on YouTube suggesting that Azerbaijani officials had been buying votes ahead of the final. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev ordered an internal investigation after it emerged that Russia received no points in the final from Azerbaijan. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, claimed that the result was outrageous and that the incident "will not remain without a response" whilst Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko also questioned the voting results (BBC News, 21.05.2013). In February 2014, the EBU confirmed that there had been irregularities in the voting results from one country in 2013 but did not disclose any further information. The EBU also pointed out that this did not affect the result.

The politics of pop: voting in the Eurovision Song Contest

Since its inception, various systems have been used to determine the winner of the Eurovision Song Contest. During the 1950s and 1960s the winner was determined by ten juries from each participating country who in turn gave one vote to their favourite song. However this was not without problems and in 1969 four countries tied for first place (Spain, France, Netherlands and the United Kingdom). With no precedent in place, all four nations were declared

the winner. Between 1971 and 1973 two jurors from each country voted for the top five songs, this was done “in vision” with the respective jurors seen on-screen casting their votes. In 1975, a new system was introduced which is still the defining feature of the contest today; countries vote from one to eight then ten points and finally the maximum twelve points is awarded.

Until 1997 this traditional jury system consisting of 16 people of differing ages from the music industry and the general public had been used. As a result of the 1996 contest, which handed Ireland its fourth win in five years, there was much discussion about the relevance of the juries at the ESC. The British act, Gina G, went on to global success despite coming eighth in the event. At the 1997 ESC, in response to criticism of the result from the previous year, telephone voting or “televoting” was trialled in five competing nations (O’Connor, 2007, p. 148). By 1998, this had been extended to all states unless there was a specific reason why voting should not be used, such as a voting malfunction or a weak telephone system, in which case a back-up jury was used. The change in the voting procedure was described as a departure from “a corrupt, narrowly-based voting system in favour of wider democracy” (*The Independent*, 13.05.1998). However, since televoting has been introduced further controversy has arisen amidst claims that the voting is “political” or has been hijacked by national diasporas voting for their homeland entries. Such claims were exacerbated after 2004 when the contest was opened up further to incorporate many Former Soviet Republics.

An examination of the nature of the debates on voting in the ESC reveals more about the wider socio-political context within which the Eurovision Song Contest operates, a Europe still divided between “old” and “new”. Every winner from 2001–2008 has been from a new-entrant country outside the contest’s traditional Western European heartland, or from long-time participant countries which had not yet scored a victory. Greece, Turkey and Finland, all of which are located on the physical edges of Western Europe, won for the first time in this period (Fricker, 2009, p. 1–2). This has been largely met with negative press attention in Western Europe. The failure of the Netherlands to reach the final in 2005 was held up in the Dutch media as an example of how power within the EU has shifted eastwards (Browne, 2005). Thus the ESC is a stage where wider political tensions concerning EU enlargement are enacted.

Recent studies have found that voting patterns do exist; former Soviet, Scandinavian and Balkan countries all tend to vote for each other (Fenn et al., 2006). The 2006 study also found that Estonia is grouped in with the Nordic countries; Estonia’s voting patterns largely reflect the return to Europe rhetoric

of Estonian politicians in the 1990s. The accusation that the ESC is political is nothing new; since the 1980s Greece and Cyprus have regularly exchanged the top vote whilst awarding few, if any, to Turkey. However, since the contest has expanded ever eastward it has infused new interest and with that, new controversies, in particular the inclusion of countries with large diaspora populations. Some strong examples of this include Turkey, Armenia and Russia.

Turkey, which first entered the competition in 1975, did not fare well until the late 1990s. With the introduction of the public vote, Turkey's entries have been markedly more successful, going on to win the event in 2003. What is interesting to note is that Germany, with a large population of people of Turkish origin, tends to vote overwhelmingly for Turkey. Between 2003 and 2006, Germany awarded Turkey with 44 points out of a maximum of 48. In 2003, when Turkey won, it received most votes from Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, all of which have a sizeable Turkish diaspora. In recent years Turkey has also received the high scores from the UK vote and when the popular vote did not go to Turkey it went to Greece, both of which have long-established communities in the UK. Furthermore Armenia, which first entered the competition in 2006, has until 2011, consistently placed in the top ten countries, receiving most votes from Russia, Netherlands, Belgium and Turkey. All of which have a large Armenian diaspora.

Arguably the strongest example of diaspora voting in the Eurovision Song Contest is the votes that Russia receives. Russia, which first participated in the event in 1994, has like Turkey, received more votes after the introduction of the public telephone vote. In recent years, Russia has received the most votes from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Israel. All of which awarded the winning Russian entry the maximum vote in 2008 and all of which have significant Russian-speaking populations. Whilst this again is not evidence of politics *per se*, it does suggest that there does appear to be a direct link with the diaspora vote. The reaction to this apparent diaspora voting in the wider Western press has been overwhelmingly negative as headlines such as "UK may quit Eurovision amid fears tactical voting is turning competition into a farce" suggest (*Daily Mail* 29.05.2008). Terry Wogan quit in his role as BBC commentator after the UK finished last in 2008 whilst Russia went on to win.

The debates surrounding the ESC and the increasing politicisation of the contest, namely by Eastern European participant states, ignores the voting correlations which exist between the UK and Ireland for example and also serves as a further example of the othering of Eastern Europe. In this context, comments about so-called Eastern-bloc voting at the ESC can be seen as a reflection

of the general rhetoric concerning European Union enlargement. The 2007 ESC semi-final, where all ten qualifiers came from east of the Danube, inflamed the passions of critics of the contest and arguably paved the way for further changes to the organisation of the event. In a bid to dispel the controversies of the previous year, the EBU separated countries on the basis of location and by those which had previously tended to vote for each other into various different “pots”. Countries which took part in one semi-final were not eligible to vote for those in another, effectively splitting the vote. A further jury vote was introduced in the semi-finals meaning that in 2008, Sweden, which ranked twelfth in the popular vote, qualified ahead of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Despite the changes to the voting system, the inherent perception of corruption persisted mainly amongst Western competitors. In fact, the Big Four (Big Five as of 2011) nations were to pave the way for further changes the following year (O’Connor, 2007, p.195). In 2009, the EBU re-introduced the use of the jury vote, combining it in an equal division with the public telephone vote for the final and this was expanded further to include both semi-finals in 2010. The Big Four countries provide up to 40 per cent of the EBU Eurovision budget due to their sizeable populations (Roberts, 2009, p. 151). Such a move can be seen as evidence of the EBU desire to continue to expand the competition whilst at the same time providing reassurance to long-standing (Western) participants that their concerns were being addressed whilst at the same time ensuring that funding for the competition continues to be secured. In short, when it comes to the ESC, Western Europe still holds the economic power within the EBU which therefore re-inscribes the image of the East as underdeveloped in comparison. This confirms the arguments that the imagined East/West divide still exists today within an EU accession context (Kuus 2004, p. 473; Mälksoo, 2009, p. 656).

The ESC as a showcase for the nation

Göran Bolin (2006) argues that the Eurovision Song Contest is the modern day equivalent of the World’s Fairs of the 19th Century. As the world exhibitions declined in popularity following World War II, mass media events came to dominate culture in modern societies. The Eurovision Song Contest is a media event (Dayan & Katz, 1992), yet it is one which is unique in its genre. Whilst the Academy or Grammy Awards can be considered to be media events, they represent competition amongst actors and musicians whilst the ESC, on the

other hand, is a competition between national broadcasters in Europe, effectively a competition between nation states. The ESC is also distinctive in that it was originally devised as a television show where as other programmes are events which were broadcast. In chapter one I argue that the Eurovision Song Contest is a mega-event (Roache, 2001, p. 1) which has the capacity to draw the eyes of the world and provides an opportunity for the host country to promote or even change its image. However, with these opportunities comes scrutiny as the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest held in Baku, Azerbaijan demonstrated. The ESC in Baku not only put Azerbaijan's authoritarian government and its human rights record under the international spotlight, it also drew attention to EU relations with Azerbaijan (Gluhovic, 2013, p. 207).

Since 2001, the contest has come to be staged in locations outside of the traditional Eurovision heartland and has become a discursive tool in defining Europeaness and effectively has become a strategy for Europeanisation and nation branding. Bolin argues that the World's Fairs had separate pavilions for each nation state and that through competing against each other, participating nations in the ESC can win the right to host the event, thus providing a platform to the country to showcase itself (Bolin, 2006, p. 201). Furthermore, technology also allows host countries to pioneer new broadcasting techniques to present a positive international image of the nation state to a global audience. As recent contests in Moscow (2009) and Baku (2012) have shown, this offers an opportunity to try and produce more and more elaborate shows. Indeed, the 2012 contest in Azerbaijan was staged in a venue, the Crystal Hall, which was custom built specifically for the ESC.

The 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 2002, p.1-3) is applicable to the ESC in that the contest has played a role in refining and promoting the international images of participating countries. The tourist gaze is a set of expectations and assumptions within which individuals regard destinations in particular and tourism in general. It is fundamentally "constructed through difference" (Urry, 2002, p. 1), understood by contrast to the routine of everyday life. The resources for constructing the tourist gaze are drawn from 'a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, television, literature, magazines records and videos' (*Ibid.*, p. 1-3). It is this use of media which therefore makes this idea relevant to the Eurovision Song Contest. The reach of the mass media means that it may not be necessary to travel in order to see with the tourist gaze (*Ibid.*, p. 90). The strongest examples are the short film clips shown between each song during the ESC. These "postcards" resemble tourist advertising campaigns; promoting scenery, cityscapes and other places of interest to the potential tourist, and are

in essence representations of essentialised heritage. In particular, the postcards used during the Estonian ESC production in 2002 were drawn from the narratives of Brand Estonia, which is discussed in chapter five. Consequently, the ESC represents a platform for nation branding, allowing host countries to convey their own images on their own terms. In particular the cases of Ireland, Turkey and Russia exemplify this and will be briefly discussed in the following. All are united by a desire to banish their peripheral status and aspire to greater centrality in Europe. Ireland has won seven Eurovision Song Contests in total, more times than any other nation. The continued success of Ireland at the contest brought much attention to the financial pressures that staging the contest successively placed on national broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTE). In this context, the ESC took on greater significance for Ireland which by its continued and successful staging of the show, along with the launch of global dance phenomenon, Riverdance, as part of the interval act for the 1994 contest, meant Ireland was able to cultivate an image of modernity and economic success (Lin, 2010, p. 53). For Turkey, a nation with long-standing EU accession aspirations, the ESC provided the opportunity for the country to showcase itself as an integrally European state rather than a peripheral or Eurasian one (Erkem, 2009, p. 500). Finally, in 2009, Russia staged the largest contest ever in terms of scale and cost of production, evidence of a desire to promote a resurgent Russia to a global audience.

At the periphery: Ireland, Turkey, Russia and Azerbaijan at the ESC

Ireland first won the ESC in 1970, at a time when the country was seen very much as an agricultural backwater, spending most of the 20th century in economic stagnation (Singleton, 2013, p. 146). State broadcaster RTE went on to stage the ESC in Dublin in 1971 confounding concerns from other participating countries that the broadcaster would not be capable (*Top Ten: Eurovision* [TV] 2000). The ESC therefore acted as a platform for Ireland to manage its image internationally. By the 1990s and until the recent global economic crisis, Ireland was seen as the Celtic Tiger (Goodman, 2000, p. 157), and the narratives concerning Eurovision during the 1990s, of which Ireland won and staged four contests in five years, reflect this. Whilst Ireland's rise involved state promotions of trade, not nation branding per se, the country used the ESC as a platform for image building or as Greg Clark argues "gentle political purposes

in terms of redefining a country's image" (Clark, 2008, p. 94). The ESC in the 1990s was an opportunity to promote an alternative vision of Ireland, one of economic success and stability. RTE was responsible for staging the event in 1993 after Ireland won in 1992. Instead of taking Dublin as the expected choice for the host city, RTE took the show to Millstreet, a small village in County Cork with a population of 1,500 people. The village boasted one of the largest equestrian auditoriums in the country, the Green Glens Arena. The decision represented an attempt by RTE to showcase the wider country through the ESC. A clear sign of the importance that Ireland attached to the event was the appearance of Irish Premier, Albert Reynolds, who visited the arena during renovations:

You could not buy the space on television screens all around the world that you get from the Eurovision Song Contest. In the past we have found that RTE do a magnificent job in showing Ireland at its best and I have no doubt that down in Millstreet when you combine the talents of RTE and the people here in Millstreet, we will have an excellent production on the night (RTE,1993).

It is interesting to note that Reynolds' was paying attention to the value that the ESC had in terms of promoting Ireland, essentially the contest acted as a three hour television advert, one which as he states RTE could not afford to buy using conventional airtime. Ireland went on to win the event in 1993 and the contest return to Dublin the following year. 1994 saw seven new competing nations join Eurovision which along with production costs increasingly meant that Eurovision was becoming an ever more expensive television format. Consequently, critics began to question the usefulness of RTE hosting the ESC. Liam Miller, Head of Programmes at RTE at the time, argued that failure to produce the show would not only be damaging for Ireland's image but would also impact upon national pride (BBC & Open University, 1995). The interval act in 1994 was the then unknown Riverdance, an act which combined traditional Irish folk music with modern dance. Riverdance became a global phenomenon, and with the single exception of ABBA, is the biggest money-spinner ever created by Eurovision, (Gambaccini, 1998, p. 130). Riverdance created the prospect that managing the contest would do more than drain the budget of the broadcaster. The runaway success of Riverdance provided RTE with a handsome return on their initial Eurovision investment. It still remains popular today and succeeded in transforming the image of Irish traditional dancing into something modern, exciting and exportable (BBC & Open University, 1995).

Ireland won the contest again in 1994 meaning that RTE was therefore responsible for staging the event again the following year. The 1995 edition was like the previous year, held at the Point Theatre in Dublin. The year also marked the fortieth anniversary of the Eurovision Song Contest and so the pressure was on for Ireland to stage a spectacular show. RTE had mastered the art of appearing lavish in production but actually being frugal in reality, re-using previous equipment and materials for the event the following year (BBC & Open University, 1995). The contest also reflected political events in Ireland at the time with the presenter, Mary Kennedy, introducing the show by making reference to the Northern Ireland peace process.

The Eurovision Song Contest is an event which celebrates a shared love of music by people of different cultures. This island of ours is shared by people of different cultures. We invite you to join with us tonight in our own celebration that neighbours north and south can now, together, share in the warm glow of peace. Long may it shine (Kennedy, 1995).

RTE used the ESC as a platform for political commentary, despite the EBU insisting that the event is not a political one. Furthermore, the comments contributed to a change in the way the relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland is imagined. Ireland won the contest again in 1996 and so were due to host the event again in 1997. This victory made headline news, not only because of the feat of winning the event again but also because of the financial burden that the contest appeared to present to RTE.

When it costs the winning nation up to £3 million to stage, it is not surprising that this year's celebrations are somewhat muted [...] The state broadcaster RTE are putting a brave face on it, but admits that hosting the event is becoming a bit of a challenge (BBC News [TV] 20.05.1996).

Michael D Higgins, then Minister of Culture, was angered by suggestions that the Eurovision Song Contest was anything other than positive for Ireland and suggested that the victory represented “a combination of different excellences both musically and culturally” (BBC News [TV] 20.05.1996). It is interesting to note the aims that RTE had for the show; a departure from Celtic imagery and a more contemporary, youth-orientated broadcast content (RTE, 1997). Despite initial contact between the BBC and RTE regarding sharing the responsibility for staging the event, RTE decided that they would go ahead with the 1997 production alone and the contest returned to Dublin. Thus the 1997 contest represented

a stronger, more confident Ireland and RTE, and a symbol of national pride during the boom years of the Celtic Tiger. Ireland used the ESC in a wider political battle for recognition on the international stage, in an attempt to banish its peripheral status. This process of discursively performing Europeanness through the ESC has continued, as the Turkish example demonstrates.

Turkey won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2003, three decades after it made its debut in the contest. The victory made headlines and was viewed by some politicians as having possible political ramifications for Turkey's aspirations to join the EU.

This is a milestone in creating an atmosphere for entry in the EU like we deserve [...] it is a very important day [...] Turkey has earned a lot of sympathy from the European people (BBC News, 25.05.2003).

Turkish victory in the ESC coincided with the wider peace process going on in Cyprus, which was reflected in the contest itself through the Turkish act receiving points from Cyprus for the first time in Eurovision history, a gesture which was not lost on the spokesperson for Cyprus who made specific reference to the ongoing peace process during the broadcast. Again, this was despite insistence from the EBU that Eurovision is not a political event. Victory in the ESC therefore represented a culmination of energies as the country worked towards acceptance in Europe, namely the EU. Eurovision recognised Turkey's cultural contribution and therefore afforded the country the opportunity to be accepted as a European state, note the tone of the language used in the quote from Kursat Tuzmen, "like we deserve".

Turkey staged the 49th ESC in Istanbul in May 2004. The theme for the contest was "Under the Same Sky" which highlighted the significance of Turkish integration into a united Europe. The Minister for Broadcasting underlined how seriously the Turkish government viewed the ESC at the time:

I want to underline how important Eurovision is for the Turkish government, which regards the contest as a unique opportunity to promote Turkey in Europe. The event is [...] more important than any other political summit (Soloman, 2007, p. 148).

Thus, Eurovision was a tool for nation branding, which, as described earlier in this chapter represents a form of soft power, unlike government summits. The notion that the ESC was more important than political summits can be seen as

a rejection of the previous model of European integration that the Turks had been following, the subtext being, Turkey's efforts had failed elsewhere yet they had succeeded in the ESC, which is based on a popular vote.

The 2004 contest featured the now customary postcard images; various beauty spots from around Turkey as well as historical sites were broadcast whilst the Turkish winner of Miss World, Azra Akin, introduced each national flag. The postcard images therefore served as a way of further promoting Turkish success on the world stage. Much of the content in 2004 was of a distinctly cosmopolitan nature; featuring café culture, nightlife, beach resorts and modern dance, suggesting that the show was produced with the European audience in mind. The broadcast attracted strong criticism from Kurdish groups who claimed that the scenes portrayed cultural heritage from the Kurdish, Armenian and Syrian regions of the country (Kurdish Media, 2004). Yet, after closer examination of the 2004 broadcast, the unambiguous message was that this is a distinctly Turkish landscape. National identity as a construction and the politics of nationalism are both reinforced through the ESC in 2004.

In 2008, Russian singer Dima Bilan won the Eurovision Song Contest and in the words of Russian Prime Minister at the time, Vladimir Putin, the victory represented 'not only Dima Bilan's personal success, but one more triumph for all of Russia' (*New York Times*, 25.05.2008). Russian national broadcaster Channel One went on to stage the event in Moscow in May 2009. The 2009 contest was like no other before; it was the most expensive in the contest's history, costing over €30 million (compared to the 13 million Euros spent in 2007). It was also the largest physically, the stage, according to the organisers, held 30% of the world's available LED lighting. The event was also one of the most controversial, with various political and nationalist grievances being played out in front of an international audience. Given the unprecedented budget in the midst of a global financial crisis and the overall spectacle surrounding the 2009 affair, the ESC was therefore a chance to promote a positive international image of Russia on its own terms to the global media, given that much of the international media coverage of Russia in recent years has come from outside Russia and therefore outside its control. The Official Programme Booklet published by the national broadcaster, Channel One, emphasised the significance of the event in terms of boosting the international image of the host country. The Eurovision Song Contest was therefore an opportunity to present a positive side of Russia to the world through the media.

In the gaze of the Western European media, Russia has not fared well. The recent and public fallout from the death of Alexander Litvenenko, the recent

killings of prominent journalists that were critical of the Putin administration, such as Anna Politkovskaya, as well as the so-called cyber attacks on Estonia and the 2008 war with Georgia, have left Russia open to criticism with consistent negative narratives appearing in the UK media (*Daily Mail* 27.08. 2007; *Reuters*, 15.08.2008). Georgia, which only the year before was engaged in a war with Russia, after initially refusing to take part in the show after the war, confirmed their choice of entry in early 2009. However the song, “We Don’t Wanna Put In”, was largely seen as a swipe at Vladimir Putin and deemed to be “too political” by the EBU. The Georgian broadcasting authorities were asked to change the lyrics of the song or submit a different entry, which they declined to do and so withdrew from the competition.

In the run-up to the contest, the Moscow authorities made headlines with alleged heavy handed tactics being employed in the efforts to clean up the city with up to 30,000 stray dogs removed from the city streets in a bid to present a positive image of the city to the international delegations (*Daily Mail*, 15.05.2009). The article also reported rumors that prostitutes and homeless people were to be taken out of the city centre as reportedly happened with the 1980 Olympic Games, thus reinforcing the notion of such spectator events being seen as a viable and serious platform for image building. It was also announced that a gay pride march would take place on the same day as the main broadcast. The organisers hoped to draw attention to what they see as systematic discrimination against the gay community in Russia whilst at the same time hoping that the heavy media presence for the Eurovision Song Contest would decrease the chance of violence, which occurred during Moscow Pride in both 2006 and 2007. The Mayor of Moscow previously described homosexuality as “satanic” and banned the proposed march. The protest did go ahead and over 20 people were forcibly removed and arrested by police. Whilst there was no repeat of the previously violent scenes, such unrest and the forcible removal of the protestors provided a striking counter narrative to the comparatively innocuous scenes broadcast during the Eurovision Song Contest itself. In this context, the label of the “Beijing Olympics of Eurovision”, by UK commentator Graham Norton, takes on deeper significance. The authorities in Beijing were criticised after reports emerged of heavy-handed tactics whilst the city was being prepared for the Olympic Games, protests relating to the situation in Tibet were silenced and it was alleged that a recall of contaminated milk products was delayed so not to damage China’s international image during the events (*The Daily Telegraph*, 15.09.2008). Confirmation of how seriously the Russian authorities were taking the event came when Vladimir Putin appeared at one of the rehearsals to oversee

the preparations for himself. Security was tight in Moscow in the run-up to the 2009 contest with a heavy police presence: up to 20,000 officers were brought in to preside over the event (*Daily Mail*, 15.05. 2009).

From a technical perspective ESC 2009 was flawless, a piece of highly sophisticated television and therefore a triumph for Russia. To reinforce the notion of a successful Russia, small clips of recent cultural victories were showing during the telecast. Fricker (2009, p. 2) argues that whilst the show was a spectacle in itself, the self-representation of Russia seemed somewhat uncertain. The presenters joked several times that Russia “does not have bears walking in the streets” in an attempt to jokingly refute an image of Russia as being perceived by the rest of Europe as uncivilised, backward, and barbaric. However the continuous verbal and visual repetition of these stereotypes arguably re-inscribes this image. During the interval the choice of entertainment was also ambiguous. The Russian girl-duo Tatu performed backed by the Red Army Chorus whilst a pink inflatable tank and jet appeared on a stage. In an attempt to dispell the idea of Russia as militaristic and aggressive, the producers inadvertently reinforced the image with such imagery and attempts to inject humour into the scenes, in the form of the pink tank, months after the war with Georgia and when there was controversy ensuing regarding the hostility towards Gay Pride in Moscow.

Russia is the only host country of the ESC to explicitly make on-air references to stereotypes in order to attempt to dispel them, thus the 2009 Eurovision Song Contest became a public relations vehicle for the Russian government, which assisted with the financing of the project. The Eurovision Song Contest in Moscow in 2009 was, until Baku 2012, the most expensive ever and a testament to how seriously the Russian authorities view such events as opportunities to promote positive international images to the global media. The underlying assumption is that Russia attempts to present certain narratives regardless of the cost, financial or otherwise. As one journalist present at the event in 2009 recalled:

Looking at it now, and at the amazing venue we were in, it was not hard to believe that the Russians had spent over €30 million on staging the event. It was all very big, very grandiose and very expensive. We were told anecdotally that the Russians simply kept throwing money at any problems that arose during the organisation of the contest until those problems went away (Journalist A, Interview, 10.05.2009).

The 2012 contest held in Baku, Azerbaijan was arguably the most politically-charged in the history of the ESC. Azerbaijan, like Russia, used the contest as

a platform for promoting itself on the world stage. Located on the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan is an oil-rich nation which straddles both East and West. Raykoff and Tobin (2007) argue that participation in the ESC often represents both an expression of modernity and a country's claim to Europe and the West. In the case of Azerbaijan, this is a somewhat dubious claim given the lack of success that the country has had in terms of opening doors to Europe, something which has arguably been held back by the alleged authoritarian regime led by President Ilham Aliyev. Nonetheless, Azerbaijan has engaged in the nation branding process and plays the public diplomacy game, as evidenced by its bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games as well as the launch of the *Amazing Azerbaijan* nation branding campaign. If anything, such activities represent an exercise in nation building on the part of Azerbaijan's ruling elite. Azerbaijan's victory in 2011 and its hosting in 2012 serve as 'normalisation' to quote Michel Foucault, a complex process by which otherness might be eradicated. Such mega-events present an opportunity for nation building by providing the Aliyev regime with a façade of legitimacy. However, as is often the case with mega-events, a spotlight is shone on host nations, opening up the country to international scrutiny, be it welcome or not.

The Azeri production of the ESC in 2012 is arguably the most expensive in the history of the contest. The venue for 2012, the Crystal Hall, was purpose built to host the event in less than nine months and a final budget has never been disclosed.⁷ The lack of transparency surrounding the 2012 event is therefore a reflection of the domestic political situation in Azerbaijan. As with the Russian authorities in 2009, Azerbaijan's staging of the event was taken seriously as a platform to promote the country, namely in Europe. With Azerbaijan hosting the contest, serious political questions concerning human rights and the freedom of the press, as well as the on-going territorial disputes with Armenia, arose. Just weeks after Azerbaijan's Eurovision victory, President Aliyev pardoned journalist Eynulla Fatullayev and 89 other prisoners (Abbasov 2011). Fatullayev was imprisoned in 2007 for articles he wrote concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as alleged possession of illegal drugs. Amnesty International described the charges as "fabricated" and state that his imprisonment is related to his critical stance on government policies (Amnesty International, 2011). Furthermore, allegations of forced evictions during the construction of the venue, as well as denial of

⁷ The budget for the 2012 ESC, excluding construction costs of the venue, is estimated at €50 million.

freedom of assembly in the run-up to the contest surfaced. Armenia eventually withdrew from the 2012 contest and in August 2012 it was reported that Azeri authorities had thwarted an Iranian-led terrorist attack on the contest (*The Telegraph*, 22.08.2012). These striking counter narratives meant that the 2012 event was the most contentious in ESC history.

Closer reading of the organisation of the 2012 contest reveals an interesting insight into the workings of the political elite in Azerbaijan. Mehriban Aliyeva, the wife of the current president of Azerbaijan, headed the organising committee of the 2012 contest. The performer during the interval act in 2012 was Emin Agalarov, who is married to Leyla Aliyeva, the daughter of the president and first lady of Azerbaijan. If there was an attempt to portray Azerbaijan as a meritocratic democracy then the organisation of ESC 2012 re-inscribed the opposite. The actual content of the Azeri show was equally contentious. In the postcard videos broadcast before each national entry, Karabakh horses, native to the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which is currently under Armenian control, were routinely portrayed. The implication being if Karabakh horses are Azeri, then so too is the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, subliminal political messages were peppered throughout the 2012 contest despite the continued reinforcements from the EBU that the ESC is a television show and not a political event. Further controversy came during the voting procedure when the German spokesperson, Anke Engelke, appeared to make reference to the political situation in Azerbaijan: “Tonight nobody could vote for their own country. But it is good to be able to vote. And it is good to have a choice. Good luck on your journey, Azerbaijan. Europe is watching you” (BBC TV, 2012). The debates concerning Azerbaijan’s staging of the ESC in 2012 highlight the fraught nature of nation and state building processes in a post-colonial context. By hosting events such as the ESC countries open up to scrutiny. In short, Azerbaijani authorities arguably wanted to influence the way the country is viewed on the world stage. However, the on-going dialogue concerning human rights in the country and the actions of an increasingly authoritarian government may well mean that it is Azerbaijan and its ruling elite which are influenced in the long-term.

Concluding remarks

The Eurovision Song Contest can be seen as a platform for the expression of Europeanness and in the case of newly-sovereign states, it acts as a tool for nation building and a platform for nation branding. It is not only new countries

that use the contest in this way though, Norway in 2010, Germany in 2011 and Sweden in 2013 promoted a brand of multiculturalism through their respective productions. The former two highlighted cultural diversity through their postcard images and representations on stage. Norway has in the past been represented by immigrant performers, one of which, Belarus-born Alexander Rybak, won the contest in 2009. In 2011, Germany opted to introduce each national entry with an introductory postcard featuring an immigrant from that particular country. The positive images associated with this reinforce the message that Germany is open and multicultural. Interestingly, this was to follow the announcement by German Chancellor Angela Merkel claiming that multiculturalism had failed (BBC News, 17.10. 2010). The slogan for the 2013 contest in Sweden, “We Are One” promoted the equality and unity of competing countries (EBU, 2013) at a time when Europe as a political, social and political entity is fractured. Branding, whether branding a nation through the ESC, or branding the ESC itself through slogans, is a contentious undertaking.

The ESC is inherently political or at least, is highly politicised, despite continuous insistence from the EBU to the contrary. It has in the past, and continues, to reflect the socio-political issues of the day, the case studies detailed in this chapter exemplify this. During Soviet times, the USSR used the Olympic Games as an opportunity to demonstrate national prowess through sport. Russia, Azerbaijan and other host countries, use the Eurovision Song Contest in the same way. It is noteworthy that the Turkish government placed emphasis on the importance of hosting the contest in the same year that Greece was due to stage the Olympic Games. It is an event linked with national prestige, both in terms of voting and hosting the event itself. Victory in the contest relies solely upon the approval of other nations in the form of votes. The ESC affords the host nation the opportunity to change perceptions and manage its external image, in essence, presenting and performing certain narratives of the nation to a global audience. Both ESCs in Moscow and Baku show that striking counter-narratives can influence the way this re-imagining takes place. Inversely, the very stereotypes countries seek to dispel through hosting the ESC may in fact have been compounded by the spin, scale of the production, and political controversies. The fact that the contest is bigger than ever and continues to attract fans and critics alike, nearly sixty years since its creation, is a feat which surely only existed in creator Marcel Baison’s imagination.

4. “What do I see? Estonia has again gotten one foot in the door to Europe.”

Victory in the Eurovision Song Contest arguably took on great significance for Estonia since it was through singing that the country is said to have mobilised popular resistance to the Soviet government even though the tradition of song festivals goes back much further. Beginning in Tartu in 1869, the national Song Festival (*Laulupidu*) is held every five years since the late 19th century. The tradition continued during the interwar republic and was permitted during Soviet times, albeit with songs which had to be approved by the authorities (O’Connor, 2006, p. 181). Song festivals were one of the few opportunities for representations of national identity as opposed to Soviet identity within Soviet Estonia. This collective identity was especially important during the struggle for independence starting in 1987. The easing of restrictions on political protests under *perestroika* meant that mass demonstrations could take place. It was during the late 1980s that the song festivals took on a greater significance as focal point for national assertion, when national symbols re-emerged demonstrating resistance to the Soviet regime. This became known as the “Singing Revolution”, a term which was coined by Estonian activist Heinz Valk (Vogt, 2005, p. 26). In September 1988 over 300,000 people gathered at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds and, for the first time in public, people began to call for outright Estonian independence. In this context, song festivals represented an opportunity for Estonians to collectively express their dissatisfaction and even hostility towards what they saw as an illegitimate regime, further strengthening the national resolve to restore independence, as Vihalemm explains:

Mass demonstrations united the participants with emotionally high voltage. Symbols, myths and rituals had a heyday, and the function of words during

the mass rallies was magical. Speeches, songs and slogans represented a collective witchcraft, the symbolic fight of a small nation against the totalitarian machinery (Lauristin et al., 1997, p. 202).

Against this backdrop, winning the ESC in 2001 gained an added significance for many Estonians which could be observed in the public reaction to the Estonian Eurovision Song Contest victory in 2001. The image of Estonians “simply walking in[to Europe] singing”, as declared by PM Laar after the victory, was arguably a highly competent piece of PR. Nevertheless, it does capture the wider political discourses which were ongoing and prevalent in Estonia at that particular time. Estonian victory in the ESC exemplifies the importance that is attached to singing within narratives on national identity in Estonia; it can be seen as an extension of the role that singing played during the independence movement as well as an affirmation of a small nation’s identity.

The window on the West

Estonia had a history of following the ESC, since during Soviet times it was watched in the north of the country via Finnish television. This window on the West was an opportunity to monitor global events as well as follow popular culture in Western Europe, the ESC being just one example. Juhan Paadam, who went on to produce the 2002 ESC in Tallinn highlighted the significance of the programme. It is interesting to note the reference to Intervision, the communist equivalent of the ESC, as being especially unpopular in Estonia, a reflection of the wider malaise towards Soviet rule in the country.

There is a historical and emotional story from our own past. Estonia is unique because during the Soviet occupation we had the ability to follow Eurovision on Finnish television [...] we are talking about the possibility to watch Finland. We knew exactly what the Eurovision Song Contest is and a lot of people thought in these days that maybe one day we will have the possibility to go [to Eurovision]. Of course the Socialist world established their own version [Intervision] to compete with Eurovision but it was not so popular and was not popular here at all (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

In this sense, television can be seen as a form of soft power for the transmission of propaganda. Popular culture became an ideological battleground and in the case of Finnish TV, it highlighted the disparities between a capitalist West and

a communist East, an example of technology overcoming government power (Holden, 2010), a pre-cursor to the modern day equivalent of the use of social media in popular resistance. Close links with Estonian émigré communities abroad and this access to Finnish television, as well as the loosening of the political system during the 1980s, provoked widespread dissatisfaction with the ailing Soviet system. This was highlighted in the documentary film "*Disko ja Tuumasõda*" (*Disco and Cold War*) which chronicled the role of Finnish Television in Estonia. Essentially watching Western TV shows such as *Dallas* became a symbol of resistance to Soviet rule, a rejection of communist economic policies by a population curious about capitalism. In this sense, following the ESC also represented the othering of Soviet rule in Estonia. The event gained an underground following with a fan club established by radio technician Karl Pihelgas during the 1960s. According to Pihelgas, Eurovision had a symbolic value, it was something that the West bought into and the Soviets did not, a symbol of a carefree capitalist society. In an interview given to the media in 2002, Pihelgas recalled that he and twelve other friends watched the event in secret; he feared that he would lose his job if his clandestine meeting became public knowledge (Rosenberg, 2002). Soon after Estonia entered the contest, the membership of the club began to wane, many members had died or were too old and since the programme was legitimately broadcast on Estonian TV there was no need to watch the event via Finnish television and so it was finally disbanded. However, for Pihelgas the event was so much more than just a television show, "it was a chance to feel that the Iron Curtain could break down, and I and my family could, if just for a night, be part of Europe" (Rosenberg 2002).

As highlighted in chapter three, Estonian participation in the ESC can be seen as a manifestation of the wider process of state building, putting the country on the world map. Estonia took part in qualifying rounds in 1993 but did not make it to the final until 1994 when the late Silvi Vrait represented the country in Dublin. After facing relegation from the competition in 1995, Estonia returned in 1996. During the transmission that year, a message expressing goodwill to the participants, recorded by a political leader or official from that country, was broadcast before each entry. The seniority of the figure who delivered the message varied wildly from country to country, ranging from Presidents and in Estonia's case, the Prime Minister Tiit Vähi, to junior ministers, or in the Spanish case, an ambassador. Effectively the choice of messenger symbolised the significance attached to the ESC by the participating country. Estonia reached fifth place in Eurovision in 1996, a feat which was front-page news and lauded as a breakthrough by the press at home (*Postimees*, 20.04.1996).

Closer reading of the press coverage from the time shows that it represented more than just a success in a song contest; it was in fact a metaphor for Estonia's return to Europe. Alongside the main article on Eurovision, there was a caricature of the singers sitting on a flying carpet featuring the EU flag. Waving them off was President Meri with a thought bubble reading "Mida ma näen? Eesti on jälle ühe jala Euroopa ukse vahele saanud" ("What do I see? Estonia has again gotten one foot in the door to Europe"). Whilst the cartoon is tongue-in-cheek, it has deeper significance. EU accession was a priority for the government of the day, this Estonian breakthrough in the ESC represented acceptance, on a populist level, of Estonia as a European state.

It is interesting to note that Estonia, the singing nation, continued to perform strongly in the contest and avoided relegation, a fate which Finland and Russia were unable to match. As with EU accession talks, to which Estonia was invited to before neighbouring Latvia and Lithuania, the country was seen as ahead of the game in the Baltic region both in terms of economic reforms and indeed, the ESC itself. Estonia won the competition after eight attempts, a significantly stronger performance than neighbouring Finland which managed to score its first victory with its fortieth attempt in 2006.

In 1999, the European Broadcasting Union changed the rules to allow competing countries the right to perform in any language and Estonia, like most other countries opted for English. This was largely uncontroversial in Estonia and was largely seen as a chance for Estonia to succeed rather than a failure to promote national values. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that viewers in Estonia were largely familiar to Eurovision by this stage, as well as having the added benefit of viewing the contest years prior to participating via Finnish television in the north. Moreover, Estonians watched Finland continually fail to win votes when singing in Finnish. Achieving success in the competition was arguably the priority for Estonian Television during this time as opposed to promoting the Estonian language. As one former Estonian representative, Evelin Samuel explains, "as a singer it was an amazing opportunity but it was also an honour to represent my country, we were like ambassadors for the new Estonia. I don't think the language was so much of an issue" (Evelin Samuel, Interview, 07.04.2008). It is interesting to note that such pragmatic views were not shared by Mart Laar who actively called for Estonian to be reinstated as the main language of performance in the competition. Given Laar's political views, this is perhaps not surprising. The politics of national identity is rarely simple, and the rhetoric concerning national representations in the ESC is therefore a reflection of this.

Everybody is a winner at Eurovision

The winning song for Estonia, *Everybody*, was performed by Tanel Padar and Dave Benton. After the results were announced people took to the streets to celebrate in scenes reminiscent of a national holiday. According to Sarah Squire, former UK Ambassador to Estonia:

It was an extraordinary moment and for Estonians, who are reserved and on the whole, quiet people, that eruption of celebration was something to witness (*Arena: Estonia Dreams of Eurovision* [TV] 2002).

The media coverage in the days following the contest was expansive; for weeks the ESC was on the front pages of the newspapers in the country. Victory in the ESC represented a significant breakthrough for the country, not only in terms of national pride but also in terms of international, namely European, recognition. In short, Eurovision was big news. The Estonian public engaged with the Eurovision Song Contest victory in 2001, and unlike the Welcome to Estonia campaign discussed in chapter two, the embrace was not top-down, it was spontaneous. Winning Eurovision was seen as "the most important event since independence" (Guha, 2002) and even a cursory glance at the media coverage from the time reflects this. The flag, a potent symbol of national identity, was very much at the forefront of the celebrations. Juhan Paadam recalled that the celebrations which followed the Eurovision result were a reflection of how significant this victory was seen at the time in Estonia:

It was like a national holiday, it was a new explosion of our national identity [...] the delegation were met in town hall square the next day. In the first year only four people wanted to meet us. The town hall square was absolutely full (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Closer reading of the Estonian reaction to this victory provides a unique insight into the construction of national identity in a post-Soviet context. Eurovision victory represented acceptance; Estonia had competed on a level playing field with more powerful, Western European neighbours, and emerged victorious. To date, it remains the largest international competition that Estonia has won. Hobsbawm (2002, p.143) highlights the role that football matches have played in constructing an imagined community within the nation, he cites that the nation appears to be more real when seen as just a team of eleven people. Fox (2006)

argues that national holidays and sporting events are comparable; both are key focal points for collective experience in which the imagined community, which is the nation, is articulated. The Estonian ESC win can be viewed in the same vein, Padar and Benton embodied the hopes and optimism of a young nation, the victory was not only a personal triumph but one in which the entire country could celebrate. Ilmar Raag, former chairman of Estonian Television expands:

While we Estonians have always been proud of our statesmen and celebrities, we don't really believe in our own importance. After all, history has testified numerous times to the fact that the interests of small nations are seldom considered in the maelstrom of global politics. It might even be more accurate to say that they go unnoticed [...] The significance of the winning song [...] was much bigger than just any Eurovision victory. It instilled optimism and confidence in all Estonians [...] this is the only major chance [...] to prove that despite the small size of our nation, we have something to say to the world (Ilmar Raag, in *Eesti Televisioon*, 2002, p. 8).

The Eurovision Song Contest offered Estonians an opportunity to celebrate their national identity together. As discussed in chapter one, Michael Billig in his work argues that most flags are ignored; flying saliently from civic buildings, part of the routine fabric of social life (Billig, 1995, p. 43). However, the Estonian flag, itself a symbol of opposition to the Soviet regime during the Singing Revolution, was anything but overlooked that night in Tallinn following Eurovision 2001, the waving of the Estonian flag was one of the defining images of the evening.

The hoisting of the newly designed flag indicates that another nation has joined the club of nations: “we” have become like “you” (no longer “them”; “we” are all nations, with “our” flags and “our” anthems, “our” seats in the United Nations, and “our” participation, with appropriately designed vests, at Olympic Games and World Cups (Billig, 1995, p. 86).

The jubilant scenes of the Estonian flag being waved in the centre of Tallinn following the announcement of the result were therefore symbolic, affirming a sense of collective nationhood. This raises interesting questions concerning who is part of this imagined community and who is not. The narrative of the nation is not linear, nationalism does not speak with a straightforward voice and national identity is never easy to deconstruct. The story of Dave Benton, one half of the winning duo for Estonia, offers a unique insight into the way Estonian national identity is both constructed and contested in a post-Soviet context.

Dave Benton: a model Estonian

Estonia has continued to face complicated inter-ethnic issues since the restoration of the independent state in 1991. Estonian nation builders found themselves at an interesting juxtaposition since, on one hand, restoration of independence drew upon the legal continuity principle which gave legitimacy for successive governments to ensure (ethnic) Estonian dominance in the political and public spheres and, on the other, the return to Europe discourses which implied signing up minority rights. This was, at times, at odds with the agenda of some Estonian nationalist politicians. Given the demographic situation with a sizeable Russian speaking minority, Estonia can be considered to be multicultural, home to different national groups with different understandings of their recent history. Multiculturalism in the Estonian context refers to the peaceful coexistence of Estonians and Russian speakers. As EU integration was sought, the previously dominant ethno-state was substituted with a more pragmatic approach, one of integration and the creation of a multicultural, democratic Estonian society (Lauristin, 2002, p. 22). Such a paradigm shift meant that Estonian society had to come to terms with its Soviet past if its future was to include full European integration. According to Lauristin, the Russian minority did not feature at all in the considerations of the Estonian government during the early 1990s with no official policy or statement issues between 1992 and 1996 (2002, p. 22). By the millennium, this had changed with the implementation of the Integration Programme of Estonian Society 2000–2007 in March 2000. The programme emphasised the need for societal integration to be based upon knowledge of the Estonian language as well as acquiring Estonian citizenship although the recognition of minority cultural rights was also acknowledged. The coalition government which passed the integration programme in 1998 was the same government which introduced restrictive citizenship laws in the early half of the decade. Therefore, the shift towards integration, community cohesion and the rhetoric of multiculturalism which prevailed in Estonia towards the end of that decade can be seen as a reflection of the Estonian government's orientation towards Western European institutions, namely the European Union. With this background, closer examination of the story of Dave Benton, one half of the winning duo provides an insight into the complexities of minority issues in Estonia.

Dave Benton, a Dutch national originally from Aruba moved to Estonia in 1997. He, along with Estonian rock singer Tanel Padar, won the Estonian Eurovision Song Contest heats, *Eurolaul* in February 2001 and then went onto

represent Estonia in the Eurovision final. Dave Benton is a point of interest not only because of his story as an immigrant to Estonia but also because he is to date the only black person to win the Eurovision Song Contest. It is also noteworthy that he represented Estonia, which like many countries in Eastern Europe, does not have an established black community. It is interesting to note that the Estonian Eurovision entry was selected by jury rather than public telephone votes (the public did not have a say until 2004). Benton and Padar also had backing singers and dancers, 2XL, two of whom were ethnic Russian speakers. The song was performed in English and written by ethnic Estonian songwriters Ivar Must and Maian-Anna Kärmas, with inclusive lyrics (the song itself being “Everybody”), performed by an ethnic Estonian, a black immigrant and supported by ethnic Russian speakers on backing vocals. The Estonian Eurovision entry in 2001 can therefore be seen as a construction of multiculturalism to a European audience.

However, the discourses surrounding Dave Benton are paradoxical. At the same time that he was held up as a symbol of Estonian multiculturalism by political elites, groups representing the interests of Russian speakers in Estonia complained that they were being discriminated against. The way in which Benton was represented in the Estonian media provides a unique insight into the nature of national identity debates at specific moments in time. The language used in the media coverage suggests that Dave Benton’s ethnic origins were not as invisible as some politicians tried to portray. After Benton and Padar won the domestic selection, *Eurolaul*, he was referred to as a “dark-skinned man” (Leivak, 2001a) and after winning Eurovision itself a woman was quoted as saying “I really like that black guy” (Leivak, 2001b). Whilst this is not evidence of racism as such, which itself is not the focus of this work, it does highlight that the coverage in the media at the time was perhaps chauvinistic and Benton’s ethnicity was regularly flagged. Benton, however, who was interviewed for this book, refutes any claims of racism and has stated that he was fully accepted into Estonian society:

I did not find any problems as a foreigner; I did not even find any problems of discrimination as a coloured person (Dave Benton, Interview, 15.11.2007)

In the context of EU accession, Dave Benton can be seen as a useable figure for Estonia’s political elites at the time. Integration and multiculturalism were the buzzwords and it can be argued that Benton embodied all of these things. He was a foreign national who moved to Estonia, learned the language, and

4. "What do I see? Estonia has again gotten one foot in the door to Europe."

was consequentially accepted into society. His status as being part of an ethnic minority could further be evidence of Estonia's multicultural credentials, useful at a time when the Estonian government were coming under increasing pressure to extend citizenship to its stateless persons. This opportunity was not lost on Estonian politicians. Signe Kivi who was the Minister of Culture from 1999 until 2002 stated that she was proud that Benton represented Estonia and that there were no issues regarding public attitudes towards him:

I was proud when we won – it is a huge event for anyone to win. I liked the fact that we had a white Estonian and a black Estonian resident. It supported the opinion of Estonia being liberal and friendly. It was a good image to show Estonia's multiculturalism [...] There was no issue with Dave's colour (Signe Kivi, Interview, 26.11.2007).

Dave Benton, in his interview, emphasised that he tried to learn Estonian as soon as he arrived in the country. He therefore reflects the view from the Estonian political elite that language is the key to integration in the country and that those who do not speak Estonian do so out of choice:

I had to integrate here. I moved here to stay, to live [...] you have to speak Estonian [...] I speak it with my children [...] I started to speak in my second week of being here [...] there are Russians here for ten years who still don't speak it, they still don't know it (Dave Benton, Interview, 15.11.2007).

Benton's comments regarding Russian speakers shows that he buys into the notion appropriated by Estonian politicians such as Mart Laar that many Russian speakers simply do not make the effort to learn Estonian. For Estonian political elites such as Kivi and Laar, Benton represented an opportunity to promote multiculturalism to the wider European community. It is interesting to note that the two Russian speakers, who performed as part of the backing group 2XL, were conspicuously absent from discourses of Estonian multiculturalism in both the media coverage and amongst respondents interviewed for this work. The issue is further complicated by the fact that some media professionals stated that the selection of two Swedish singers as Estonian ESC representatives was more controversial than the choice of Benton:

There was nothing about Dave Benton. I don't remember hearing anything about that. After this Eurovision win the government gave him permanent residency [...] everybody likes that he was the only black man in Estonia, there

wasn't any problems [...] about Swedish girls later because there were many Swedish girls [...] especially in 2006 [...] Sandra didn't even know the colours of our flag (Marko Reikop, Interview, 19.11.2007).

I don't remember any [negative] analysing in the media. Later on this dispute arose because one year we had a Swedish girl who got nothing, then the media asked why this foreign girl, we have lots of talented singers here (Andri Maimets, Interview, 26.11.2007).

It is notable that no elite level respondent went on-record to state that there were any negative comments concerning Benton, however, some of the public level respondents told a different story. Whilst they do not state that Benton himself experienced racism per se, they did allude to underlying attitudes in Estonia which were not engaged in by the media or by politicians at the time. One respondent recalled that the Dutch Ambassador, Hans Glaubitz resigned in 2006 because he and his Cuban partner "could no longer cope with gay hatred and racism on the Estonian streets" (Margit, Travel agent, Tallinn, Estonia, 17.11.2007).

It was a chance for us to show solidarity with a black man which is a joke actually. It was a cover-up. Estonia is a very nationalistic country. It was a huge spin. You never see black people here. There are no Indian students in Tallinn University, not that there aren't any applications. I think that speaks volumes [...] I don't think Estonians are aggressive towards him [Benton] [...] after all Estonians still respect him for winning this contest (Anonymised respondent, Interview, 12.11.2007)

As stated earlier, Benton himself states that he has not experienced racism in Estonia, nor is this the focus of this work, however, the disparity between the public level respondents and media/elite-level respondents is revealing. Benton represents the desires of the political elite keen to portray Estonia as a liberal, multicultural country in the run up to EU accession. It is interesting to note that on the subject of integration, he buys into the same rhetoric as Estonian politicians, the ethnic Estonian narrative of the nation, that knowledge of Estonian is required in order to be accepted in Estonian society and that many Russian speakers are simply unwilling to learn Estonian.

Eurovision gave me a boost in the eyes of the Estonian people [...] you start using more and more the norms of the country. You can't ask them to change their norms of culture to suit yours, you have to change yours to suit theirs [...]

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my opinion is that you have all the rights, it's your own country (Dave Benton, Interview, 15.11.2007).

Note the reference to ethnic Estonian ownership of the country, despite the fact that many Russian speakers were also born and raised in Estonia. Benton has arguably integrated into Estonian society; he lives in Estonia, speaks Estonian and buys into the notion of knowledge of the Estonian language as key to integration. As such, Dave Benton's ethnicity is not an issue, despite the strong views from some respondents stating that he is a one-off due to his celebrity status. Perhaps this is the case, however for those who advocate language as the key to integration then Dave Benton is living proof of this. Likewise, those advocating that Benton is a symbol of multiculturalism can claim that this is still the case; he is fully integrated and accepted in Estonian society albeit on ethnic Estonian terms.

Through the media gaze: Eurovision 2001

After Estonia won the ESC, the headline of the tabloid, *Õhtuleht*, simply read "Uskumatu" ("Unbelievable"). The articles which followed were entirely in-keeping with the headline; the victory was seen as unbelievable. Closer examination of the content reveals interesting narratives relating to Estonian identity and highlights the significance of this event for Estonia and Estonians at the time. The first edition featured 16 pages which were dedicated to Eurovision; extensive coverage of the celebrations both in Copenhagen after the event as well as the reactions in Estonia, and analysis of the event itself. All the articles relating to Eurovision were emotionally charged and reflected a lack of self-confidence in Estonia at the time, moreover, almost immediately, concerns were also raised that Estonia would be incapable of successfully hosting the competition in 2002.

One article, "Flowers and Tears at the Airport" (Jakobson, 2001) focussed on crowds waiting for the winning duo to arrive at the airport in Tallinn. Signe Kivi, the Minister of Culture at the time was there to welcome to team back home. Upon arrival she was immediately asked about whether Estonia could host the event to which she replied "Europe has chosen Estonia's entry as the best, should we really bring shame upon ourselves?" Thus, the link between the victory and Estonia's international image is reinforced. Another article focused on the celebrations the previous evening after the Estonian entry was declared

the winner. “Estonia Celebrated Until Morning” (Kaupmees, 2001) described the scene in Tallinn with masses of people filling the city centre with flags and car horns. Again the narrative focused on the disbelief amongst Estonians. One respondent is quoted as saying that the event was “unbelievable... I would never have thought that Estonia would win.” It is noteworthy that much of the tone of the reporting was overtly masculine; the article specifically mentioned that the person was a man with tears in his eyes. When the duo arrived in Tallinn they were introduced to the crowd by conductor Tarmo Leinatamm, who remarked “Thank you boys, yesterday Estonia became world famous, Tallinn next year”.

When Signe Kivi spoke to the crowds that evening she proclaimed that Estonia would be capable of hosting the event and highlighted that Estonians had been organising song festivals for 135 years. With such rhetoric the issue of Tallinn hosting the event in 2002 was then put firmly on the agenda. Kivi and Laar appeared to be determined that the event would go ahead in Tallinn in 2002 when there were significant doubts. As early as 14 May 2001, Laar was said to have committed 50 million EEK (£2.5 million) to the event (*Õhtuleht*, 14 May 2001). Thus, even in those very early days, the Laar government saw value in hosting the contest in Estonia, presenting a narrative of the Estonian nation to a global audience.

The nature of the media coverage highlights several issues. First, the Eurovision result was a significant event for Estonia in terms of placing them on the world map. Secondly the newspaper coverage was overwhelmingly masculine, which given the previous analogies that I made with sporting events, is perhaps unsurprising. The tone of the articles resembled football coverage or other such popular events; it was not seen as camp or kitsch and there were no negative connotations attached to winning this contest in the Estonian media’s representation. Thirdly, the nature of the coverage reveals how Estonians saw themselves at the time. Constant references to the win being “unbelievable” or “shocking” suggests, to a degree, a low level of self confidence among Estonians. Winning Eurovision was a morale boost for the Estonian public and came at a time when they had been preparing for European Union membership and as such had been feeling the effects of economic cutbacks to ensure smooth accession to the Union in 2004. It was arguably a big shot in the arm for politicians who had invested everything in the EU integration project. Eurovision therefore represented an opportunity to manage Estonia’s international image on a global scale.

At the time it was seen as a unique opportunity to show Estonia to almost 300 million viewers or more. This was a pretty powerful argument [...] in Estonia

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at the time Eurovision was front page news[...]for Estonia in any competition, if our sportsmen get into the top ten it is already a newsworthy item (Ilmar Raag, Interview, 13.11.2007).

Many years earlier in the 1990s and still now, almost every family watch. It was a very big deal for Estonia [...] it gave us the opportunity to organise an all-European television show in Tallinn. Estonia was the first former Soviet country to do this. Some didn't think we could do it (Ivo Rull, Interview, 09.11.2007).

"We will do it and we will do it well!"

As highlighted in chapter three, towards the end of the millennium, the ESC had grown to accommodate increasing numbers of participants, and ever increasing production costs. The challenge for Ireland's state broadcaster, RTE, which staged four out of five competitions, was well-documented. Immediately after Estonia won the ESC, doubts were raised in both the Estonian and international media as to whether or not Estonian Television had the capacity to produce a show on such a scale, the comments above from Ivo Rull reflect this uncertainty. The budget for the event at that time was estimated to be in the region of 100 million EEK (£5 million). Whilst the EBU provides almost half of the funding, the remaining balance is met by the host broadcaster. The enormity of the project became clear when the annual budget of Estonian Television was taken into account; 160 million EEK (£8 million) in 2001 (Pino, 2001). Estonian Television not only had to come up with the necessary funding guarantees to secure the event in Tallinn but the organisation also had to prove that the country had the necessary infrastructure. It was a challenge which Estonian political and media elites rose to.

On 23 May 2001, the BBC reported that Estonian Television were facing a financial crisis and would not be able to stage the event in Tallinn unless the government stepped in. The nature of the debates surrounding the financing of the Contest reflects the wider debates surrounding cuts to government subsidies in an EU accession context as well as an illustration of the politics of Europeanisation around that time. "We will do the concert for sure" was a paraphrased quote from the Director General of Estonian Television, Aare Urm (Viivik, 2001). ETV was given four weeks to confirm to the European Broadcasting Union whether or not they would stage the event in 2002. Some commentators in Estonia saw the contest as a tool for forcing the government's hand into providing more funding to ETV to help clear its debts, after a series

of cutbacks in state subsidies in the run-up to EU entry. The Estonian government had initially offered ETV a loan to stage the contest however at £1.4 million it fell short of the amount requested. Aare Urm stated

We are doing our best to stage the contest but the government's anti-public service broadcasting policy makes this impossible [...] should the government stick to its ruling, it is likely there will not be a public service broadcaster in Estonia by next year. (BBC News, 23.05.2001)

Other commentators viewed the contest differently; they saw it as a way of ensuring that the government stepped in to stage the event while also assisting the financing of ETV more generally:

ETV and entrepreneurial head director Urm are of course very cunning. They use the situation and try to resolve two problems in one take. Get money for the singing contest and also fix the bad economic state of the institution in the shadow of the competition [...] getting one fly with two hits (Maide, 2001).

Whilst this may have been an issue for the government to consider, closer reading of the article below suggests that political wrangling within the coalition government itself rather than concerns about ETV may explain the delays providing concrete guarantees on assisting with the financing of the project.

The Toompea boys have messed up [...] If the Laar-Kallas government should ruin the Eurovision contest in the fight or rivalry between them, it will bring severe consequences for both of them. (Maide, 2001)

Eurovision effectively represented a public relations vehicle for the Estonian government. Failure to stage the contest successfully would be damaging to the country's prestige and international image. Pressure began to grow in the Estonian media with calls for the government to fund the contest:

Because the expenditures are direct and the profits are only indirect we might feel that the money is just being thrown into a black hole. If we leave aside the multiplied profits that the capital's hotels, pubs and bars and other amusement establishments will gain, we win most of all from the worldwide presentation of Estonia's image. For Estonia, who before had to buy advertising space for itself in foreign newspapers, this is a chance that has fallen into its lap, to promote itself through a modern television medium (Pino, 2001).

Mart Laar recalled that there were initial discrepancies with the allocation of funds, he maintains that hosting the event was cost effective in terms of the airtime and media coverage dedicated to Estonia as a result, as well as the cost of failing to capitalise on the opportunity being far more costly in the long run. Indeed, the lack of a larger debate suggests that there appears to be an almost-unanimous elite-level consensus around the necessity to stage the ESC in 2002 which can be seen as reflective of an elite-level consensus around Europeanisation and, arguably, for that matter, EU membership.

There were [people who questioned the value of funding the event] but they knew not to argue with me. Maybe when they had opinions they kept them [...] we had some meetings with the Irish Prime Minister who was absolutely terrified when they won the Eurovision three times in a row, it is some economic burden. We were the first country, a new democracy, it is huge work [...] we demonstrated that new democracies can host such a large international event in the same quality as so-called developed countries. When you get this amount of people looking at you it really was a great opportunity to use (Mart Laar, Interview, 12.11.2007).

Signe Kivi also highlighted the importance of the event for the Estonian image and viewed it as a long-term investment for both Estonia's international image and the broadcasting industry more generally:

We viewed it [Eurovision] not only as a great way to boost Estonia's image but also good training for all involved, TV technicians, and designers. An event of that scale was the biggest chance and the biggest challenge for both Estonia and Tallinn [...] we [the Estonian government] had regular contact with Estonian TV and they reported the progress and problems which needed to be resolved. 15 ministers were involved in this team [...] It was an opportunity which had to be caught. We were initially concerned about putting on a good show – if we failed, it would have been extremely negative for Estonia. It was a huge responsibility. We decided to go for it and it was given a priority by all involved (Signe Kivi, Interview, 26.11.2007).

The fact that the Laar government held a meeting with the Irish Prime Minister is telling; it reveals how seriously the Estonian government, or indeed Laar himself, took this opportunity as well as highlighting that the debates in Estonia echoed those in Ireland after they were faced with hosting the event three years in succession. Ireland capitalised on the publicity garnered from this and was able to promote a positive international image. Failure to do so could have confirmed stereotypes about Ireland being less developed than other EU members.

In the wider (Western) European press, articles continued to appear highlighting Estonia's apparent inability to stage the contest. In the UK, the Daily Telegraph newspaper suggested that the opportunity to host the event in Estonia was likely to be turned down since Estonia was "woefully ill-equipped to host an event such as Eurovision. It has no stadium big or modern enough for the contest and there are not enough tourist hotels". (*The Telegraph*, 27.05.2001). Such rhetoric appears to confirm that assertion from Kuus and Petersoo that the East/West divide is alive and well, as discussed in chapter one. Perhaps more telling is the fact that the article in question was reprinted in *Õhtuleht*, Eurovision therefore became not only an opportunity to promote Estonia internationally, it was also a chance to prove that the country could host large scale events at the same standard as other European countries. By June 2001 ETV received the necessary financial backing from the Estonian government and confirmed to the European Broadcasting Union that they would stage the event in Tallinn in May 2002.

Concluding remarks

Through Estonian participation, victory and hosting, the Eurovision Song Contest was one of the symbols of Estonia's return to Europe. The competition represented an opportunity for Estonia to manage its own image on its own terms, particularly in light of negative press attention from Western Europe. Arguably Estonian political elites used the opportunity to promote the image of Estonia that they wished to. In the context of EU accession, Dave Benton's ethnicity became a useful tool for highlighting both Estonian multiculturalism and the success of the government integration programme, but also countered claims by some Russian speakers that the state was discriminating against them. Media analysis surrounding the debates on Eurovision in 2001 reveals that Estonians were lacking self-confidence; victory was regularly referred to as "unbelievable", thus suggesting that the Estonian nation were somehow unworthy. The rhetoric concerning the financing of the event reveals that the Laar government saw value in hosting the competition particularly in the shadow of negative press attention from Western Europe, namely dispelling negative stereotypes of "backward" Eastern European Estonia. This is precisely what Estonian politicians have been trying to do since independence. With the finances settled, the Estonian government, in cooperation with Estonian Television, then set about planning the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest to be held in Tallinn.

5. Eurovision Song Contest 2002: a modern fairytale

As highlighted in the previous chapter, Estonian officials had to confirm in June 2001 whether they would be staging the event in Tallinn in 2002. There was much pressure on Estonian Television to ensure that the event was staged successfully. Failure to host the event was seen as undoubtedly damaging to Estonia's international image, confirming Western assertions that Estonia was not fit to compete on the same level as other EU members, thus cultivating an image of Estonia as a "poor Former Soviet republic" rather than a prospective EU member. It is with this background that the preparations for the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest began. Estonia not only had to prove that it was capable of producing a slick international television show but also had to do this against a backdrop of uncertainty in terms of technical expertise and infrastructure and in front of the gaze of the international media. Closer analysis of the content of ESC 2002 provides a unique insight into both the construction of Estonian national identity and the self-image of the country as well as the reinforcement of the other, namely Russia and the Soviet past.

By August 2001, plans for the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest were well under way in Estonia. ETV, a small broadcasting corporation, lacked both the technical equipment and experience required for such a large-scale international broadcast as the ESC. Neighbouring Sweden stepped in and assisted in the production of the event. Executive producer of ESC 2002, Juhan Paadam highlighted the necessity of this international cooperation in an interview given in 2007:

We did not buy in people to do it instead of us, we needed help with knowledge and facilities [...] the ideas were absolutely Estonian, it was our show [...] every television professional understands what it means [...] Estonia was the first

country to have an international co-production team, it was my idea and it was the only solution to the problem [...] It is an ambitious project [...] it is the purest propaganda for the country which hosts the broadcast [...] It was our purpose to tell Europe of our modern fairytale (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Paadam was keen to stress that whilst ETV required technical support, the ideas for the content of the production were wholly Estonian. It is noteworthy that as Estonian politicians were keen to emphasise that Estonia was the first post-Soviet country to enter into EU accession talks, Paadam highlighted that Estonia was the first country to pioneer international cooperation in the ESC, a system which was then repeated in consecutive years by other broadcasters. The following year both Swedish and Estonian officials assisted Latvian Television with preparing for Eurovision in 2003 and Swedish broadcaster SVT continued to provide technical assistance until 2010. Whilst Paadam's comments concerning international cooperation are slightly misguided since other countries have worked together in the past (Yugoslavia and the UK in 1990 for example), never before has such substantial technical help had to be bought in from outside the host country, without which Estonian Television would never have been able to stage the show. According to journalist Andri Maimets, the Estonian public were pragmatic about this issue:

We had to face up to the fact that we had not done anything like that. For some people in Estonian Television it was also the start of their career, after hosting, doing the show, they worked for the EBU, for the career it was a very good start and some people, one is now the head of EBU entertainment. I think for the television company the organising was much more important to show that we can do the show. For the people generally, the fact we won was important. Sweden was involved and this was not controversial, they are our neighbours (Andri Maimets, Interview, 26.11.2007).

Given the historical links between Sweden and Estonia, Maimet's comments regarding Swedish involvement in an Estonian production go some way to explain the lack of any substantial media debate on this issue. This Nordic link was further reinforced after the selection of a Swedish singer to represent Estonia in the contest in Tallinn. Whilst not uncontroversial, it reflects the Nordic image that Estonian politicians were keen to portray through Brand Estonia and indeed the ESC itself. The 2002 Eurovision Song Contest can therefore be seen as a mirror of the wider debates concerning the wider geopolitical position of Estonia, a reflection of the political rhetoric presented by Estonian politicians during the 1990s.

“Run away to the stars”

As highlighted in chapter four, from the outset, the ESC was linked to Estonia’s international image thanks to speeches from Mart Laar and Signe Kivi. Arguably the doubts concerning ETV’s inability to host the show which were raised in those early days following the victory meant that there was added impetus for the project, Estonia now had something to prove to the world. Eurovision was regularly in the headlines in the Estonian press throughout 2001 and this in itself can be seen as a reflection of the significance of the event at the time for Estonia. Ehtel Halliste, press spokesperson for the Estonian Foreign Ministry, highlighted the importance of foreign media in the promotion of Estonia and spoke with particular reference to the Eurovision Song Contest:

We are a small economic tiger. We have tried to make people understand that we are credible as a state as well as a people [...] after we won [Eurovision] people started to show more interest. I can’t remember any big newspaper or magazine not visiting Estonia that fall (Gardner & Standaert, 2003).

Winning Eurovision helped to present a positive image of Estonia at the time. When we won, our German colleagues sent us a small article from a newspaper where it was written that the event would be held in the forest where the Russian bears live [...] Even the Germans, with who our culture is tied with did not know much about Estonia. Our tiny European country really needed promotion (Tiiu Simm, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Not only was the emotional significance attached to the event in terms of Estonia’s international image flagged, but also potential ramifications for Estonia’s standing amongst its EU member neighbours if the country failed to host successfully. Juhan Paadam highlighted the significance of the event within the context of EU enlargement. He stated that the event date was changed in order to align it closer to the time when EU accession talks were concluding in order to capitalise on publicity garnered in the global media.

Eurovision really was the greatest possibility we had to promote our country. I am quite sure there was an influence in the negotiations between Estonia and the EU [...] I asked the European Broadcasting Union to move the Eurovision to two weeks later [...] closer to the time of the final negotiations between Estonia and the European Union (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Whilst EU accession was obviously unrelated to the ESC, Paadam's response does show that the Estonian image was very much on the political agenda at this time; the event was a springboard used to direct Estonia's image away from a post-Soviet setting and towards an EU accession context. The mere fact that the date of the event was moved to coincide with the conclusive EU accession talks is hugely significant. The former UK Ambassador to Estonia, Sarah Squire went further to state that she believed on some level that winning Eurovision in 2001 and staging the event in 2002 had an impact on the outcome of the EU accession referendum.

At the time of Eurovision, the EU was absolutely looming over the horizon and Eurovision had this remarkable effect [...] there was a very strong fear that the sceptical Estonians would vote no [...] winning I think came absolutely at the right time because it suddenly made Estonians think, not only "we are part of Europe but we are potentially a winning part of Europe" [...] It's very difficult to extricate of course but my observation from being there was that the national self-confidence and the sense of being European and having something to show Europe and be proud of and put themselves on the map, not just be sort of steam-rolled by another big cultural bloc as they always were steam-rolled in the past [...] seeing their country on the TV [Eurovision 2002] really did change people's attitudes (Sarah Squire, Interview, 15.01.2008).

Paadam elaborated on this issue of the EU:

I heard that there was an interest in Brussels concerning Eurovision in Tallinn. You must understand that there are not many people interested in Eurovision in the power corridors of Brussels but the interest was there. It was interesting because we were the first post-communist country to host the event and in the process of EU negotiations and the second being that we are a tiny country with a very small television corporation. How we survived with this huge and unique production was of interest to them (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

The ESC was not a substandard competition; it was a platform for the Estonian state to present itself to the world, namely the EU, as a transforming nation, able to produce high quality events much like other countries in Western Europe. This is also the view shared by Mart Laar, who stated that whilst Estonia was well on the road to EU membership at the time, Eurovision helped to portray Estonia as a so-called normal country.

When I talked about Europe at the time it was clear that we would arrive on the inside of the European Union but it was absolutely unclear about NATO. [...] It [Eurovision] helped to put us back on the map [...] Estonia is now more known, we are a normal partner in Europe (Mart Laar, Interview, 12.11.2007).

The 2002 ESC was a manifestation of the return to Europe discourses within the realm of popular culture. Laar was keen to stress that whilst it was the reforms taken by his government in the 1990s that paved the way for EU accession, the ESC provided a much-needed boost to his wider campaign of promoting Estonia on the world stage. However, with government interest in the project, both financial and political, it raises questions about who ultimately took the decisions and how much impact the Estonian government had on the creative process.

The government which governs least, governs best

The ESC in 2002 was essentially a government-sponsored event and as such it raises questions concerning the potential influence that the authorities had over the direction and content of the show. According to ETV's Juhan Paadam and Tiiu Siim there was early confusion over the responsibility for the contest during the initial planning phase.

In the very early stages someone from the culture department phoned and asked us if we had listed the political aims of our work. I do not remember the name but I explained that we are not a political organisation (Tiiu Siim, Interview, 02.11.2007).

From when we started there was not a clear understanding of what the song contest is and lots of powers wanted to take it over [...] there was a real misunderstanding because we needed the state's support and the money so at first the debates were related to who was paying. ETV was on the edge of bankruptcies [...] it was not easy to explain about the costs [...] we had long talks [with the government] and I spoke with ministers. In the spring Mart Laar's government collapsed [...] when he was Prime Minister he was very interested in the success of the project and a couple of times he gathered with us in his office and was asking how things were going. After they understood more about the show they did not try to control the content (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

It is interesting to note the initial, almost Soviet reaction from the Estonian government, something in which the administrations of the 1990s would have been keen to distance the country from. When asked to reveal who exactly the voices in the government wanting to take over the contest were, both Paadam and Siim were either unable or unwilling to say. Whilst ETV was eventually left to produce the content of the show, the interest from the Estonian government, perhaps unsurprisingly given that public money had been pledged, remained. Paadam did specifically credit the Minister of Culture, Signe Kivi, for helping to secure the event for ETV.

I am very grateful to her because she took some risks. We had a lunch every second week together. People questioned her about the costs, why the stage costs this and that and she had to answer why. She trusted us at ETV that she would be repaid the following May in a positive sense because it was a successful show (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Mart Laar himself rejected the notion of any “government control. We just pushed the TV team and promotion campaign together. We were sure they would find the exact style and the exact way to promote Estonia (Mart Laar, Interview, 12.11.2007). The nevertheless significant interest in content, i.e. in using Eurovision as a way of promoting a positive image of Estonia, was also confirmed by Signe Kivi:

There was no political pressure over the content. That was not our aim. We just wanted Estonian Television to produce a good show as we gave them the tools to do this [...] If we failed it would have been extremely negative for Estonia. It was a huge responsibility and we decided to go for it. It was given priority by all involved (Signe Kivi, Interview, 26.11.2007).

Such testimonies reveal that initially there was not only a debate as to who was responsible for leading the project, the broadcaster or the state, but also how much control the government would have over the content. Both Signe Kivi and Mart Laar when questioned about the government exerting control over the content completely refuted this. However, they did acknowledge that there was an effort to ensure that the team working on Eurovision had contact with those at Enterprise Estonia, which was launching the Welcome to Estonia project. Thus, technically, the content was not influenced by government pressure *per se*, although by linking Eurovision to the launch of Brand Estonia it ensured that the programme was in-sync with the essence of the campaign. Note that

whilst the two politicians refute any suggestion that there was government involvement in the preparations for the ESC, others from ETV, such as Paadam and Siim concede that there was “confusion” in the earlier stages. This also represented the view expressed by Ilmar Raag, Chairman of the Board of ETV in 2002, who said that there was “soft” government involvement in the project:

We were lucky enough not to have too much involvement [from the government] the question was what was to be promoted more – Estonia or Tallinn? [...] We managed to sell the idea that the best way to promote Estonia was simply to produce a good show [...] we agreed that the clips should reflect Brand Estonia (Ilmar Raag, Interview, 13.11.2007).

Whilst the respondents did not expand greatly on the issue of government involvement in the project, it is clear that there was an active interest in the promotion of Estonia, a format for promoting Estonia to a global audience. In short, heavy-handed government involvement might be seen as a throw-back to the Soviet regime, something which Estonian political elites have strived to distance the country from since 1991.

The theme chosen by Estonian Television for the 2002 ESC was the modern fairytale which serves as an interesting point for analysis. The fairytale, a distinctly European construction (Quentel, 2006, p. 97), served two purposes in the Estonian case; to present Estonia as European and also to other the Soviet past through the continuous reinforcement of Estonia’s so-called happy ending. Specific mention of the theme was made by creative designer Rene Vilbre in the official programme booklet for the 2002 contest:

If Estonia were a fairytale, it could perhaps be likened to Sleeping Beauty. Having awoken from the ice cold slumbers of Soviet Rule, Estonia today is a bold, young country, vibrant with creative energy and eager to take its place in Europe (Eesti Televisioon, 2002, p. 12).

The continuous flagging of this happy ending was a way of distancing Estonia from its Soviet past whilst simultaneously promoting a strong and positive international image. The fairytale analogy links in with the nationalist discourse which portrays nations as primordial, where historical and national actors have awoken from periods of repression to the realisation of their destiny. In the Estonian case, Soviet rule represented the period of oppression, which has seemingly been absorbed by the public quite uncritically. The more traditional narrative of nationhood was wedded to a more future-oriented

discourse of economic dynamism in Estonia through both Eurovision and Brand Estonia. Arguably, the issue of how to deal with Estonia's Soviet past was a contentious one. Given that the period from 1991 can be characterised as that of a return to normalcy. To quote Daina Eglitis, any reference to the past would inevitably have invited discussions concerning Soviet rule, something which Estonian politicians had strived to move away from since independence. The modern fairytale theme then is entirely reflective and representative of the wider historical and political paradigms in the country.

There was a debate about how we talk about 50 years of Soviet rule [...] at the time it was quite clear what we wanted to say to Europe, what we wanted to show [...] that we are not Soviet, we never were. The slogan for the branding campaign was positively transforming. It was a good place to start (Andri Maimets, Interview, 26.11.2007).

Note the reference to Estonia not being Soviet, this rejection of the Soviet past is entirely consistent with narratives on Estonian nationhood. Respondents regularly emphasised that during Soviet times, Estonia was seen as the Western part of the Soviet Union; the linguistic, historical and cultural ties with Finland and Sweden were continuously flagged by those interviewed. Soviet rule was illegitimate in Estonia and therefore dismissed as a mere footnote in the years following independence. The concept of the modern fairytale was launched at a press conference in May 2002 by Signe Kivi. Each postcard image broadcast between each national entry depicted a modern take on a traditional fairytale, set in Estonia.

The broadcast in 2002 opened with scenes set inside a castle and featured commentary introducing Estonia through typical fairytale language. "*Once upon a time, in a land far, far away*" (Eurovision Song Contest 2002, [TV], ETV). This not only set the scene for the theme of the show but also served to portray Estonia as somehow exotic and undiscovered. Within seconds of the start of the transmission, the Estonian flag flying at Toompea, the focal point of the re-establishment of independence in 1991, was shown. In the context of the fairytale theme, this represents a direct and explicit link to the cessation of Soviet rule. During introductory scenes the UK commentator, Terry Wogan explained the significance of the contest for the country:

Welcome to the 47th Eurovision Song Contest from Tallinn, the capital of Estonia. A small, proud Baltic state, independent of mother Russia since 1991 when they shrugged off the USSR, pulled down Lenin's statue and decided to

go it alone. Some may scoff and even snigger at the old Eurosong but winning it last year was regarded as a major breakthrough by the Estonians, an opportunity to show themselves off, make their mark in Europe. Seven thousand people here tonight in the Saku Suurhall, hundreds of millions around the world watching from Reykjavik to Sydney (Wogan, Eurovision Song Contest 2002, [TV] BBC1).

The opening scenes served a dual purpose, to promote Estonia as European through the fairytale but also as a modern European nation, the choice of images reflected this. Mobile telephones, flat-screen computers, e-government were all depicted, presenting the country as a land of innovation. The images included in the opening sequence therefore reflected this enmeshment of ancient and modern. Images of technology; the mobile phone, computers and the idea of e-government were alluded to by showing members of parliaments behind flat-screen computers. It is worth noting that in 2002 flat-screen monitors were not mainstream, the image of Estonia as a technologically advanced country with a modern government is therefore reinforced.

The broadcast then came live from Tallinn's Saku Suurhall with presenters Anneli Peebo and Marko Martvere making specific reference to the fairytale concept, "Estonian history is like a fairy tale too, with happy ending". Arguably this was a political point, again as highlighted in chapter three, despite insistence from the EBU that the contest is not political in nature. The national entries were then introduced via small video clips or postcards depicting various well known fairytales. Each clip told the story of a fairytale but with a modern Estonian twist. For example, in the clip entitled Snow White, instead of a mirror, an interactive computer was shown. The clips were a way of showing positive aspects of life in Estonia through a variety of stories. At the end of each clip a slogan was shown on-screen which related to the theme of the postcard. The essence of these clips reflected the narratives of Brand Estonia, promoting the country as modern, positively transforming and Nordic with a twist. Like the opening sequence, these images served to promote Estonia as a modern European country. The notion of Estonia and technology was regularly flagged with references to Estonian internet connections and "everything at the touch of a button". The Estonian countryside was also regularly highlighted along with science and education in the postcard depicting the University of Tartu.

Many of the clips included in the Eurovision 2002 broadcast also promoted Estonia as a Nordic country, reflecting the narratives of both Brand Estonia and the rhetoric from Estonian politicians throughout the 1990s. The Estonian

sauna was featured directly before the Finnish entry. The slogan “extrem heat from Estonia” that came with it appears to be a deliberate reference to the sauna being Estonian rather than Finnish. Naturally, debates rage around issues of origin, however, the clip served to promote Estonia as the home of the sauna whilst at the same time aligning the country closely to Finland and the Nordic sphere.

The clip screened directly before the Estonian entry told the story of Sleeping Beauty. Given the previous references to Estonian history being like a fairytale in both the programme booklet and at the start of the broadcast itself, this video clip can be seen as a metaphor for how Estonians view their country and their recent history. According to the ethnic Estonian narrative of the nation, the country was stifled under Soviet occupation but now thriving in independence. Perhaps controversially the clip screened before the Russian entry was called Freedom. This particular clip told the story of a goldfish in captivity, a modern take on Alexander Pushkin’s fairytale. The man in the clip feels compelled to release the fish as the slogan “Freedom” appears immediately before that of the Russian flag. When questioned about this, Juhan Paadam stated that it was a deliberate decision to screen that particular image at that particular time. It therefore serves as a political point.

There was a postcard called Freedom and we put it before the Russian entry. The American ambassador mentioned to me about the coincidence that it was put there. I said that we exactly put it there [...] we were not insulting anyone, it was a light story with no politics in a hard way (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

It is noteworthy that whilst Estonian politicians were playing on discourses of multiculturalism in the run-up to EU accession, Dave Benton represented a useful and useable figure in this context; there was absolutely no reflection of this in the ESC broadcast itself. Mention of multiculturalism would undoubtedly have needed to address the Russian speaking minority. Furthermore, the clips which were chosen featured diverse regions of Estonia and yet Narva, the third largest city in Estonia, with a majority Russian speaking population, was conspicuously absent from the broadcast. This reinforces the notion that the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest was told on purely ethnic Estonian terms.

As is now commonplace at the Eurovision Song Contest, the interval act organised by the host country when the voting is taking place usually portrays some aspect of national identity. The interval act in Estonia was a modern dance piece which served to encapsulate what the essence of Estonia

is. Like the postcard images, there was a fusion of old and new, reflecting the Estonian story. In one section of the performance, the sauna is shown through the medium of dance whilst later dance sections portray the external influences which have shaped Estonian culture over the centuries. The official programme booklet described the many influences that have shaped the Estonian character over the years:

A maritime country, Estonia is inclined to be open to foreign influences, to take some and spit some out [...] We preserve our own – our minds are open to the new, but caution and sobriety always pulse on the edge of our brains [...] All of this has helped us to be preserved as a nation and delivered us to the present day (Eesti Televisioon, 2002, p. 78).

Again there was no direct reference to the influence of the Russian empire or indeed to Estonia's sizeable Russian speaking minority. Although the notion that Estonia had not always been open to foreign influences, hence the quote "spit some out", might be a veiled reference to the rejection of Soviet rule. Whilst Soviet rule was arguably never going to be articulated through Eurovision, the diversity of Estonian society may be seen. However, this was something which was not evident or explicit during the broadcast of Eurovision in 2002 and offers a striking counter-narrative to the rhetoric of diversity which Dave Benton elicited from the political elite in Estonia.

Quantifying the unquantifiable

Gauging the success of large-scale events such as the ESC or the Olympic Games is no easy task since much of the revenue generated through tourism and the publicity associated with such occasions are difficult to quantify in monetary terms. The London 2012 Olympic Games were considered by the UK's National Audit Office to be value for money (Gibson, 2013). However, no such government analysis was undertaken in Estonia following ESC 2002 although ETV did provide its own report. According to ETV, the final cost of the 2002 Eurovision Song Contest was €7.9 million. The scale of the competition can be seen when the entire annual budget for Estonian Television is considered, €10.9 million (ETV, 2002, p. 27). The EBU provided €3 million with government funding (€2.2 million) and sponsorship and ticket sales providing the remaining €2.7 million (ETV 2002, p.27). Estonian political and media figures interviewed for this work discussed the legacy of hosting the event and as such these testimonies

provide a unique insight into the importance placed on Estonia's international image at the time. The event was seen as overwhelmingly positive and cost-effective given the viewing figures and potential reach of the television format.

Quite often people questioned where the money was going [...] there were doubts whether the money would be used properly. This show represented huge amounts of money for Estonia [...] For television promotion, the Eurovision Song Contest was the only way for Estonia [...] It was seen as a unique opportunity to show Estonia to almost 300 million people. This was a pretty powerful argument (Ilmar Raag, Interview, 13.11.2007).

We had a good opportunity [...] it was not wasted money. It was an investment in the Estonian image. The value of this publicity was in fact priceless [...] in that time we were heading towards EU membership. We were a positively transforming country (Ivo Rull, Interview, 09.11.2007).

The tone of the media coverage is particularly worthy of note, it was overwhelmingly positive with few, if any, dissenting voices concerning the costs involved. Moreover no single respondent could name an individual who categorically stated that hosting the Eurovision Song Contest was a waste of resources. One article in particular, in *Õhtuleht*, cited the importance of the contest for Estonia's standing in the world, reflecting wider political discourses from Laar and Kivi. Regardless of the credibility of the event as a musical showcase, it is clear that the ESC was viewed as a serious event in Estonia at this time.

The image we created before Eurovision was already very high. The responsibility of raising it or at least keeping it on the same level rests on our shoulders. If at least twenty three countries are watching Estonia at the same time, if the Eurovision is successful it is the best marketing technique for the country, you cannot buy it for any amount of money. This opportunity should be used to the maximum. I think that after the Eurovision the impression will be uniform, one of surprise. Many have prejudices about the place the event will be held in. I can imagine the surprise will be the more positive for it. I think that maybe it is the best Eurovision ever made [...] our pride and self-esteem has been rising especially when you see the in-between clips (Kasemaa, 2002).

There were, however, some small low-level media debates concerning the presence of the government in the auditorium at the event itself, many of whom had received free tickets. An article published in *Õhtuleht* on 7 May 2002 reported

that over one hundred VIP passes had been given to politicians whilst members of the public had to pay to attend. The Minister of Agriculture, Jaanus Marrandi, was quoted as saying “I would not have thought that the members of the government would get any sort of free tickets [...] they can afford to buy their own” (Michelson, 2002a). Regional Minister Toivo Asmer stated that he believed that he personally did not think it was right that the government would be able to attend for free. However, he still accepted the invitation, flagging the significance of the event. “The Eurovision Song Contest is a big historical event, Estonia may never get to organise it again” (Michelson, 2002a). Such discourses were the only controversies, for lack of a better word, concerning the financing of ESC 2002, a stark contrast to the rhetoric which dogged the Brand Estonia campaign, suggesting that the ESC was something which media, politicians and the public alike bought into. The mere fact that there was such a strong political presence in the auditorium itself speaks volumes about the emphasis placed on the ESC that year. Political figures such as Signe Kivi, Mart Laar, Marju Lauristin as well as the UK ambassador to Estonia, Sarah Squire, were all in attendance.

There was a very excited atmosphere, the build up to it. All the ambassadors were invited to the event, so I attended the Eurovision Song Contest, sitting in a rather sedate part of the auditorium [...] I do not remember any grouching in the columns in newspapers or editorials [...] we were just astonished by the effervescence of the crowd. We had never seen an Estonian crowd behave this way. It was out of the norm (Sarah Squire, Interview, 15.01.2008).

Perceptions of self

As underlined in the introduction to this book, much of the data gathered for this work involved interviewing political and media figures in Estonia as well as the wider public. These interviews, whilst not wholly representative, provide unique insights into the way national identity is both constructed and internalised. This chapter has already outlined some of the responses from the elite level, the public level almost entirely reflect these testimonies, a sharp contrast to the reaction to Brand Estonia as discussed in chapter two. ESC 2002 was seen as not only a success in that the production itself was impressive, but also that it promoted an image of the country which Estonians could readily identify with.

I think the introductory clips they showed between the songs were great; they were really clever and funny. I remember thinking that a lot of people in Europe were watching this and maybe even the class of people who might not be interested and would actually learn something from this kind of stuff. For sure it had to be a positive thing [...] I think hosting the show was a good thing, it was an amazing chance (Riina, Interview, 10.04.2008).

It was really good. I think it was very witty and clever. If you compare it to Ukraine for example [host of Eurovision in 2005] I didn't understand what they were trying to show. Do you remember what Terry Wogan said about it? He said "average people look ugly everywhere" because they were showing pictures of faces from the streets and from the young people, it was terrible [...] at that time it was very important to show the world that we are as good as other countries, that we are not using the wooden spoons and not driving carriages with horses and that we can do a production which is as good as the BBC and that's the part that we took *really* seriously (Margit, Interview, 17.11.2007).

As can clearly be seen from the selection of interview transcripts, Eurovision in 2002 was an event which the Estonian people bought into. Again the importance of the Estonian image is reinforced, respondents highlighted that organising Eurovision afforded Estonia the opportunity to prove that the country can produce large-scale international events to an equal standard as other Western European countries, namely the UK, given the specific reference to the BBC. Criticism of the Ukrainian production reveals more about the orientation of Estonian national identity, that of Estonia as Nordic, not like Ukraine, an Eastern other, "with wooden spoons and carriages". It is interesting to note that the term "Eastern Europe" is seen as pejorative to many of the Estonians interviewed. Riina, a respondent quoted earlier, is a Canadian-Estonian who moved to Estonia in 1991 and explained further the disconnection that Estonians appear to have to the term:

I think most Estonians who have come from abroad, they feel that they do love Estonia but there are certain things, certain oddities like principles or morals. I started thinking about the whole idea of Nordic versus Eastern European thing and it is interesting to think whether your average Estonian is offended by that, I don't think it is an offensive thing if we lump people together as one of the other. I understand that there is nothing to be ashamed of; if all those countries have had the same sort of Soviet lifestyle then there are certain things which are bound to be the same. I guess it's more to do with being somehow connected to Russia or the Soviet past (Riina, Interview, 10.04.2008).

Estonia is a small country. This was a time when not too many people knew about Estonia anywhere so for one moment I think they were looking on the map and when it was held here [...] I think there is a stereotype about us being in Eastern Europe [...] Eurovision gave us the chance to have a voice for once, to say something for ourselves about ourselves, for me that was really powerful (Margit, Interview, 17.11.2007).

Returning to the issue of the content of the postcard clips specifically, some respondents did highlight that with hindsight there were some images that they felt were somewhat dated or unrepresentative, namely the clip entitled Snow White. This particular video, whilst arguably aiming to be amusing, provoked a reaction from two respondents in particular who viewed it as having undertones of misogyny. The clip featured the wicked stepmother asking a digital computer screen the well-known question of who is the fairest of them all. Again the image of Estonia as one of technological innovation is re-inscribed. Several images of Estonian women were then shown and the tagline “So many beautiful women”. The queen is then seen to be organising crates of apples to be sent to Estonia.

Whilst I thought the clips were great, they absolutely reflected the Estonia that I identify with, I did have an issue with them saying that there are so many beautiful women here. It was a bit sexist really and I don't think they would get away with doing that now, Estonia has moved on since then (Kati Varblane, Interview, 09.04.2008).

This was the only noticeable point of criticism from ethnic Estonian respondents. All other interviewees expressed positive views that the clips promoted a positive image of Estonia as well as one in which they could easily identify with. This then raises the issue of how Russian speakers in Estonia viewed the content of the broadcast. Could Russian speakers readily identify with a programme which consistently emphasised Estonia's so-called happy ending or more specifically, the triumph of good over bad through the fairytale theme? Whilst this work does not focus on Russian speakers *per se*, some responses from interviews conducted in Narva illuminate some of the more salient narratives of identity politics in Estonia. None of the Russian speakers interviewed had strong feelings on the modern fairytale theme while ethnic Estonians readily identified with it, which in itself is telling.

I thought the show was impressive, Estonia looked good but I am very curious why they did not show anything of Narva in those clips. We are the third city.

They showed Tallinn, ok I understand and Tartu too but why not us? It's a border town, an interesting place for people to see I think. They showed nature and forests but not my hometown (Dmitry, Interview, 23.11.2007).

I remember thinking that it was great to have such a big event here in Estonia. I speak Estonian fluently, I consider this to be my home but I also understand why Russians look to Russia too. Eurovision is one example, we vote for Russia. In 2002 I remember thinking that it was strange, there was a Swedish singer for Estonia. Imagine if there had been a Russian singer, that would be a big challenge for Estonians (Andri, Interview, 12.11.2007).

Such testimonies reveal that whilst Eurovision again was seen as a useful tool for promoting Estonia, the view amongst Russian speakers was that the content did not reflect aspects of Estonia which were part of their lives. Given that Narva, the third largest city in Estonia was completely absent from the entire broadcast despite other arguably more obscure images being screened appears to confirm this. In particular the goldfish “freedom” clip broadcast before the Russian entry, as discussed earlier, appears to be a political point by ETV. The narrative from Andri in particular highlights that divisions exist within Estonian society; he suggests that the selection of a Russian speaker as Estonian representative at the ESC would be problematic, thus providing a counter narrative to the rhetoric on multiculturalism from Estonian politicians in the run-up to EU accession negotiations.

For me it is better to say that I think I am Estonian-Russian. It means that I am a Russian speaker who lives in Estonia [...] I can say that if we win something it's my victory too. A good example was the year 2006 when we won some gold medals in the Winter Olympic Games. I heard our Prime Minister on the radio say that he is proud about Estonians and all Estonians can celebrate. He did not use the phrase “Estonian people” so when I heard this I understood that I am not welcome to understand it actually in his point of view [...] I remember how it [Eurovision] was presented, our country they really did not mention national minorities but I am not sure if it was a good place to do that [...] I was very proud about my country [...] People always know that I am Russian because I look like a Russian person, I have dark hair and my skin is a little bit different from Estonians. When I use Estonian language I speak with an accent which always gives some information about my origin. I cannot say that I was discriminated because of this (Dima, Interview, 27.11.2007).

The respondent, Dima, spoke fluent Estonian and is an Estonian citizen, on paper he is officially integrated into Estonian society. However, his testimony

reveals that deeper divisions remain despite his affiliation to Estonia, not the use of “my country”. It is also telling that his Russian origins are flagged by others and he is sensitive to semantics; “Estonians” versus “Estonian people”. The testimonies here show that multiculturalism and the integration of the Russian speaking minority in Estonia are both complex and multifaceted. This issue is not clear-cut; language is not the only point of difference. Examination of the debates surrounding Eurovision therefore serves as a mirror of the wider identity debates ensuing in Estonia. Those that do not speak fluent Estonian were the source of great anxiety for many ethnic Estonians interviewed whilst those who do speak fluent Estonian are yet still somehow singled out, as highlighted in the response from Dima. This in turn suggests that Estonia has yet to construct an inclusive sense of national self, signifying that integration issues are more complicated than the conventional literature on Estonia suggests.

Media analysis

A cursory glance at the Estonian media coverage of ESC 2002 reveals that the issue of Estonia’s international image was never far from the agenda. Articles speculated about the success of the show and how Estonia would be seen in the gaze of the international community, the reporting portrayed a latent anxiety concerning this issue. Mart Laar, who was by that time, out of political office, emphasised in an article he wrote for the newspaper *Postimees*, that the international image of Estonia was of paramount importance.

Although there may be differing opinions, it is important to us that more than 100 million people will watch Eurovision through us. It means that 120–160 million people will acknowledge the bearings, the place where Eurovision takes place. It is a very important event for Estonia. I believe that we will succeed in showing Estonia in a good light to the world (*Postimees*, 2002c).

In an editorial piece entitled “Unknown Comparison” Andri Maimets (interviewed for this book) flagged the opportunity that the event brought for the country but also highlighted that Estonia should be seen as a “normal country” and in order for this to happen people should not expect a heavy emphasis on Estonia’s past.

To Estonia winning the Eurovision and being able to organise this year’s event means a lot. It is a chance to show a three hour long live show from Tallinn, and

wedge in little fragments about Estonia (which are, by the way, made very professionally), to present different Estonian landscapes, introduce our musicians and choreographers; to paint a good image of us, to create a certain reputation [...] We are a normal nation in a normal state, not some sort of cage monkeys begging for bananas who have to hang down the wall by their toes and show everything they can do [...] We should try not to go out of our way to hope for an echo of our independent country's ten year history (Maimets, 2002b).

Much of the coverage in the Estonian media was preoccupied with what the foreign press were reporting about the country at this time as evidenced in the article "What the foreign press thinks about Estonia" (*Postimees*, 2002a). The article detailed the various reports published in the international press as Estonia prepared to host Eurovision, all of which signified the importance of the ESC for boosting Estonia's international image:

A miniscule Baltic republic is about to register in the popular imagination of Europe for the first time [...] This month Tallinn is set to become the latest member of yet one more exclusive European club (*The Independent*, 2002).

The Observer (28 April 2002) emphasised the importance of the event given the recent political and historical context and presented an alternative view of Eurovision, in contrast to the deep cynicism in which many British people view the ESC. *The Observer* almost suggested that the Estonian government had pinned its foreign policy agenda on hosting Eurovision, which was not only untrue but also borderline chauvinistic. The comment from Maimets, "we are not monkeys in a zoo", therefore takes on significance and can be seen as a response to the reporting of Estonia internationally.

For most viewers in Britain it will be a three hour sneerathon, a showcase for everything risible in Euroland. Not so in Estonia [...] Estonians argue that Eurovision will put them on the map [...] The project is daunting – the three hour show will cost as much as the entire annual budget of the national television corporation [...] The recent past has not been buried. The talk in Tallinn these days may be of joining the European Union and NATO but it is accompanied by a nervous glance over the shoulder at the Russian bear. In this context Eurovision has taken on an almost surreal significance (Guha, 2002).

However, not all the international media coverage was positive. *The Times* newspaper focussed on the social cost of the transition from communism to capitalism, even going as far to suggest that the country was a quasi-Soviet state

with “mafia-type organisations prevalent”, an image that the political elite in Estonia would have been keen to dispel, particular in the context of the clean break from the past, the return to Europe.

The experience of freedom has not been completely pain-free for Estonia. Crimes committed by mafia-type organisations are prevalent, and the fact that a third of the population is Russian – of the occupying nation – means that the social fabric of the country is far from perfect. The divide between the rich and the poor is very clear on the streets. Old ladies in worn out farming attire are hauling bags past the Mercedes-Benz cars parked in two lanes on the streets [...] All this can't cloud the charm of Tallinn. It is one of the most beautiful medieval towns in Europe [...] a little bit unnerving, like an eerie magical forest in a fairytale (*The Times*, 2002).

Perhaps more controversially, closer reading of this article suggests that if there is blame to be apportioned for societal ills in Estonia, then they lie with the Russian speaking population. The article makes a link between Russian speakers and the recent past, labelling them as “the occupying nation” and referencing “mafia-type organisations”. Interestingly, whilst this image would undoubtedly have been unwelcome, the references to occupation have been seemingly internalised in both the media and amongst respondents, such an article therefore serves as another avenue in which to other the Soviet past and indeed the Russian speaking population. A further article provided a review of the BBC documentary based on Estonia's preparations for the ESC. The programme, *Estonia Dreams of Eurovision*, contextualised Eurovision in terms of Estonia's tradition of song festivals and its recent strides towards EU membership. However, the coverage in the Estonian press was arbitrary:

In itself it was a very well made programme about a country from *the former Soviet Union* down to every last cliché – the one-time fear of the KGB, then songs that stopped the tanks and a sly remark about the number of suicides [...] Our lives do not seem quite as amateur as the BBC makes them out to be (Eriavid, 2002).

The BBC documentary of Estonians and their recent history will probably make a large proportion of viewers think that Estonians drink, live in a dark and cold place, are poor, miss the regime of the Soviet Union and try to swindle and defraud other people's money [...] Such a film is enough a reason why Estonians should think about marketing at home as well as abroad. This documentary [...] will have a very depressing effect on future investors and

tourists [...] In the light of the BBC's depressing vision of Estonia, the country should take decisive actions to market itself and help improve its image abroad, although the millions needed for it may seem too big (*Õhtuleht*, 29 May 2002).

The reviews of the documentary in the Estonian press therefore serve as a reminder that the issue of the image of Estonia was a pressing one; the BBC documentary presented a narrative of the nation which was alien to many Estonians. Such articles provide an insight into the way through which the Estonian nation is imagined; note the particular flagging of the term "Former Soviet Union", a label which Estonia had been trying to shed during the previous decade. Not all voices in the press were critical however, Gerli Padar, an Estonian singer and contributor to the documentary film, was quoted as saying "I like the film. I like the fact that it is honest, that we are showing what we are actually like". Immediately after this quote, it was referenced, rather wryly, that Gerli Padar lives in Finland, the subtext being that she therefore is not best placed to say what is a true reflection of Estonia and what is fabrication.

Following the ESC, the press in Estonia deconstructed the event, again, with focus on what the world was reporting, again, reinforcing the notion that Estonians were conscious about their international image. Of the articles which centred on Estonia itself, some could be interpreted as contentious. *Õhtuleht* published an article claiming that Eurovision had almost become a battleground between Estonians and Russian speakers in the centre of Tallinn; "Russians and Estonians were shouting over each other" (Michelson, 2002).

On Saturday night on Raekoja Square at the "People's Eurovision" event, thousands of people were screaming over each other. "Eesti! Eesti!" and "Ross-i-ja! Ross-i-ja!". In the end a Russian youngster broke the flagpole of the blue-black-white flag [...] During the Russian song it feels like we are not in Estonia at all. "Ross-i-ja! Ross-i-ja!" people are punching the air. The noise is so loud that people in the back can't hear the song at all. But Estonia's song brings back the belief that we are in Estonia after all and that not everyone is Russian (Michelson, 2002).

The article serves as a reminder that Estonia is, to some extent, a divided society and seems to suggest that the loyalties of Estonia's Russian speaking minority do not necessarily lie with Estonia itself. Eurovision therefore offered another platform for the rhetoric that, on some level, Russian speakers are seen as disloyal to the Estonian state and therefore presented an opportunity for the othering of those populations; "it feels like we are not in Estonia at all".

Concluding remarks

In terms of providing a platform for the country to manage its own image on its own terms, the Eurovision Song Contest was hugely important for Estonia in 2002. The debates which were central to the planning of the event were dominated by discussions concerning the image of Estonia in the context of the return to Europe. The sheer volume of coverage dedicated to Eurovision in the Estonian media is further evidence of how significant the event was in terms of raising Estonia's international profile. The personalised tone of many of the articles appears to have had an impact on many Estonians since the event was seen as a personal affair, something that the country needed to support in order for it to be a success. It seems that Estonians were fully behind the event and felt a connection to it. The preoccupation with what the world thought about Estonia at the time is a reflection of an almost inferiority complex that the country had at the time. Eurovision was an opportunity to prove that it was as good as the others, i.e. its Western, EU neighbours. The self-representation of Estonia through the ESC itself was that of a fairytale, a country which had escaped its evil captor, the Soviet Union, and found a happy ending. The content of the broadcast was informed by the ethnic Estonian narrative of the nation and apart from the "Freedom" postcard directly before the Russian entry, any references to the Soviet past, or indeed the Russian speaking minority, were absent. Ethnic Estonians identified with this content, whereas Russian speakers were less certain, even apathetic towards it. As such these groups lack a common Estonian national identity. Russian speakers therefore represent a form of hybridity; not quite Estonian and not quite Russian. Latvia won ESC 2002, which attracted speculation in the Estonian media that the country would not be able to host the contest the following year. The successful staging of Eurovision provided Estonians with a confidence boost since they were casting doubts over their neighbours when, only twelve months before, other countries were ironically doing exactly the same to Estonia.

6. From Wild Dances in Ukraine to Hard Rock in Finland: A comparative perspective

This chapter explores the connections between nation branding and nation building through the Eurovision Song Contest in two other cases: in post-Soviet Ukraine and in Finland. This contextualization is meant less as not as a full-scale comparison of cases, but rather as providing a broader comparative perspective on the Estonian case. What all of these cases have, indeed, in common historically is that they have straddled, with varying degrees of success, a geopolitical tightrope between East and West. In all cases winning and staging the Eurovision Song Contest were lauded as a major opportunity to promote the country to the rest of Europe, a chance to manage the international image and, as I argue in this chapter, the debates also reflect a desire by the political elite to use the event to promote nation building in the post-Cold War context.

When Ukraine, another post-Soviet state struggling with nation building, won the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest the event was afforded significance in terms of image building since it provided Ukraine with the opportunity to host a major cultural event for the first time since independence. The winning performer, Ruslana, declared at a press conference immediately after the event that “all of us are making a positive image of Ukraine. I want my country to open up before you with friendship and hospitality [...] I would like you to forget about Chernobyl” (*Moscow Times*, 17.05.2004). Thus, from the outset, the victory was linked to the international image of Ukraine and as such it was seen as an opportunity to present a different view of Ukraine to the rest of the world. The hosting of the 2005 ESC in Kyiv took on even greater significance following the political protests which took place across the country at the end of 2004 which became known internationally as the Orange Revolution. A study of the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest offers a rich set of insights into the nature

of the Orange Revolution and its accompanying debates on Ukrainian nation and state building. Moreover, the debates in Ukraine, often wholly different to the narratives on national identity in Estonia, illuminate the complex nature of post-Soviet nation building.

Finland, like Estonia, emerged as an independent state in the aftermath of World War I. While the two countries have many differences, there is also an element of commonality. Language is arguably the most obvious similarity, both being the only Baltic Finnic people to have managed to build their own nation state (Lehti, 2003, p.16) However, both can also, to differing extents, be considered to be post-colonial. Moreover, both states have shared a peripheral status in relation to Europe, namely Western Europe, and both have renegotiated their prospective international relations with neighbouring Russia and the wider world. Finland, unlike Estonia, managed to resist Soviet demands through military force during World War II, retaining its status as an independent state in the face of overwhelming odds. Given Finland's geopolitical position it is perhaps not unsurprising that respective Finnish governments pursued a policy of neutrality during the Cold War. Indeed, it was by no means predestined that Finland would not suffer the same fate as Estonia and the other Baltic nations since Finland was assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence under the terms of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (Jakobson, 1998, p. 4). Finland's peripheral status means an analysis of the Eurovision Song Contest and the ensuing debates that the event engendered provides a unique insight into the way national identity is constructed in the country in a post-Cold War context. Both Ukraine and Finland attached great importance to victory in, and hosting of the ESC and as such demonstrate the significance that the event has as a platform for nation branding. An analysis of the event in both countries not only reveals the more salient narratives of national identity, they serve as an interesting comparison to the main case study on Estonia.

The 2005 ESC in Kyiv in the context of the Orange Revolution

Unlike in Estonia, Ukrainian nation and state building was slow and piecemeal in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukrainian politicians took a middle of the road approach. The successive presidents Kravchuk and Kuchma remained on good terms with Moscow despite attempts to integrate with Europe. In practice, both leaders did little to move Ukraine towards

this goal. Arguably, the return to Europe discourse was not prevalent in directing Ukrainian policy. This has been labelled as “declarative Europeanisation” by Kataryna Wolczuk, in that only lip service was paid to the idea of Ukrainian integration into European structures such as the European Union with little else tangible forthcoming in reality (D’Anieri, 2007, p. 217). Presidents Kravchuk and Kuchma promoted a sense of nationhood which was not based on ethnic criteria and accepted the use of Russian in state business, despite the implementation of one official state language, Ukrainian. Thus, nation building in Ukraine was constrained by the difficulties in encapsulating and building a common national identity. Succinctly capturing the essence of Ukrainian national identity is no easy task. Ukraine has been described as an “amalgam of regions” with different ethno-linguistic, economic, cultural and political profiles (Wolczuk, 2002, p. 65). The lack of a uniform consensus on a constitution, which was finally ratified in June 1996, making Ukraine the last former Soviet republic to do so, exemplifies the protracted and complex nature of Ukrainian nation building.

The 1986 Chernobyl disaster has continued to loom large over Ukraine’s international image, the legacy of which has arguably impacted upon the way in which the country is viewed in the West. Regional divisions and political factors aside, the incident cast a shadow over the country in the eyes of the world. Ukraine, unlike the so-called “clean slate” Estonia, had far more work to do in terms of shaking off this negative image. Given the immediate link between Chernobyl and the Ukrainian victory in the ESC in 2004, when the winner Ruslana stated that she wanted the world to “forget about Chernobyl”, the incident has left a lasting impression on Ukrainians and on the way in which their country has come to be viewed by the West. Both the 2004 ESC victory and indeed the Orange Revolution represented positive news stories for Ukraine, the former providing Ukrainian officials with an opportunity to manage its own image on its own terms for the first time since independence. The ESC in Ukraine therefore took on an unprecedented significance in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, as Vasyl Myroshnychenko, from the Ukrainian public relations firm CFC Consulting explains:

If you analyse the history of Ukraine most of the information about Ukraine in the media was negative [...] Chernobyl or corruption [...] of course a splash of positive information was the Orange Revolution but I would still put on winning Eurovision in 2004 and then hosting in 2005 up there as the most important events to help our image in recent times (Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Interview, 05.12.2007).

The Orange Revolution in context

By 2004, Ukraine was said to have slipped into an increasingly authoritarian state with widespread corruption going largely unchallenged by the Kuchma government (D'Anieri, 2010, p. 1). The 2004 presidential election, of which the first vote was held in October 2004, saw neither candidate, pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko or pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich, surpass the 50% majority requirement. A second round was held in November which saw Yanukovich emerge victorious. In the immediate aftermath, reports emerged of electoral fraud and voter intimidation, widespread protests took place. When it emerged that the opposition candidate Victor Yushchenko had been poisoned with dioxin it served as a rallying call to people, effectively the presidential election came to be seen as being “stolen” (D'Anieri, 2010, p. 81 and 99). People took to the streets of Kyiv with orange flags, banners, symbols representing their opposition to the government. Later counter-protests from pro-Yanukovich supporters, with blue as their emblem, emerged. In crude terms the Orange Revolution can be seen as a clash between East and West. However, as with the linguistic divide, not all Western regions were pro-Yushchenko nor were they all pro-Yanukovich in the east (Velychenko, 2007, p. 85). The Orange Revolution therefore serves as a mirror of wider Ukrainian society; complex, confusing and often contradictory.

The events which took place in Kyiv in winter 2004 attracted the attention of the world. The elections and protests potentially represented a change in geopolitics given that victory of the opposition could potentially take Ukraine closer to EU and NATO membership, and further from Russia. It is therefore not surprising that both East and West closely followed the dramatic events in Ukraine. After the votes of the previous run-offs were nullified by Ukraine's Supreme Court another election was announced for 26 December. This time the ballot was closely scrutinised by international observers and deemed to be fair and free. The result showed a clear victory for the orange opposition led by Yushchenko who won 51.9% of the vote compared to 44.2% who voted for Yanukovich (D'Anieri, 2010, p. 23). Consequentially, Yushchenko was sworn in as President of Ukraine on 23 January 2005. The significance of the events of the Orange Revolution was not lost on the new president who made reference to the impact that the protests had on Ukraine's geopolitical position in Europe. “We are no longer on the edge of Europe [...] we are situated at the centre” (D'Anieri, 2010, p. 25). The Orange Revolution became a discursive tool for Ukrainian politicians to define and create a new image of the country. Effectively, the

Orange Revolution put the country on the map, in a positive light, in the gaze of the international media and demonstrates the influence that protests can have on nation identity formation as well as the international image of a country. Previous media coverage on Ukraine focused, rather unsurprisingly, on the continued challenges that Chernobyl posed, allegations of political corruption, and the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000 (Krushelnycky, 2006, p. 359). The Orange Revolution provided Ukraine with something that had previously been lacking; recognition and positive affirmation within the international community. As Krushelnycky concludes, the events were “spectacularly successful at winning Ukraine international goodwill” (2006, p. 359).

The Orange Revolution also became a platform for other expressions of protest namely through music. Ukrainian bands performed for the hundreds of thousands of people who were gathered in Kyiv’s Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). One such band, Greenjolly, was a group from the Ivano-Frankivsk region in Western Ukraine. Their song “*Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty*” (Together we are many, we cannot be defeated) became an unofficial anthem of the Orange Revolution. In 2005, it was controversially chosen to represent Ukraine at the Eurovision Song Contest, an issue which will be discussed later in this chapter. The reigning Eurovision champion Ruslana also became heavily involved in the Orange Revolution. The singer went on hunger strike in protest against what she saw as a stolen election and later went on to become a politician herself as a member of parliament for Yushchenko’s ruling Nasha Ukrayina (Our Ukraine) party (Krushelnycky, 2006, p. 294). The links between the Eurovision Song Contest and politics go further than just from the outset of the Orange Revolution since Ukrainian participation in the event itself can be considered to be an inherently political act, aimed specifically at improving the international image of the country.

Eurovision: “It was a good opportunity to showcase Ukraine”

Ukraine entered the ESC in 2003, a year before scoring its first victory and a decade later compared to other post-Soviet successor states, a reflection of the country’s protracted trajectory towards reforms and European integration more generally. Ukrainian participation in the ESC was the idea of Gennadiy Kurochka from the public relations firm CFC Consulting. CFC Consulting, a private marketing and public relations organisation based in Kyiv, approached

the government of Ukraine in 2002 and offered assistance to the National Television Company of Ukraine (NTU) with regards to managing the country's entry to Eurovision. The corporation is funded by corporate and private sponsors. In 2005, they signed a contract with the Ukrainian government as official public relations partner for the 2005 ESC and in 2007 the organisation signed an agreement with the government of Georgia, overseeing its Eurovision debut that year. According to CFC Consulting, Ukraine participated in the ESC specifically to improve its international image:

When we started with the idea of having Ukraine in the Eurovision [...] what we had in mind was how to use it to work on improving the image of Ukraine internationally [...] I remember when we had to present the entire project of Eurovision to the vice Prime Minister of Ukraine [...] we had to draft all the positive benefits Ukraine would get should we actually win the contest. So it was on the back of our minds from the very beginning, how to use this television musical project for the benefit of Ukraine's image (Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Interview, 05.12.2007).

In 2004 CFC Consulting oversaw the selection of Ukrainian ESC representative and together, with the national broadcaster, NTU, approached Ruslana Lyzhychko. The song *Wild Dances* is said to be derived from Hutsul songs and rituals from the Carpathian region of western Ukraine. Ruslana's performance drew upon various "ethnic Ukrainian" motifs and victory in Eurovision arguably boosted self-esteem and the image of the country. The song which features traditional drums and the Hutsul alpine horn, the trembita, immediately connects with Ukrainian tradition; the various incantations in the song carries associations with Hutsul culture and the Carpathian region of Ukraine (Pavlyshyn, 2006, p. 475). However, what is perceived by audiences as Hutsul may, in fact, be references to a more generic European folk sound (Yekelchuk, 2010). Transferred to the Eurovision stage, this essentialised depiction of a local, western Ukrainian, culture comes to be seen not as a local representation but as a national one; speaking on behalf of Ukraine as a whole. The song was performed in both English and Ukrainian and, interestingly, not Russian. The absence of this effectively shows that the performance of Ruslana was an ethnic Ukrainian narrative of national identity. Ruslana's sexualised and almost militant style led her to be dubbed *Xena: Warrior Princess*, by UK commentator Terry Wogan. Ruslana was not only "wild" for the purposes of the performance of her song; she also projected this image in the promotional material for her song, even sharing a cage with wolves. *Wild Dances* therefore

served to sexualise and exoticise a particular narrative of national identity whilst simultaneously presenting Ukraine, or more specifically, the Carpathian mountains, which inspired the performance, as being at the heart of Europe (Baker, 2006). Ruslana was selected internally as Ukraine's representative for the ESC in 2004 and promoted internationally by CFC Consulting. Thus, the narrative of Ukrainian identity sold to a wider European audience was controlled by a select group of elites in the country. In representing Ukraine as a nation state, Ruslana's performance raises questions about how nationhood is defined, constructed and affirmed through Eurovision.

We didn't have any national selections here so it was pretty much the decision of CFC and the National TV Company of Ukraine and we came up with Ruslana [...] her act and her performance was very ethnic but it was very particular to special rituals in western parts of Ukraine, from the mountains [...] it was very Ukrainian [...] it was an act itself which did a great deal for promoting Ukraine the country (Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Interview, 05.12.2007).

Note that Myroshnychenko appears to suggest that this western Ukrainian style is perhaps more organic than something reflecting the eastern influences in the country, "it was very Ukrainian". *Wild Dances* can be seen as a product of a small elite circle that decided and disseminated understandings of what constitutes national culture in Ukraine, and promoted that message to the rest of Europe. *Wild Dances* ultimately had little to do with folk traditions of east-central Ukraine, by far the most populous area of the country (Yekelchuk, 2010). Thus, the constructed nature of national identity in Ukraine and the underlying power relations behind it are revealed. In the media, Ruslana was held up as a symbol of Ukraine and articles appeared promoting the singer as an embodiment of a new, post-Orange Revolution, national identity:

The new nation has acquired new symbols that embody its success on the international arena: the footballer Andriy Shevchenko, Ruslana Lyzhychko and boxing champions the Klitchko brothers. No matter what language they speak, no matter where they were born and where you work at this time, it is important that they feel themselves to be Ukrainian (*Den*, 21.09.2004).

The discourse concerning Ruslana reflects the complexities and difficulties in defining Ukrainianness, which is complicated further by the apparent absence of a strong linguistic divide that exists in other post-Soviet states. Mykola Kniazhyts'kyi argues that regardless of language or narratives of identity,

figures such as Ruslana present an opportunity for Ukrainians to build a common identity and can act as an antidote to what he calls the “national inferiority complex” in Ukraine (Pavlyshyn, 2006, p.482). It is interesting to note that some western Ukrainian purists objected to the alleged corruption and commercialisation of traditional Carpathian musical styles (Fawkes, 2004). It is interesting to note that Ruslana’s selection as Ukrainian representative at Eurovision took place when Leonid Kuchma’s allegedly pro-Russian regime was still in power. Ruslana presented a narrative of Ukraine which was exotic and sexualised; a wild country in need of exploration. Ruslana’s performance arguably represented a highly competent piece of PR and one which was directly orientated towards a wider European market. Ruslana therefore represents the contested nature of encapsulating Ukrainian national identity; the narratives of identity which can be discerned from her Eurovision performance are questioned in the west of Ukraine, amongst the people who, arguably, can understand it the most.

Ukraine twelve points

During the immediate aftermath following Ruslana’s and Ukraine’s victory in the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest, explicit references were made in the Ukrainian media regarding the impact that the event would have for Ukraine’s image and standing in the world. TV station One-Plus-One saw the victory as having possible political connotations for the country especially since European Union Commission President Romano Prodi had recently expressed scepticism about Ukraine’s chances of joining the EU. One-Plus-One’s analytical TV programme, Epicentre, countered Prodi’s comments:

[t]he gloom of Romano Prodi that Europe has no room for Ukraine was smashed last night [...] Ruslana and her “Wild Dances” have proven to us and to the whole world that we can get what we deserve in Europe – if only in singing, for now (BBC News, 17.05.2004)

To state that winning Eurovision had smashed the notion that there is “no room for Ukraine” in the EU is dubious and can be put down to the initial euphoria during the immediate aftermath of winning the ESC, if not political opportunism. However, the opportunity to host the ESC provided a much-needed platform for Ukraine to be heard on its own terms, an opportunity it had not had since independence. Here there are strong echoes of the Estonian case study

where the ESC came to be used as a potent tool for image management. It was in this context that state broadcaster NTU set about planning the 2005 event.

“It is up to Ukraine to prove that it is a true European country”

Almost immediately following the announcement that Ukraine had won the 2004 contest, doubts were raised in the Western media concerning the country's ability to stage the event with references to a lack of infrastructure and substandard venues prevailing. The rhetoric which previously faced Estonia and Latvia previously was repeated, otherness continued to be re-inscribed. As such, the ESC almost served as a platform for the othering of new entrant states by Western media outlets, a new chauvinism towards lesser developed nations. Such discourses did not go unnoticed in Ukraine; tabloid newspaper, *Segodnya* highlighted the significance of hosting the event successfully. There are echoes from the Estonian case; the subtext being that failure to host the event would appear to confirm a stereotype of the country as a poor former Soviet republic. “It is up to Ukraine to prove that it is a true European country” (*Segodnya*, 17.05.2004). Like in the Estonian case, the event was seen as a unique opportunity in the context of European integration and consequently took on significance. “Ukraine's leaders have a new headache – how not to miss this chance to gain a foothold in Europe” (BBC, 17.05.2004). In September 2004, it was confirmed that the venue for the 2005 contest would be the Kyiv Sports Palace. However, the arena was to undergo extensive renovations in order to bring it up to the standards required by the EBU.

The political turmoil caused by the Orange Revolution meant that the preparations for the 2005 contest were seriously hindered. When the EBU's then Executive Supervisor of the Eurovision Song Contest, Svante Stockselius, visited Kyiv for a routine meeting in February 2005 he found that the preparations were seriously behind schedule, so much so that an agreement had not been signed between NTU and the management of the Kyiv Sports Palace. Stockselius warned the Executive Producer of the show, Pavlo Grystak, that he would move the event to another country unless significant progress was made. Stockselius was taken to a meeting with Yushchenko himself, a move which demonstrates the seriousness in which Ukraine and Yushchenko's government approached the Eurovision Song Contest.

Whilst I did not speak Ukrainian or Russian, I understood what he was doing; he assigned each member of his cabinet a specific responsibility for Eurovision. It was quite extraordinary (Svante Stockselius, Interview, 03.04.2008).

Stockselius gave Grystak and NTU two weeks to fulfil a list of demands and when he returned to Kyiv he found that all the conditions had been met. How close the EBU came to moving the event from Ukraine has never been publicly disclosed however the response to Stockselius' ultimatum highlights the urgency and significance of the event for the Orange Revolution government in Ukraine at the time. Whilst initial demands were met, NTU and Ukraine still faced a significant challenge in preparing the city for such a large-scale international event to take place in a matter of weeks, against the backdrop of simmering media discourses of chaos. In an interview with the BBC, the presenter of the 2005 contest, Pavlo Shylko admitted that the organisation of the event was proving to be a challenge:

We understand what we have to do, otherwise the prestige of the country which is starting to be built in Europe might go down...That's why we're working every day, 24 hours a day [...] before the Olympic Games in Athens people said that nothing was ready [...] when I went there [to Athens], everything was ready and everything went well (Fawkes, 2005).

Note the parallels between the staging of the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 and the ESC in Kyiv, both of which had faced negative press attention while being on the receiving end of othering from the West. Given that the Eurovision Song Contest was taking place in a country which, only months before, had become the focal point of the world's attention as a result of political protests, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Contest that year was tinged with political rhetoric. The slogan for the competition in 2005 was "Awakening" and this, along with the selection of the band Greenjolly, who had been active in the political protests, as the Ukrainian Eurovision entry that year meant that the contest was highly politicised and as such highly contested. The insights of Svante Stockselius, the EBU Executive Supervisor and Juhan Paadam, the Executive Producer of Eurovision 2002 in Tallinn and member of the EBU Reference Group in 2005 are crucial to understanding the way by which Eurovision was used as a political platform for Yushchenko's government. According to Paadam, Yushchenko initially intended to make a lengthy political speech at the contest itself:

President Yushchenko wanted to come to the show and have a speech for forty minutes. I think the EBU had a strong word and explained that it was a TV show. The president agreed to come and give the award [trophy to the winner] which is ok as it was a revolution situation, democracy won and so on. But they could have used any celebrity for the final, the Klitschkos were there. They had their president (Juhan Paadam, Interview, 02.11.2007).

Stockselius supports Paadam's recollection of events and states that the Yushchenko government "tried to influence it [Eurovision] more than they were supposed to" (Svante Stockselius, email correspondence, 03.10.2008). Whilst Yushchenko's appearance at Eurovision was a brief affair, the fact that he went on to the Eurovision stage at all is momentous. In the history of the Eurovision Song Contest such a move was unprecedented and took place despite the continuous reinforcement from the European Broadcasting Union that the contest is a non-political event.

Orange Eurovision

In autumn 2004, Ukrainian broadcaster NTU announced that they were to host a national selection for the first time. The Ukrainian national final comprised of 15 rounds where each week five songs were presented to the audience and the winner put through to the grand final which was to be held in February 2005. Ani Lorak, one of Ukraine's most popular singers, and a vocal supporter of Viktor Yanukovich, was one such act to compete in the qualifying rounds. Controversy arose when, at the request of Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Tomenko, four wildcards were entered into the national selection programme. One of these wildcards was a pro-Yushchenko political anthem by the band Greenjolly. The group therefore bypassed the heats. The group's entry went on to win the competition and were to represent Ukraine in the Kyiv final. Largely seen as a political coup, the actions were highly controversial with both public and competing artists alike:

It was a political decision. It was a really hard period in Ukraine because of the revolution. This team, they sang a song about the party, the President, it's a little bit political even, the situation. It was so political and yet the contest should not be about politics (Ani Lorak, Interview, 16.05.2008).

Given the attempts by the Ukrainian government to influence the organisation of the Eurovision Song Contest it is therefore not inappropriate to assert that last minute changes to the Ukrainian selection for ESC 2005 were shaped by political manoeuvres. Whilst it should also be pointed out that the song by Greenjolly was popular in Ukraine at the time and did win the public telephone vote, there was media speculation that the result was untrustworthy.

I thought the decision was political. They [Greenjolly] did nothing before and nothing after. It was purely political [...] I really don't think the people voted for it, I seriously doubt it [...] I was at the first national channel listening and reporting [...] I don't know. They tried to link Ukraine and the revolution with Eurovision but I don't think it was the right decision (Olena, Interview, 13.12.2007)

Whilst conspiracy theories abound concerning the affair, it is somewhat ironic that a song which encapsulated the very essence of the Orange Revolution and called for an end to manipulation and falsification, went on to represent Ukraine as a direct result of rules being adapted at the request of politicians, arguably a throwback to the pre-revolutionary corruption which was supposed to have been suppressed as a result of Yushchenko's rise to power. Further controversy ensued when the EBU rejected the song as it contravened the ban on political references. The mention of Yushchenko as president in the chorus of the song was dropped and more generic phrases were introduced in English, the entry then was allowed to proceed to the Eurovision finals. The actual ESC performance of *Razom nas bahato, nas ne podolaty* included direct and explicit references to the Orange Revolution. At the start of the performance the two backing dancers wore handcuffs, symbolising the stifling of democracy which was such a driving force for protestors in Ukraine. As the performance culminated, the handcuffs were broken. Again, the latter can be seen as a metaphor for Ukraine. As a result of the protests described in the song; the country is now free. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the performance received the largest reaction in the hall on the night. As with Ruslana, it appears that Ukraine was again represented in the international arena by specific, elite-driven narratives of identity. Greenjolly's participation in the ESC therefore embodies a specific political narrative, that of the ruling elite, the Orange Revolution government.

Despite the delays to the organisation of the contest, the 2005 ESC was a success for the National Television Company of Ukraine (NTU). At that time, in May 2005, the Eurovision Song Contest was the largest international event ever staged in Ukraine. A direct and public link to Ukraine's position regarding

the EU was made by Deputy Prime Minister Mykola Tomenko at the welcome reception for participants and delegates, who said the contest is a serious step for Ukraine towards the EU membership. Hosting Eurovision also meant that there were significant changes to legislation in Ukraine for visitors to Ukraine from the EU. The visa restrictions were lifted for EU nationals from 1 May 2005 and this is still in place today. When questioned about the “Awakening” theme of the show, Executive Producer Pavlo Grystak was quick to point out that this was not an explicit reference to the Orange Revolution per se but more of a statement on behalf of Ukraine in general. There were other options such as “Beautiful Ukraine” and “Beautiful World of Ukraine”. However, according to Grystak, these were deemed “more romantic, more lyrical”. He added that the Awakening theme “was not about politics or politicians [...] it was just about society [...] Ukraine has been awakening and it has been doing it for decades” (Pavlo Grystak, Interview, 12.12.2007). When questioned about government involvement in the contest, Grystak maintains that the government played a supportive role and that there was “no big interference into all this creative part”. Note that Grystak discusses the “creative part” of the ESC, suggesting that the government may have been involved elsewhere. CFC Consulting representative Vasyl Myroshnychenko also said that the government was not heavy handed in terms of dictating content. This is in sharp contrast to the testimonies of both Juhan Paadam and Svante Stockselius who, as previously highlighted, asserted that Yushchenko was planning a political speech during the broadcast in 2005. The testimonies from Grystak and Myroshnychenko are also questionable given that Vice Prime Minister, Mykola Tomenko, was the head of the organising committee for ESC 2005.

Closer reading of the broadcast content sheds further light on the way in which Ukrainian elites chose to present the country to an international audience. Within seconds of the broadcast going live, the logo for the event that year appeared immediately on-screen with the slogan “Awakening” immediately connecting the wider political context to the ESC in Ukraine. Ruslana, a political figure in the revolution, then appeared on stage performing another Hutsul-inspired song, “Heart of Fire”. The hosts Pavlo Shylko and Maria Efrosinina then made their appearance on stage and welcomed the audience in the now customary English and French. It is noteworthy that the presenters also spoke in Ukrainian rather than Russian, this coupled with the particular spelling of the host city, Kyiv, the Ukrainian version rather than the Russophone Kiev, shows that ESC 2005 reflected and reinforced an ethnic Ukrainian narrative of national identity.

A cursory glance of the scenes depicted in the postcard images shown between each national performance suggests that this was an event in which the eastern urban regions of Ukraine were not the point of focus, a reflection of the new geopolitical orientation of the Yushchenko government in moving away from the Soviet past. Many of the images depicted non-descript rural regions whilst others focussed on Kyiv and in particular western Carpathian traditions. The significance of Eurovision itself was routinely flagged; the preparations of the host city were shown regularly along with scenes of the semi-final which had been held two days prior to the event. Many of the scenes were disjointed and seemingly incoherent; shots of ballet were intermingled with fishing, weddings and shipping. The ambiguity of the scenes depicted are a metaphor for Ukrainian national identity itself; difficult to encapsulate in a limited narrative. The clips shown directly before the Ukrainian entry were scenes from the Orange Revolution, featuring protesters, tents and banners bearing Yushchenko's name as well as shots of the president's inauguration. It was undoubtedly a political message depicted through Eurovision, again, despite the insistence from the EBU that the contest is not political.

The politicised messages of the contest continued into the voting procedure when a short video clip was shown, a clear reference to the agenda of the Ukrainian government. The video opened with shots of Kyiv and the Ukrainian flag before covering various scenes from the official welcome reception held the previous week. Towards the end, a billboard was shown with various goodwill messages written. The heading read "Leave your wishes for the Ukrainian people here". A highly symbolic shot of the Ukrainian flag next to the flag of the EU was then shown. Immediately after this, a shot from inside the arena was shown; Yushchenko and Tymoshenko sitting in the audience. At the end of the voting procedure Yushchenko appeared on stage alongside the emergent winner, Greece's Elena Papparizou. The president was given a standing ovation by the audience whilst he gave "a special prize symbolising friendship and unity between European countries", according to the presenter Pavlo Shylko. The closing shots of the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest were therefore of the Klitchko brothers, Ruslana and Yushchenko himself, reminiscent of the scenes from the Orange Revolution only months before.

Concluding remarks

Ukrainian national identity is presented as a unified entity through its representation in, and hosting of, the ESC, despite the fact that Ukraine is a country

divided by history, language, economics, and as the latest wave of protests show, politics. The ESC was of tremendous significance to Ukrainian politicians in the wake of the specific geopolitical context of the Orange Revolution, as exemplified by Yushchenko's personal involvement in the organisation of the event. The Eurovision Song Contest represented a unique opportunity for Ukraine to control the image of the country for the first time since independence. The narratives concerning Ukraine's self-representation through hosting the ESC reveals that the organisers actively aimed to dispel stereotypes about the country; "there were a lot of stereotypes about Ukraine in Western Europe [...] stray dogs running downtown in Kyiv [...] contamination from Chernobyl [...] there is more to Ukraine than sports stars and Chernobyl" (Vasyl Myroshnychenko, Interview, 05.12.2007). The reference here to stereotypes reveals that not only was the image of the country paramount, and intrinsically linked to the ESC in 2005, but also that Chernobyl lingers on in the popular psyche. The choice of phrase "there is more to Ukraine than sports stars and Chernobyl" is particularly interesting in that it represents a desire by Ukrainian image makers to move towards a more contemporary international image. However, it is also perplexing given the positive news stories associated with many sports. As Barry Smart writes:

Sports are universal signifiers, they "travel across borders", rise above differences of politics, culture and religion, and promote a positive feeling of shared experience and a sense of common meaning [...] iconic globally popular sporting figures increasingly accord a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country [...] as modern sport has become global in scope it has largely lost its playful character and its professional practice has become both a global and media spectacle and a serious and financially significant business (Giulianotti, 2008, p. 24).

According to a recent analysis of Western media coverage of Ukraine, "the country is mostly associated Orange Revolution, political instability, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and contentious relations with Russia. Positive coverage of Ukraine was mostly confined to news reports about Ukrainian sportsmen, in particular the Klitschko Brothers (Katchanovski, 2009, p. 8). Given the importance attached to the ESC by the ruling elite in Ukraine at the time, I argue that it remains significant given that it was also a positive news story and represented a change in the way the country was represented in the international media. The 2005 ESC was arguably the most politicised up to that time (a label which has now been usurped by the controversy concerning

the 2012 contest staged in Baku, Azerbaijan) and the attempt by Yushchenko to make a speech at the event demonstrates this. Perhaps more crucially, the fact that the visa entry requirements were changed in Ukraine specifically to ease the hosting of Eurovision is highly significant and at the time of writing, these visa regulations are still in place today; a lasting legacy of the Eurovision Song Contest in 2005.

National identity and nation building in Finland through the ESC

Eric Hobsbawm once stated that Finland is one of the few countries to have “adequately democratic political institutions that have functioned without a break” (cited in Jakobson 1998, p. 3), yet Finland after the Cold War, emerged relatively unknown on the world stage. According to former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, Finland is a country “much admired, often pitied but never envied” in that the country was respected for initially fighting the Red Army, later ostracised for continuing the fight and then castigated by Western powers for refusing to trust Stalin (Jakobson, 1998, p. 3). During and since the end of the Cold War, Finland has proactively attempted to manage its image on the world stage, yet like Estonia, it has continued to challenge its peripheral status and labels of otherness imposed from outside the country. Finland’s emergence as an independent state and indeed its continued existence as an independent state were arguably down to skilful nation building practices. The Finnish independence movement shows, not for the first time in history, that the result of a conflict between a larger, more powerful, neighbour with wider geopolitical interests and a small nation state relatively unknown on the world stage is not a foregone conclusion.

During the Cold War the Finnish government kept to a strict policy of neutrality and one of self-censorship, or “Finlandisation”, whereby Finnish authorities curtailed criticism of the Soviet Union in order to remain independent as a nation state (Browning, 2003, p. 116). In short, Finland kept its mouth shut to avoid the mighty wrath of the Soviets. Paradoxically, whilst on the surface, Finland was borderline isolationist, at an official level efforts were many to manage Finland’s international image with the development of “international communication” by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These efforts to promote Finland through print and other media as well as through informal networks abroad can be seen as an early attempt at public diplomacy or even

nation branding. According to Louis Clerc, these activities were also one of the stages on which internal debates about Finland's national identity were played (Clerc, 2013). These national networks attempted to manage Finland's image for political, cultural and "national" reasons in order to spread "true" notions about Finland as a nation, an economy, a culture and as a worthy international actor. Following World War II, Finland engaged in a difficult but ultimately successful balancing act of remaining on good terms with the Soviet Union whilst making Finnish neutrality, and Finland more generally, credible to Western Europe.

Estonia and Finland have faced some similar challenges since independence in that both were seen as peripheral others, and that both have successfully moved towards mainstream geopolitics of Europe. According to Jakobson, Finnish entry into the European Union in 1995 ended half a century of ambiguity and represented confirmation that Finland was a Western European country. Whilst in the Estonian context, there was arguably more urgency with the process of returning to Europe, thus showing parallels with the Finnish case. The EU was presented as protecting and enhancing national identity and security. Rather than a return to Europe, the accession process in Finland was presented as "coming home", belonging to a Western club, and dispelling "Easternness". D. Smith (2003, p. 59) argues that Finland was by far the most enthusiastic Nordic state when it came to joining the EU, a reflection of the repudiation of otherness which the country had previously experienced. Finnish history before the end of the Cold War had been dominated by antagonists, EU accession therefore offered the country further stability in an ever-changing Europe (Browning, 2003, p. 103).

"The nation needed a state in order to be heard"

Historian Christopher Browning argues that Finnish history before the end of the Cold War was dominated by the prioritisation of the state over the nation. In short, the people served the country to ensure both government sovereignty and territorial sovereignty amidst the continued threat of infringement from outside, namely by the Soviet Union. Jakobson (1998) asserts that Finns have been seen as nationalist people in the past, prioritising the state above all else. However, he also highlights a paradox in the way identity debates are articulated. Nationalism today is often seen as a dirty word evoking images of extremism and even genocide. Yet the nationalism which was lauded as

setting the Baltic states free from Soviet rule, for example, is often forgotten. The Baltic Chain of 1989 in which over two million people joined hands across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in a peaceful protest against Soviet rule was arguably underpinned by nationalist discourse. In a Finnish context, the label of nationalism can be seen as another manifestation of otherness.

The international image of Finland has continued to be a point of debate and even consternation for the Finnish government. Whilst the telecommunications company Nokia has arguably helped to put Finland on the map, the country remains relatively unknown on the world stage (Anholt, 2007). According to Anholt, if Nokia were to articulate its Finnish roots more to the wider world, then Finland's international image would be given a boost. Anholt argues that the company does not do this since Nokia is a stronger brand than Finland and closer associations may lead to a dilution of the brand as a whole. Whilst much of this is hypothetical it does highlight the difficulties in promoting lesser known states on the world stage. In 2008, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up a committee to produce a nation branding strategy for Finland. As discussed in chapter two, branding strategies are often developed as a response to otherness, this was true in the Estonian context and the same is true in the Finnish case. An analysis of nation branding enables us to see how foreign policy is not only about interacting with predetermined actors but about communicating values and identity to the wider world and to the nation itself. Browning (2011) argues that the formation of a Finnish branding committee is also linked with ontological security; the security of being and also an attempt at collectivising national identity and self-certainty in a changing world. In a similar vein Steele (2008, p. 58) states:

While physical security is (obviously) important to states, ontological security is more important because its fulfilment affirms a state's self-identity (i.e. it affirms not only its physical existence but primarily how a state sees itself and secondarily how it wants to be seen by others). Nation states seek ontological security because they want to maintain consistent self-concepts, and the 'Self' of states is constituted and maintained through a narrative which gives life to routinised foreign policy actions.

In chapter two, I argued that nation branding can be seen as a form of nationalism in that it promotes the nation state as a primordial framework for identity. Nationalism is driven by the desire of the political and national community to justify itself and legitimise and enhance its standing. Lehti and Smith (2003) argue that larger powers legitimise their actions whereas smaller states

legitimise their very existence in the first place. Nation branding is therefore a reflection of this. In the Finnish context, for a country which historically can be seen as being subordinated, excluded and marginalised; nation branding offers the opportunity to manage its image and be heard on the world stage.

In November 2010, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published its branding report in which it provided an overview of previous work carried out on Finland's image from a historical perspective as well as a conclusion that "a coherent image of Finland, let alone a brand, does not exist" (Moilanen & Rainisto, 2008). The report stated that the impression of Finland is that of a cold and sparsely populated country in the north inhabited by a quiet and peaceful nation and that whilst there is a weak image of Finland, among the international community, the impression is generally positive (Mission for Finland, 2010, p. 263). Parallels can be seen here with the report commissioned by Enterprise Estonia which highlighted the current state of the Estonian image on the world stage. As both reports highlight, measuring image is a fraught process and one which is ultimately unreliable. However, the fact that both countries have not only attempted to do this but have actively targeted resources towards nation branding initiatives is a reflection of elite-level repudiation of otherness as well as a manifestation of a wider consternation about how the country is perceived on the world stage. The report included some humorous or even bizarre recommendations, one of which made reference to "emphasising Finnish honesty through physical nudity" (Mission for Finland, 2010, p. 359). A low national self-esteem is also detailed, which will be discussed later in relation to the Eurovision Song Contest. Thus, nation branding provides an insight into wider identity constructions within the nation state.

The Finnish branding strategy report concluded that Finland should carve a niche for itself as a problem solver. The notion of being the "best" as described in the report, according to Browning, resonates with Cold War narratives of Nordic exceptionalism, the notion that the Nordics were historical exemplars of modernity with much to teach the world (Browning 2007, p 28). Interestingly, the report makes explicit reference to the Finnish public and recommends that any strategy should be developed in consultation with the nation. This is markedly different from the Estonian approach which appeared to have been imposed from above by an external organisation, as described in chapter two. The call to Finns to help build the nation brand and take collective action on developing the country's image in the desired direction is also conducive to nation building. Browning argues that the patriotic call to become involved in the branding process has parallels with Finlandisation in that those who failed

to comply with official policy were subject to legal action. Whilst this is obviously not the case with nation branding, which does not have any legal force underpinning it, the call to the public does imply that failure to engage would be deemed unpatriotic and seen to be undermining the national project. Here the subtext is that Finns who fail to engage in the nation branding process are ultimately failing to fully meet the demands of their citizenship. Such rhetoric opens the door to further discussions concerning the constitution of “patriotic behaviour”. Again, I argue that this suggests that nation branding practices are not as innocuous as they might seem.

Identity of shame: Finland at the Eurovision Song Contest

As highlighted earlier, discourses of low national self-esteem are prevalent when the image of Finland is discussed in the literature. Mari Pajala argues that these narratives have also been reflected in discussions concerning the Eurovision Song Contest. As discussed in chapter three, the ESC is an event ultimately linked with national prestige. Pajala argues that whilst the ESC is not concerned with history per se, an analysis of the debates that the event engenders provides a wealth of historical discourse (Pajala, 2011, p. 406). Finnish national broadcaster YLE first entered the ESC in 1961. Until its victory in 2006, Finland was one of the least successful competing nations in the ESC finishing in last place eight times (nine as of 2009) and never reaching the top five. According to Pajala’s media analysis, this lack of success led to a so-called “national trauma” in which failure were linked to identity and feelings of shame amongst the wider public. Pajala argues that early media discussions concerning Finnish ESC entries were concerned with the representation of nationhood with nationality being the dominant theme. Arguably such rhetoric has parallels with the historical context of Finland as a small country, dominated by its neighbours. The ESC therefore acts as a platform for wider discussions concerning nationhood more generally. Pajala argues that nationality has been the central frame for making sense of the ESC in Finland, the narrative of disappointment being a reflection of Finland’s peripheral geopolitical position. Moreover, Finland’s participation in both the ESC and the Eastern European equivalent, the Intervision Song Contest, is a reflection of Finland’s peripheral status and its dual-vector policy towards the Soviet Union and Western Europe. Pajala argues that by the 1990s readings of the ESC changed from consternation engendered by failure to a form of quasi pride in that the country was the “most

successful loser”. It is also interesting to note that this paradigm shift took place as the contest was expanding to incorporate newly sovereign nations from the former Eastern bloc and former Yugoslavia. Parallels with UK discussions concerning alleged neighbourly voting by new entrant countries, discourses of a “savage East” can be seen in the Finnish case. Thus, Finland’s lack of success in the contest was confirmation of the country’s Western credentials. As discussed in the Estonian case study (chapters four and five), having experienced otherness, debates in competing countries serve to other newer entrant states, this is true in the Finnish context too. Interestingly absent from the Finnish media debates is the fact that Finland was actually more successful in the Eastern-backed Intervision Song Contest than it was with the ESC.

Finlande Douze Points

Finland won the 2006 Eurovision Song Contest held in Athens by a landslide. The group Lordi with the song “Hard Rock Hallelujah”, received 292 points, 44 points more than second-placed Russia. After first appearing in Eurovision in 1961, Finland had scored its first ever victory. The media reaction in Finland was one of euphoria with the ESC remaining front-page news weeks after the contest and national broadcaster YLE promptly arranged a televised homecoming party for the victors. Jokes circulated on the internet that “hell has frozen over since Finland has won the Eurovision Song Contest”. The implication being that the impossible had just happened, Finland had won the ESC. Like with the Estonian ESC victory in 2001, the 2006 result engendered a sense of national pride and provided an opportunity for the commemoration of Finnish nationhood. To quote one Finnish respondent, “I had never seen anything like it before or since, it was bigger than when we won the ice hockey, and that was big!” (Mayu, Interview, 02.04.2012). Lordi’s victory represented a turning point in ESC history not only because it marked Finland’s first breakthrough in the contest but also because it was a totally new genre, hard rock, to succeed at the ESC. The reaction to the victory in Finland exemplifies the capacity that the ESC has to engender national pride and evoke a sense of imagined community to use Benedict Anderson’s term. YLE then set about planning the 2007 ESC, the first ever to be staged in Finland.

By 2007, the Eurovision Song Contest had grown considerably and as highlighted in chapter three, the technical challenges were ever-increasing since national broadcasters not only had to produce a live final but also a televised

semi-final (two as of 2008). Logistics aside, the ESC was becoming ever more expensive. Again as with the Estonian case study, there are parallels in that in the immediate planning phase questions were raised in the Finnish media concerning the image that the country would present to Europe through hosting the ESC (Fricker & Gluhovic 2013, p. 96). Thus, the issue of Finland's image remains pertinent in a post-Cold War context. Like Estonia, debates concerning image have manifested through the ESC itself. Again, as with the Estonian case study, the financing of the event was linked with national prestige, as Kjell Ekholm, Head of Delegation in 2006 explains:

“When Finland won [in 2006] I was the head of our delegation. During the encore I was standing there thinking ‘Oh no’. I knew what was in front of me because I had been involved in the reference group for four years. I knew all the problems all the broadcasters had [...] I started working on it immediately; for one year, from June 2006 until July 2007 I was working more or less day and night on that project. As a public broadcaster with no sponsorship department, doing this show was like somebody throwing us into the lion's cage [...] On the Monday after winning our managing director said publically ‘YLE can't arrange this on our own. We have some knowledge and equipment and so on, but the government has to come in with €15 million or it will go to Tallinn or Stockholm’. It took one hour and the prime minister said ‘No, no, no! Not to Sweden! We will give the money to YLE’” (Fricker & Gluhovic, 2013, p. 103).

As with the Estonian case study there are parallels in that the government there stepped in to guarantee funding for the event as happened in Finland. Failure to stage the ESC would inevitably have been damaging to the international image of Finland, especially given that less affluent post-Soviet nations had staged the event successfully in the preceding years. The reference to Sweden cited in the quote above is telling, whilst it is obviously jovial, it reveals more about how Finnish nationhood is constructed and again is a reflection of the historical context of otherness and post-colonialism. In short, it would have been an embarrassment to ask the big brother, Sweden, to host the ESC in the event that Finland was incapable of doing so. As is so often the case, hosting the ESC is intrinsically linked with national pride and indeed nationalism itself. The nature of the debates in Finland also demonstrates how important the ESC is as a platform for promoting a constructed image of the nation to a wider audience.

Finland's True Fantasy: ESC 2007

In chapter five I argued that Estonian Television used the Eurovision Song Contest in 2002 to essentialise the country's Nordic credentials, YLE's 2007 production can be viewed in the same vein. The slogan for the 2007 contest was "Pure Fantasy" and sought to promote the uniqueness of Finland or "Finnishness" as described by the organisers (YLE 2007, p. 4). The stage design was also a representation of Finnish identity since it was in the shape of the kantele, a traditional Finnish string instrument. The postcard images screened between the songs encapsulated the essence of this slogan as well as promoting the Nordic identity of Finland. Skiing, snowy landscapes, ice and water featured regularly. Moreover other postcards depicted aspects of everyday life in Finland but with a twist, promoting the uniqueness of Finland. For example, bog football was presented, of which world championships are held in Finland, prompting UK commentator Terry Wogan to state on-air "they're a different people, I can tell you" (BBC TV, 2007). Technology also featured prominently, Nokia mobile telephones being heavily promoted in several of the scenes. The sauna was rather unsurprisingly included in the postcard selection however, those filmed were clothed. This is an interesting point to note since saunas in Finland are places where nudity is the norm. Whilst television regulation means that producers had to be careful about the images included in the broadcast, the self-censorship can be seen as a manifestation of Finlandisation as well as a clear sign that these images were produced with the wider European audience in mind, where nudity is not necessarily the norm in public saunas.

The postcard images offered Finland an opportunity to promote its own image on its own terms. The choice of having Santa Claus on-stage to open the voting was deliberate, with the hosts making reference to the fact that the character is Finnish. The crisp on-screen graphics reflected Nordic design and provided an insight into how Finns view themselves. In terms of a wider debate the ESC in 2007 led to a positive media debate concerning the images which were chosen to promote Finland throughout the broadcast:

"During that year, many commercial channels in Finland, who are together with the newspapers, started saying things like: 'YLE can't arrange this. It's going to be a disaster and all of Europe will laugh at us'. That was another kind of pressure on us. All the time there were questions about what kind of image we will give to Europe, with the postcards and so on. It was a really hard thing but we believed in what we were doing, and we stuck to all the decisions

we made. After the semi-final – it was just one semi-final in 2007 – everything started changing. Everyone in Finland said: ‘Wow! This is great. This is the right picture we want Europeans to have about Finland’ (Kjell Ekholm, Interview, cited in Fricker & Gluhovic 2013, p. 96).

The testimony above demonstrates that, like Estonia, Finnish television executives carefully considered what image of Finland they would project through Eurovision as a medium. Moreover, the apparent consternation about whether the image would damage Finland’s standing reflects wider identity insecurities and is arguably related to the peripheral geopolitics of Finland more generally. One of the postcards broadcast during the show depicted a large ship breaking ice in the Arctic Circle; in essence, this can be seen as a metaphor for Finland and the ESC. The ESC offered Finland an opportunity to break the ice with Europe and tell its story, on its own terms.

Concluding comments

The Finnish discourses on nation branding and the ESC reflect the peripheral geopolitics of Finland. The Finnish case study also demonstrates that the return to Europe rhetoric was not just confined to post-socialist states. Finland’s entry into the Council of Europe and the European Union had a symbolic and powerful meaning, confirming the country as Western and no longer peripheral (Jakobson, 1998, p. 156). Moreover, if language is what makes a nation, then having Finnish formally listed as an official language of the EU arguably provided a boost to the self-esteem of Finns. The debates that the ESC provoked in Finland also reveal that image and image building were important to both the authorities, media and public alike and the ESC provided an opportunity for the country to speak to the continent. However, as highlighted in chapter one, otherness does not disappear overnight, national identity is not about to be replaced by a common European identity (D. Smith 2003, p. 56). The successful re-orientation of Finland from a Baltic state to a Nordic one demonstrates that image is just as powerful a tool as geopolitics and even physical geography. Meanings, identities and otherness are constantly changing and evolving, the Finnish example is certainly proof of that.

Conclusion

This book aimed to offer a new perspective on the relationship between the nation and state and the political management of international image in a post-Soviet, post-Cold War context through an examination of the Eurovision Song Contest and nation branding. The case studies cited in this work exemplify the importance attached to image by the political community with the nation state. By investigating issues of national identity and nationalist politics through the medium of popular culture, with particular reference to the ESC and the role that the event has played in terms of image building and nation branding, the more salient aspects of identity debates have been presented. For Estonia as well as for Ukraine and Finland, the Eurovision Song Contest offered an opportunity to present a certain narrative of identity to a wider audience. However, as I have argued in this work, this process is an inherently fraught one. In order to articulate what a nation is, states have also communicated what they are not, engendering fierce identity debates.

There are unintended consequences of both nation branding and nation building. The development of Brand Estonia reflected, and was part of, the wider return to Europe discourse propagated by the political elite in Estonia in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. I argue that nation branding in Estonia was a form of soft nationalism in that it was a deliberate attempt to convey a certain narrative of the nation to a wider audience, holding the titular nationality as the primordial framework for identity. The call to Finns to participate in the nation branding process, as discussed in chapter six, can be seen as conducive to nation building; creating that shared (imagined) community. However, this further sets the agenda for otherness and serves as a potential opportunity to label those who do not follow the agenda as disloyal to the state, which can have serious and tragic consequences. Nation branding can essentially be seen as forward-looking in the sense that projects are

developed with a view to attracting inward economic investment and presenting positive images of the country. The process involves a long-term leap of faith in believing that the investment in image will be repaid further down the line. Nation building on the other hand can be seen as something which is retrospective in that it relies on elements from the past in order to build a form of social solidarity or community cohesion. However, because nation branding is future-orientated, it does not mean that nationalism, a concept which nation builders draw upon, is dead. Aronczyk (2013) argues that nation branding is little more than an updated form of nationalism for the 21st century. Nation branding is therefore evidence that we do not live in a post-nationalist world as some scholars such as Heller (2011) suggest. Recent debates within the UK on an EU referendum and, indeed, the Scottish independence referendum exemplify this. In the Estonian case, nation branding and nation building were linked to the other; by saying who we are not, we are confirming who we are; “We are not Russian, we are Estonian”. By engaging in nation branding, state actors firmly erect boundaries against the other. In promoting a country’s so-called European credentials, a barrier is effectively constructed against those who fail to meet these ideals.

The Eurovision Song Contest has been used by different countries as a platform for the expression of Europeanness and, in the case of newly-sovereign states, a tool for both nation building and nation branding. The ESC has routinely reflected the wider political context of Europe. It has also been used as a tool for both countering and reinforcing otherness. The case of Turkey is a strong example, an EU outsider and one which used the ESC as a platform for demonstrating its European sameness as discussed in chapter three. The apparent irony towards the ESC by participating countries can also be seen as othering; a shared view of Eurovision as a joke is thus confirmation of a nation’s (Western) European credentials. The case studies cited in this book represent a historical account of key identity debates at a specific moment in time. For the main case analysed here, Estonia, this is particularly true as the ESC was a manifestation of the wider return to Europe discourse. The ESC offers a form of approval but also a chance for each host country to say something to the world, on its own terms. The case studies cited in this book all demonstrate that host nations of the ESC have, to varying degrees, an ontological anxiety and share concerns about what the world thinks about them.

In this sense, Bolin’s comparison of the Eurovision Song Contest as a modern day equivalent of the 19th century World’s Fairs can be confirmed. Eurovision can be seen as an event which is routinely embedded in the life

of the nation, an annual European ritual which is collectively consumed. By examining the debates that the ESC engenders, the more salient narratives of the nation can be considered at a specific moment in time.

Image remains an important political issue for nation states. The case studies in this book demonstrate the complexity involved with encapsulating national identity and branding this for an external audience. Significance has been attached to the ESC in Estonia, Ukraine and Finland (as well as other states) in that it has allowed them to confirm their European credentials. Paradoxically the accession of new entrant countries has provoked fierce debates about European identity more generally and mirrors wider debates concerning EU expansion. In the cases of Estonia and Finland in particular, later failures to succeed in the contest were presented in the mainstream media as confirmation of belonging to Western Europe. Over the past two decades, since the contest has expanded, negative portrayals about tribal voting and alleged Eastern domination of the contest have persisted amongst competing countries. The politics of the other is very much alive in Europe today. Despite this, the ESC remains a powerful symbolic tool. Analysis of the images host countries choose to use provides an insight into a sense of self.

Whilst the ESC has been criticised for its lack of musical and cultural relevance, it is still an event which attracts upwards of 100 million viewers and as the 2012 winner from Sweden, Loreen, proved, it still generates international hits. It is also an event in which participating countries continue to invest. In 2010, Estonia's participation in Eurovision was paid for by Enterprise Estonia after ETV announced that they were withdrawing in the light of the global economic crisis. Enterprise Estonia cited that the ESC was an important platform for continuing to promote Estonia. Despite otherness and cynicism, the ESC remains an event which authorities continue to buy into. In Ukraine, a visa-free regime was introduced for EU citizens in the run-up to the contest in 2005. To date, this policy remains in place, a lasting legacy of the Eurovision Song Contest. One quote from Riina Kionka, the former Estonian Ambassador to Germany, offers a fitting closing remark for this book. As highlighted earlier, whilst otherness is evident in the debates surrounding the ESC, winning and staging Eurovision are serious opportunities for putting a country on the map:

Estonia was the first new country to win and host it [Eurovision], it was a sharp contrast. We measured at one point, our year end analysis of the press and questions that year [...] at least a third of the press attention during that entire year was press for Eurovision [...] They [international media] started writing about us right from the win all the way up to hosting. It was huge. Up to that point

coverage had always been on the minority or difficulties in the relationship with Russia [...] it was not necessarily good news stories and Eurovision really turned that around [...] Everybody understood that it was important and the foreign ministry understood it to be important [hosting ESC] It is easy to forget now, years later, but these were real decisions at the time (Riina Kionka, Interview, 11.08.2008).

Meanings are never fixed; social reality is constructed and ever changing. The continued success of the Eurovision Song Contest, celebrating its 60th edition in 2015 is quite remarkable given that a wider European identity remains a vague construction still in the process of formation. The questions of what constitutes Europe and what holds it together remain as pertinent today as they were following World War II. The global economic crisis has further aroused discussions concerning development and notions of Europeanness. Fricker and Gluhovic (2013) argue that the Eurovision Song Contest has become a stage on which the changing realities of Europe are being played out. I go further to state that the ESC today, as a competition, sanctions a playful form of quasi-xenophobia in that whilst the contest seeks to present Europe as a united entity, it actually represents an idealised form of the EU, a notional space without borders. Despite media narratives depicting the ESC as an Eastern European stitch-up, in reality Western Europe controls the contest and recent changes in the voting procedure following pressure from Western European broadcasters and the creation of the so-called Big Five exemplify this. The slogan for the 2013 contest held in Sweden was “We are one”. The financial crisis has demonstrated that Europe is not one, economically, politically or even socially. Yet the Eurovision Song Contest as a television format continues to endure. Eurovision exhibits these wider socio-political tensions year in, year out and will continue to do so. As such it represents a unique form of public diplomacy, in theory, allowing countries to pass judgement without the threat of repercussion. Although, as discussed in chapter three, the disputes concerning Azerbaijan and Armenia, to name just one example, demonstrate that Eurovision is in fact a form of living nationalism. This analysis of the ESC, as well as nation branding and its relationship to and influence on, nation building more generally, has highlighted some of the more salient narratives of identity politics in Europe today. In an ever-changing Europe, meanings and identities are shifting rapidly. This book is offered as a preliminary step to understanding and encapsulating some of these key debates in specific contexts and at specific moments in time.

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Personal interviews and correspondences

Elite-level experts:

- Alexander Kliemenov, Television Producer, Kyiv, Ukraine, 18 December 2007
 Andri Maimets, Journalist, Tallinn, Estonia, 26 November 2007
 Andriy Kulykov, Journalist, Kyiv, Ukraine, 12 December 2007
 Ani Lorak, Singer, Belgrade, Serbia, 16 May 2008
 Anu Välba, Broadcaster, Tallinn, Estonia, 19 November 2007
 Dave Benton, Singer, Tallinn, Estonia, 15 November 2007
 Evelin Samuel, Singer, Tallinn, Estonia, 07 April 2008
 Evelin Ilves, Project Manager of Brand Estonia, Tallinn, Estonia, 20 November 2007
 Gennadiy Kurochka, PR Consultant, Kyiv, Ukraine, 05 December 2007
 Hans Lepp, Diplomat, Stockholm, Sweden, 19 March 2008
 Helen Fawkes, Journalist, Telephone interview, 11 November 2010
 Iir Hermeliin, Designer, Tallinn, Estonia, 13 November 2007
 Ilmar Raag, Film and Television Producer, Tallinn, Estonia, 13 November 2007
 Ivo Rull, PR Manager, Tallinn, Estonia, 14 November 2007
 Journalist A, Moscow, Russia, 10 May 2009
 Journalist B, London, UK, 09 September 2009
 Juhan Paadam, Television Producer, Tallinn, Estonia, 02 November 2007
 Kaja Tael, Diplomat, Tallinn, Estonia, 08 April 2008
 Kati Varblane, EBU Event Manager, Tallinn, Estonia, 09 April 2008
 Marek Tamm, Academic, Tallinn, Estonia, 15 November 2007
 Marju Lauristin, Academic & Politician, Glasgow, UK, 22 October 2007
 Marko Reikop, Broadcaster, Tallinn, Estonia, 19 November 2007
 Mart Laar, Politician, Tallinn, Estonia, 12 November 2007
 Mati Sepping, Producer, Tallinn, Estonia, 14 November 2007
 Meelis Kompus, Broadcaster, Tallinn, Estonia, 08 April 2011
 Michael Haagensen, Journalist and Academic, Tallinn, Estonia, 11 August 2008
 Natalia Panchenko, Broadcaster, Kyiv, Ukraine, 19 December 2007
 Nikolas Glover, Academic, Stockholm, Sweden, 19 March 2008
 Olari Koppel, Political Advisor, Tallinn, Estonia, 06 November 2007
 Olena Litvenko, Journalist, Kyiv, Ukraine, 13 December 2007
 Orysia Letsevych, NGO Director, Kyiv, Ukraine, 20 December 2007
 Pavlo Grystak, Television Producer, Kyiv, Ukraine, 12 December 2007
 Philippe Naughton, Journalist, Moscow, Russia, 15 May 2009
 Pille-Triin Männik, Project Manager of “Tallinn 2011”, Tallinn, Estonia, 13 August 2008
 Roman Kalyn, Singer, Kyiv, Ukraine, 13 December 2007
 Riina Kionka, Diplomat, Tallinn, Estonia, 11 August 2008
 Sarah Squire, Diplomat, Cambridge, UK, 15 January 2008
 Sietse Baker, EBU Project Manager, Tallinn, Estonia, 26 November 2007

Signe Kivi, Politician & Academic, Tallinn, Estonia, 26 November 2007
Svante Stockselius, ESC Executive Supervisor, Stockholm, Sweden, 03 April 2008
Svitlana Bazhanova, Production Assistant, Kyiv, Ukraine, 11 December 2007
Tiia Raudma, Political Advisor, Tallinn, Estonia, 09 April 2008
Tiiu Simm, PR Manager, Tallinn, Estonia, 02 November 2007
Ülar Mark, Architect & Designer, Tallinn, Estonia, 25 November 2007
Valentin Yakushik, Academic Professor, Kyiv, Ukraine, 19 December 2007
Vasyl Myroshnychenko, PR Consultant, Kyiv, Ukraine, 05 December 2007
Yuriy Melnik, PR Manager, Kyiv, Ukraine, 13 December 2007

Public-level respondents (cited):

Andri, student, Tallinn, Estonia, 12 November 2007
Dima, researcher, Tallinn, Estonia, 27 November 2007
Dmitry, research assistant, Narva, Estonia, 23 November 2007
Margit, Travel agent, Tallinn, Estonia, 17 November 2007
Maimu, occupation unknown, Tallinn, Estonia, 08 April 2008
Mayu, research assistant, Cardiff, UK, 02 April 2013
Meelis, occupation unknown, Interview, 08 April 2008
Riina, housewife, Tallinn, Estonia, 08 April 2008

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This book provides a unique and intriguing insight into current debates concerning the relationship between nation and state as well as the political management of international image in today's Europe through an examination of debates on nation branding and the Eurovision Song Contest. Europe is a contested construct and its boundaries are subject to redefinition. This work aims to advance critical thinking about contemporary nation branding and its relationship to, and influence on, nation building. In particular it focusses on key identity debates that the Eurovision Song Contest engendered in Estonia in the run-up to EU accession. The Eurovision Song Contest is an event which is often dismissed as musically and culturally inferior. However, this work demonstrates that it has the capacity to shed light on key identity debates and illuminate wider socio-political issues. Using a series of in-depth interviews with political elites, media professionals and opinion leaders, this book is a valuable contribution to the growing field of research on nation branding and the Eurovision Song Contest.

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