

# Estonia's Knight Returns

MEL HUANG

**T**he results of the 2001 Estonian presidential elections shocked the country and many outside observers, as former communist-era leader Arnold Rüütel won the post by a slim margin in a specially convened Electoral College. Few analysts had given his third bid for the presidency much of a chance, and most opinion polls agreed. Thus, the election result came to most as a total surprise, and to some a rather negative one.<sup>1</sup>

Although the power of the Estonian presidency, if examined constitutionally, is generally limited, the position does carry a significant symbolic and political-influential force. The bulk of the president's powers are linked to foreign affairs, as the head of state represents Estonia overseas and at home. Most of the appointment powers of the president require parliamentary confirmation (for cabinet members and other top officials) or other consultative agreement with the government (for ambassadors). Although the president also serves as supreme commander of national defense, the practical application of this has remained consultative. The president holds limited veto power over legislation, with deadlocked bills decided by the Supreme Court. For the most part, the power of the Estonian presidency is stronger than that of Germany but weaker than that of Lithuania or Poland.

Attempts to explain the electoral triumph of Rüütel over candidates from the three-party center-right ruling coalition of *Mõõdukad*, the Reform Party, and Pro Patria Union instead exacerbated the already growing tensions within the trio; indeed, the coalition collapsed within a few months. But whatever the explanation offered, Rüütel was nevertheless elected and will serve as president until the next election in autumn 2006; in other words, Rüütel—formerly the highest ranking official in Soviet Estonia—will likely lead the country into NATO and the EU.

Why did Estonia, largely seen as one of the leaders of reform in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), choose this relic of a bygone era to lead it back into Europe? Does Rüütel's election actually indicate a political maturity or perhaps even a symbolic end to the transition period?<sup>2</sup> And the key question is whether

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Mel Huang is a research associate at the Scottish Center for International Security, University of Aberdeen. Previously he worked as a Baltics analyst for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and as Baltics editor of the *Central Europe Review*.

the knight in question (the word *rüütel* in Estonian means *knight*) will be a dark knight riding in from Estonia's gloomy past or a knight in shining armor on a white horse, leading Estonia into a bright future—or perhaps both.

### Where Have the Ex-Communists Gone?

For the most part, Estonia's top communist functionaries from the 1980s fell from public prominence, unlike those in many other CEE countries. Arnold Rüütel, who became chairman of the presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet in 1983, is the sole top functionary still active in politics. However, despite being a popular member of parliament (MP), his profile diminished over recent years as he relinquished his leadership role in his party, the rural-focused Estonian People's Union (*Eestimaa Rahvaliid*). His profile only rose in August 2001 during the events commemorating the tenth anniversary of the restoration of Estonian independence, in historical reflections, mainly on television.

Other high-ranking former communists bowed out of politics for the most part; for example, former chairman of the Council of Ministers Indrek Toome has transformed himself into a real estate developer able to work easily with the Scandinavian partners that dominate the construction market in Estonia. The former Communist Party, renamed the Estonian Social Democratic Labour Party (*Eesti Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Tööpartei*), gained a minute representation in the parliament in the 1999 general elections by running in a coalition with the Estonian United People's Party (*Eestimaa Ühendatud Rahvapartei*), a mostly Russophone party.

The case is rather different in many other CEE countries, as many of the former Communist Parties successfully transformed themselves into some "social democratic" or "democratic labor" party. Poland's former communists, now constituting the Democratic Left Alliance (*Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej*), are now in their second stint in power following the fall of communism, and President Alexander Kwaśniewski—a former minor communist-era cabinet minister—remains popular in his second term. Much the same occurred in Lithuania, where the former communists in the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (*Lietuvos Socialdemokratų Partija*) are in their second stint in power; former Communist Party leader Algirdas Brazauskas served as the country's fifth president (1993–98) and is currently prime minister.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon is less prevalent in Latvia, though former Latvian Supreme Soviet chairman Anatolijs Gorbunovs has been in the cabinet for years and remains one of the more popular politicians in the country.<sup>4</sup> Latvia's political problem is also exacerbated by the political activity of several high-profile activists against independence, like Tatjana Ždanoka and former Riga mayor and hard-line communist Alfrēds Rubiks.

Certainly some of the lesser Communist Party functionaries remain in the Estonian political system only a decade removed from the restoration of independence. After all, Estonia did not force outright lustration like some other CEE countries, most notably the Czech Republic. However, many of the most active politicians today worked to reform the system. For example, the current partners in the two-party centrist ruling coalition—the ultraliberal Reform Party

(*Reformierakond*) and the center-left Center Party (*Keskerakond*)—are led respectively by Siim Kallas and Edgar Savisaar; the two composed half of the team that envisioned economic independence for Estonia with their *Isemajandav Eesti* (Self-Managed Estonia) plan in 1987.<sup>5</sup> Current prime minister Kallas served later as the head of the central bank, chiefly responsible for introducing the *kroon* in July 1992 against IMF advice, while Savisaar served as a leader of the Estonian Popular Front (*Eestimaa Rahvarinne*) and was the transitional prime minister. However, for the most part the major former Communist Party players are not on the front lines of politics in Estonia—except for Rüütel.

### Running Up to the Election

Even as early as 1999 the issue of who would succeed Lennart Meri dominated the political scene. Meri, having served as president since the re-establishment of the post in 1992 but barred by term limits from a third term, in effect symbolized the development of Estonia since the restoration of independence. Few Estonians remember another president.<sup>6</sup> The possibility of a new person in Kadriorg, the president's residence, was enticing to every political party.

The results of the March 1999 parliamentary elections clearly indicated that the August-September 2001 presidential election would be difficult. By law, for a president to be elected, he or she must receive a supermajority of votes, or sixty-eight, in the 101-seat Riigikogu. The ruling coalition controlled only a few more seats than the bare fifty-one-seat majority in the parliament. Though the opposition was fractious, so was the coalition on the issue of the president. The Riigikogu has only three rounds to try to elect a president, unlike in Latvia, where the process is indefinite (plus in Latvia, only a simple majority of the hundred-member Saeima is necessary to elect a president).

If the Riigikogu cannot resolve the matter, a special Electoral College is convened. The body is composed of the 101 parliament members, along with 266 representatives of local councils.<sup>7</sup> Most of the councils have one representative, although some of the big cities have a few more. However, the balance is clearly on the side of small rural communities. For example, Tartu, a city of more than seventy thousand voters, sent four representatives from the city council to the Electoral College. On the other hand, the Tartu county parishes of Laeva, Piirisaare, Meeksi, and Peipsiääre, with a combined electoral base of just over 2,200, have in total the same number of representatives to the body. In fact, both the tiny island of Ruhnu (sixty-one voters) and the city of Valga (9,093 voters) have the same number of representatives to the Electoral College: one.<sup>8</sup> With this scenario in mind it is puzzling to see why the ruling center-right coalition pushed to merge small councils, triggering anger from many of them.

By the October 1999 local elections the presidential campaign had already begun. The most obvious attempt at using the presidential card for the campaign was the one run by the centrist party *Mõõdukad*.<sup>9</sup> Though nominally a social democratic party, *Mõõdukad* worked closely with the ultraliberal Reform Party and the conservative Pro Patria Union in the three-party national coalition. *Mõõdukad* did well in the March 1999 general elections, winning 15.21 percent of the

votes and seventeen seats. However, their campaign slogan for their party leader, Andres Tarand, "*Tarand Presidendiks—Vali Mõõdukad*" ("Tarand for President—Vote Mõõdukad"), backfired, as it appeared like a sidestepping of real issues.<sup>10</sup> The party was especially hard hit in the cities, where just a few months earlier in the general elections the results were quite good. For example, even with an expanded electorate in the local elections, the party registered a major drop in just eight months: the Tallinn total was 16,824 in the March general elections and 12,584 in the October local elections, and the Tartu total was 5,914 in March, 2,267 in October.<sup>11</sup> The attempt to promote the presidential issue at that point failed for the party, as people just did not see the connection.

The year 2000 was dominated by the growing campaign, as various parties pushed their candidates forward. The candidacy of Rüütel was expected from his small (eleven seats) Estonian People's Union, as was the candidacy of Andres Tarand from Mõõdukad and of Riigikogu speaker Toomas Savi from the Reform Party.<sup>12</sup> The Pro Patria Union (*Isamaaliit*) of then-prime minister Mart Laar suffered a major internal split as the originally proposed candidate of Riigikogu deputy speaker Tunne Kelam was replaced by protest votes for Peeter Tulviste, a Tartu city councilor and former rector of Tartu University. The main opposition Center Party was also embroiled in controversy when the naming of Peeter Kreitzberg as its candidate instead of its 1996 candidate, Siiri Oviir, led to accusations of the party's being antiwomen.

By 2001 most opinion polls saw the contest as a two-horse race between Savi and Tulviste, though Rüütel had crept up as the election neared. In May 2001 EMOR polled 20 percent support for Savi, compared to 30 percent for Tulviste and 8 percent for Rüütel; however, by late August, with the saturation coverage of events from a decade ago, Rüütel's support jumped to 20 percent, while Savi's remained at 20 percent and Tulviste's crashed to 21 percent.<sup>13</sup>

However, as the race grew closer, the polling mattered less, as the public had no vote in the presidential election. Pollsters attempted to survey rural councils, but that proved overly complex and basically haphazard. For example, a quick poll by the daily *Eesti Päevaleht* in April, months away from the election, indicated that about 32 percent of council chairmen supported Tulviste, while another 21 percent supported Savi;<sup>14</sup> the results in September did not bear out these preliminary votes of support.<sup>15</sup>

The polling results were subordinated with analysis of the political orientations and party affiliations of the leader(s) of the councils. However, just looking at the raw figures as compiled by *Postimees* on the eve of the Electoral College meeting, the results are quite unsatisfactory; of the 266 local council representatives, only about forty openly supported or held a definitive party affiliation with one of the main candidates, Rüütel and Savi (with less for Tulviste and Kreitzberg).<sup>16</sup> With no response from about sixty of them and a further sixty-three nonparty officials not inclined to reveal their choice, there was not much fodder to use to predict the outcome.

The Riigikogu convened on 27 August for the first round in the presidential elections. The fact that the heavy-hitters—Savi, Tulviste, and Rüütel—did not put

their names up for vote showed the feeling of inevitability of a parliamentary failure. The first round yielded forty votes for opposition MP Peeter Kreitzberg and thirty-eight for coalition candidate Andres Tarand. Tulviste did end up participating in the second round the following day, replacing Tarand from the coalition, but that vote was also inconclusive, with thirty-six for Kreitzberg and thirty-five for Tulviste. The third round, a runoff of the second, was a draw of thirty-three votes for each candidate. The stage was set for the Electoral College.

In the meantime, the issue of representatives to the Electoral College hit the headlines. Though in smaller councils the issue was more easily resolved since they had one vote, in larger cities the distribution became more complex. The most

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notable problem came in Tartu, with its four mandates. Though the ruling coalition in Tartu mirrored the national coalition—Reform Party (mayor’s post), Pro Patria Union (council leader), and Mõõdukad—the distribution of votes did not reflect the coalition nor the council’s composition. Reform’s controversial mayor in Tartu, Andrus Ansip,

instead kept three mandates for Reform representatives and granted one to the opposition Tartu-2000 coalition as a not-so-thinly veiled snub to the Pro Patria Union, whose candidate Peeter Tulviste was actually the Tartu City Council chairman. Tartu-2000 only held four seats in the forty-nine-member Tartu City Council, as opposed to the fourteen held by the Pro Patria Union (and the twenty by Reform). The Tartu-2000 representative at the Electoral College voted for the Reform Party’s candidate. This incident collapsed the coalition, and Ansip broke the trend by crafting a new coalition with the disliked Center Party and Tartu-2000.

The Electoral College convened on 21 September. The first round featured four candidates, two from the coalition and two from the opposition. Though a row broke out between the opposition Center Party and the Estonian People’s Union during the parliamentary rounds, there was a tacit agreement on a united front for the opposition candidate getting into the second round. There was little chance that any of the four would win a majority of the 367 Electoral College votes (provided by 101 MPs and 266 local council representatives), thus a two-candidate runoff would determine the outcome. And logic dictated that the opposition (most likely Rüütel) would get one of the runoff posts since the coalition would be divided with their candidates, Toomas Savi and Peeter Tulviste. The last EMOR poll of public opinion indicated that a third thought Savi would be elected, though he only had 22 percent actual support; Rüütel also had 22 percent actual support, but only 8 percent thought he could be elected.<sup>17</sup> However, most analysts and pundits predicted further that the coalition candidate would win the runoff, with one major paper going so far as to editorialize that Rüütel was “always second.”<sup>18</sup>

Most analysts just did not believe that there would be enough electors to support the former communist leader, predicting a failed election (where no candidates receive a majority in the runoff) as the likelier outcome in case the coalition candidate failed.

The first-round results shocked everyone involved. Though not nearing a majority, Arnold Rüütel—the twice-losing candidate—came in first with 114 votes. Toomas Savi came in second with ninety, and Tulviste in third with a hard-luck eighty-nine.<sup>19</sup> Therefore the runoff would be between Rüütel and Savi. However, the real shock was the vote total for the fourth candidate, the Center Party's Peeter Kreitzberg. He gained seventy-two votes. Quick arithmetic shows that the opposition won 186 votes, two more votes than needed to squeak out a victory.

Shocked by this realization, many coalition supporters walked out of the Estonia Concert Hall. The opposition showed remarkable discipline in that all of its electors stuck to the agreement, which opposition leader Edgar Savisaar said gave them a “new enthusiasm and vigor.”<sup>20</sup> The second round gave Rüütel a win with the exact 186 votes calculated from the opposition total of the first round, compared to 155 for Savi (reflecting the walkouts). Rüütel, out of the blue, was elected to the job he had held over a decade ago, one he had coveted since, one that no one thought he would regain.

### The Knight's Tale

Arnold Rüütel was born on the island of Saaremaa in 1928 and pursued a career in agriculture. After various posts Rüütel rose in 1963 to become the director of a model collective farm near Tartu, then rector of the Agricultural Academy in 1969. Rüütel first entered a major public role in 1977 with his appointment as the agriculture minister for the republic.

However, the gradual trend in “nativization” of the communist regimes started in Estonia in the early 1980s, as native-born Estonians replaced so-called “Yestonians” born and raised in Russia.<sup>21</sup> Rüütel rose to become the deputy chairman of the Committee of Ministers and was thus in line to become the chairman; however, internal political struggle resulted in Rüütel's being made chairman of the presidium of the Estonian Supreme Soviet in 1983, the de facto symbolic head of the republic.

Though generally mild-mannered, Rüütel took part in some of the most significant declarations of the late 1980s, ranging from the 16 November 1988 declaration about sovereignty to the 18 January 1989 law establishing Estonian as the official language. As the de facto head of the republic, Rüütel received a fair share of scoldings from the Kremlin for Estonia's actions. Rüütel also championed Baltic cooperation, at first with the Baltic Council. Nevertheless, Estonia under Rüütel moved into autonomy and eventually independence, as Rüütel continued as the de facto head of state and also as a member of the constituent assembly. And through all this Rüütel successfully defended his doctorate in 1991.

Rüütel was by far the most popular politician in Estonia after the restoration of independence. A poll by EMOR conducted in March 1991 indicated that Rüütel had a 94 percent approval rating among ethnic Estonians and 52 percent

among non-Estonians, the highest among both groups.<sup>22</sup> In the constituent assembly, however, the figure of a powerful president was not created despite both the far right (in large part returning émigrés) and the left (which sought power for Rüütel), and the constitution left the president with a weak set of powers.<sup>23</sup> Though the elections for president were to be taken by the parliament, the first round of the very first elections on 20 September 1992 was given to the public—on the same day as the first post-Soviet parliamentary elections.

Not surprisingly, with his popularity, Rüütel won the most votes—195,473, or 41.77 percent.<sup>24</sup> However, this was short of the majority needed to be elected, therefore a runoff was necessary. The runoff, as prescribed by law, was held in the newly elected Sixth Riigikogu, which was dominated by the center-right. The center-right moved against the popular choice and managed to elect Lennart Meri, a well-known writer and documentary filmmaker, transitional foreign minister, and ambassador to Finland, over Rüütel by a fifty-nine to thirty-one vote on 5 October.

Despite his popularity Rüütel lost his head-of-state post in 1992. In 1994 he founded the Estonian Rural People's Party (*Eesti Maarahva Erakond*), a centrist, rural-based party.<sup>25</sup> The party ran in a coalition with the centrist Coalition Party (*Koonderakond*) in the 5 March 1995 general elections, in which the coalition won a strong forty-one seats (out of 101). Rüütel did not serve in the cabinet; instead he took the job of Riigikogu deputy speaker to prepare for a challenge to Lennart Meri in the 1996 presidential elections. At the time Meri was quite popular with the public; he was perceived as a “wise, grandfatherly” figure, very much the elder statesman of a young (figuratively and literally) political system, and his remarkable ability to charm foreign dignitaries also made him a well-loved figure among many outside of Estonia. However, Meri was rather unpopular among politicians for what was seen as an aggressive hunger for power, which led him to stretch the limits of his constitutionally defined job description, especially in trying to influence day-to-day domestic politics.

Unfortunately for Rüütel, Meri repaired his reputation with politicians in time. The August-September 1996 presidential elections featured Meri as the favored candidate, but there appeared too little support in the parliament. Though Meri won more votes than Rüütel in all the parliamentary rounds (45–34 on 26 August, 49–34 and 52–32 on 27 August), it was short of the two-thirds supermajority needed to win. Therefore, a special 374-strong Electoral College (101 MPs and 273 local council representatives) was convened on 20 September and some new candidates came forward. The first round resulted in a strong finish for Meri (139), while Rüütel went into the runoff in second place (85).<sup>26</sup> The runoff came out in favor, as expected, of Meri, who won by a 196 to 126 vote.

Many had thought that the career of Rüütel, now sixty-eight, was close to over. In the same year there had been many rumors about his health and mental state, especially after a minor car accident. Finnish, then Estonian, tabloids reported that Rüütel was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Though Rüütel furiously denied it, the rumors continued and further damaged his reputation. Rüütel played a significant role as an MP, especially in working with other Balts in the Baltic Assembly, but his role continued to diminish, even within his party. The ambi-

tious Villu Reiljan rose to become the leader of the party and moved it a step to the left by the incorporation of the Estonian Pensioners and Families Party (*Eesti Pensionäride ja Perede Erakond*) and the Estonian Rural Union (*Eesti Maaliit*). The newly merged party, the Estonian People's Union, was founded in 1999 and made Rützel its honorary chairman and candidate for president. Few then would have believed that the dwindling party and its former leader would come back so strongly two years later.

### Aftershock or Afterglow?

At first the shock to Estonia was tremendous; it seemed unreal that after almost a decade, Rützel was back as the country's leader. He had been marginalized for so long as a quiet MP, seen as a historical rather than contemporary figure, and his failed attempt in 1996 to win the job from Lennart Meri was thought to be the end of his illustrious career. The aftershock of his win was immediate.

On the main media sites, the comments at first were extreme and sometimes rather irresponsible. Within the first few hours after the elections, there were veiled and some not-so-veiled calls for the election's invalidation (on all sorts of grounds, including health) or even Rützel's assassination.<sup>27</sup> However, this knee-jerk reaction on the ultrademocratic Internet soon tempered into quiet acceptance of the fact, which soon even evolved into a warmth toward Rützel, but not quite an afterglow. A poll taken by EMOR in October 2001 indicates that only 31 percent of respondents thought Rützel would become more prominent than his predecessor Lennart Meri, whereas 35 percent thought he would be less prominent.<sup>28</sup> A prominent coalition MP recalled hearing complaints back in Tartu such as "Why did you let this happen?"<sup>29</sup> Losing candidate Toomas Savi commented after the defeat that "democracy won in Estonia" because the Electoral College made its decision.<sup>30</sup> Most commentaries carried a tone of reconciliation (much like the rhetoric used in the postelection United States), with the leading daily *Postimees* editorial putting it best:

The presidential election period was nervous, full of tension and antagonism. But it pays to remember that all the candidates were of the single mindset in that irrespective of the election's outcome, others will accept the people's choice. Yesterday the nation did not voice their choice for Arnold Rützel directly but via their own democratic representative and has come to accept that vote. Estonia is and must stay a democratic *Rechtsstaat*.<sup>31</sup>

However, the damage to the three-party ruling coalition was certainly severe, with one ranking coalition MP saying that "shock is the best coercion to learn."<sup>32</sup> The parties refrained from mutual public accusation over the defeat by doing some "self-reflection," but the lengthy campaign chipped a major crack in their solidarity. What happened with the Tartu City Council was more than telling, as the Pro Patria Union and Mõõdukad voiced displeasure at Reform's choosing to work with the disliked Center Party instead.

The theme repeated itself in Tallinn in December. Tensions, already thick after the presidential debacle, were exacerbated over a dispute about a city loan proposed by Mayor Tõnis Palts of the Pro Patria Union. The notoriously fiscally con-



servative Reform Party balked at the move and quit the coalition over the issue. However, the fact that Reform chose to work with the Center Party, making the controversial ex-prime minister Edgar Savisaar the mayor of Tallinn, angered the other two to the breaking point. At the passing of the 2002 national budget, Prime Minister Laar announced his resignation and collapsed the coalition. Eventually Reform and Center teamed up again to form the current government headed by Siim Kallas (Reform), confirmed in mid-January 2002.

Although much of the tension among the three-party coalition came from various other problems—regional administrative reform, value-added tax for heating, and others—the presidential election fiasco was the symbolic demonstration of the three's inability to override self-interest for the common good. The lack of a united coalition candidate from an earlier point exacerbated the tensions and showed the increasing differences among the three, and it symbolically signaled the end of their cooperation. Nothing went right for the coalition after the election failure, and it ended in total collapse just months after the opposition victory.

### **What Caused the Röötel Victory?**

Various opinions exist on why Röötel won the election, but as I hinted in above sections, the overriding reason for the victory was the failed attempts at regional administrative reform by the government. Though part of the coalition's campaign pledge, it was divisive because different coalition parties approached reform differently. Issues such as the final number of local administrations, or even whether the changes were to be mandated or voluntary, exacerbated the intercoalition tension. By election time nothing had been enacted due to continuing cabinet disagreement over the reform plan, but the entire debate incensed many local councilors. Although most politicians in Tallinn agreed that a small country like Estonia, with under 1.4 million people, does not need over 240 local councils, the reaction from the local councils to draft plans for their forced mergers or even division was seriously negative.

Looking at the Electoral College, we see that a large number of the electors represented small councils, ones that the ruling coalition sought to shut down. Of the 266 electors from local councils, 196 represented constituencies with less than three thousand voters. And with many of them poor rural communities, the choice seemed to be the Tallinn-centric, urban-based ruling coalition or the rural-focused opposition. Most pundits before the vote really believed that a hung election was more probable than a Röötel victory, just by looking at history and the stigma of a "return to the past" for many of the electors. In hindsight, a Röötel victory was so rarely considered a possibility that it was just ignored—in a way, demonstrating the urban, Tallinn-centric nature of the media and political analysts. Rural wins one over urban.

### **Whither Leads the Knight?**

Immediately after the election of Röötel, there was worry among the three parties in the ruling coalition that policy could be affected. Though the president holds little power in domestic politics, with the one-time veto being his most pow-

erful tool, the president does exert significant influence in foreign policy. Looking at his party's 1999 platform, the Estonian Rural People's Party strongly supported Estonia's NATO and EU bid, though the latter is deemed to require a referendum.<sup>33</sup> However, some of the strongest Euroskeptic rhetoric in recent years has come from disenchanted farmers and some of Rützel's closest political allies.

Within a short time after taking office, Rützel made several strong remarks about his support for Estonia's EU membership, which actually raised public support for EU membership, according to a poll conducted soon after.<sup>34</sup> Then-prime minister Mart Laar also called on Rützel to help explain EU integration to the public.<sup>35</sup> Yet when the European Commission announced a transition period for the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, the subsidies system granting money to new members, the same Euroskepticism resurfaced, especially among rural interests such as members of the president's former party.

Thus it is clear, with all parties agreeing that a referendum is necessary on Estonia's joining the EU, that the vocal support of Rützel is vital. Supporters of the center-right parties, such as the conservative Pro Patria Union (of ex-prime minister Laar) and the ultraliberal Reform Party (of Prime Minister Kallas), would overwhelmingly support EU membership. However, the difficulty comes from other voters, especially the disenfranchised poor and the disengaged rural communities. This segment of the population looks highly on Rützel, thus his influence on EU integration could be pivotal in the referendum.

However, most of Estonia's main domestic policies are written in stone, ranging from the pegged currency (EUR 1 = EEK 15.65) to extreme fiscal discipline in legally mandated balanced budgets. The issue that had separated the center-right parties and the left-leaning Center Party was taxation, as the centrists pushed for a progressive income tax, an idea anathema to their coalition partner, the Reform Party. The two agreed to keep the current tax situation, to fight the issue at the next elections, in March 2003. But with all major political parties in agreement on most of the other major points, there is little reason to think that the Rützel presidency would change anything significantly for the worse.

One possibility is the improvement of links with Russia. Already a few months into his term, the president's office is discussing a possible summit with Russian president Vladimir Putin as a step toward rapprochement. There is no worry among Estonian parties about Rützel's abandoning Estonia's citizenship and language policies, since his party is as conservative about national issues as the main conservative party, the Pro Patria Union; before the March 1999 general elections the party responded to a questionnaire by Estonian news agency ETA by saying,

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“[T]he state’s citizenship policy is liberal enough, and we do not approve of any further concessions.”<sup>36</sup>

One source of limitation for Rütel is his lack of foreign language skills, especially compared to those of the multilingual Lennart Meri. Meri would answer a press conference question in French if the question came from a French journalist, for example. Rütel has only Russian as a foreign language, and—very importantly—no English. This limits his diplomatic options compared to Meri, Latvia’s multilingual (former Quebecois) president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, and Lithuania’s (former U.S. citizen) Valdas Adamkus. In the past it was the other way around, with the multilingual Meri, a more limited Guntis Ulmanis from Latvia, and Algirdas Brazauskas from Lithuania, who spoke no English.

For the most part, the election of Arnold Rütel shows both the openness of Estonia’s democracy and its reconciliation with its past, indeed demonstrating its increasing maturity. Opinion makers in the media and politicians, even those who did not support Rütel during the campaign, called it a victory for Estonia’s democracy, despite the outcome. Arnold Rütel does indeed represent a figure from the past, but that does not preclude him from being a figure in the present and future. Estonia has matured enough to understand this, which is the real mark of how far the country has come in just over a decade.

#### NOTES

1. I would like to thank Fredo Arias-King for suggesting this topic and for his help.
2. For example, Ilvi Masso, “President valitud. Elagu president!” *Postimees*, 24 September 2001.
3. The original successors of the Lithuanian Communist Party, *Lietuvos Demokrat? Darb? Partija* (Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party), officially merged with the Social Democrats in early 2001.
4. This despite serving the difficult portfolio of transportation and communications.
5. The plan’s name is contracted into IME, which in Estonian means “miracle.”
6. For that you have to go back to Konstantin Päts, who was “officially” in the office named “president” from 1938 to 1940. There was no president per se before that, and Päts was one of the first victims of the Soviet occupation. He was deported to the Urals and died in a mental institution in Kalinin.
7. That changes depending on the number of local councils; for example, the number of local council representatives at the 1996 Electoral College was 273.
8. All official election data was taken from the official Web site of the Estonia Electoral Commission, <<http://www.vvk.ee>>.
9. The name *Mõõdukad* can be roughly translated as “Moderates,” but the party insists that the English version of its name be its Estonian name, as some Irish parties do.
10. Mel Huang, “A Deflating Election Experience,” *Central Europe Review*, 25 October 1999.
11. In local elections noncitizens who are permanent residents are allowed to vote, thus increasing the number of voters by a significant amount (especially in urban races).
12. Originally, the Estonian Rural People’s Party elected only seven MPs, but after the formation of the Estonian People’s Union, with two MPs each from the Rural Union and the Pensioners and Families Party, who won seats running with the Coalition Party, the number rose to eleven total.
13. Argo Ideon, “Kolmandik rahvas ennustab Toomas Savi võitu,” *Postimees*, 21 September 2001.

14. PM-Online, "Valijamehed eelistavad Tulvistet," 23 April 2001, <<http://www.postimees.ee/index.html?number=425&op=luгу&id=17849>>.
15. Doing quick arithmetic, this would translate into at least eighty-five votes from local councils, and clearly Tulviste did not receive this many votes from council representatives at the Electoral College.
16. *Postimees*, "Presidenti valib 367-liikmeline valijameeste kogu," 18 September 2001.
17. Ideon, "Kolmandik rahvas ennustab Toomas Savi võitu."
18. *Postimees*, "Arnold Rüütel—igavene teine," editorial, 7 September 2001.
19. This result incensed the Pro Patria Union most, since if the Tartu City Council representatives voted according to the original coalition's strength, the results would have been reversed, giving Tulviste ninety and Savi eighty-nine.
20. Argo Ideon, "Rüütli võit tiivustas poliitilist vastasrinda," *Postimees*, 22 September 2001.
21. They were called "Yestonians" because Russians tend to palatalize initial *Es* when speaking.
22. Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: A Return to Independence* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 198.
23. Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm, "Recent Historical Developments in Estonia: Three Stages of Transition (1987–1997)," *Return to the Western World*, ed. Marju Lauristin and Peeter Vihalemm (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 1997), 101.
24. Rüütel was followed by Lennart Meri with 138,317 (29.52 percent), Rein Taagepera with 109,631 (23.40 percent), and Lagle Parek with 19,837 (4.23 percent).
25. They describe themselves as conservative.
26. The pair was followed by Deputy Riigikogu Speaker Tunne Kelam (seventy-six), Tartu professor Enn Tõugu (forty-seven), and MP Siiri Oviir (twenty-five).
27. A quick scan of the various comments on the elections on popular Web sites such as *Postimees* ([www.postimees.ee](http://www.postimees.ee)), *Eesti Päevaleht* ([www.epl.ee](http://www.epl.ee)), and *Delfi* ([www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)) included some of the chilling ideas.
28. Argo Ideon, "Rahvas paneb Arnold Rüütli suuri lootusi," *Postimees*, 29 October 2001.
29. Marju Lauristin, "Shokk on poliitikas parim õpetaja," *Postimees*, 26 September 2001.
30. Opinion from Toomas Savi, *Postimees*, 22 September 2001.
31. *Postimees*, "Demokraatlik valik," editorial, 22 September 2001.
32. Lauristin, "Shokk on poliitikas parim õpetaja."
33. Taken from ETA (Estonian News Agency) questionnaires to parties, published by the Estonian Foreign Ministry, 2 March 1999.
34. Argo Ideon, "Arnold Rüütli seisukohad toetasid Euroopa Liidu reitingut," *Postimees*, 19 November 2001.
35. BNS, "Laar loodab Rüütli abi ELi teema selgitamisel," *Postimees*, 27 September 2001.
36. ETA questionnaires, published by Estonian Foreign Ministry.