

Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center

## **Evaluation of Estonian Political Science Research**

*Institutes evaluated:*

**University of Tartu:  
Department of Political Science  
Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn Pedagogical University  
Tallinn Pedagogical University:  
Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Government**

*Evaluation dates:*

*May 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> 2002*

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## **Introduction**

The evaluation team was invited to Estonia by the Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center to evaluate research in Political Science in Estonia. The visit was carried out during the period of 7-12 May 2002. Initially, the team was supposed to evaluate four research units – the Department of Political Science and the Department of Public Administration at the University of Tartu, the Department of Government at the Institute for International and Social Studies and the Department of Government at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Tallinn Pedagogical University. As the Department of Public Administration in Tartu decided to withdraw from the evaluation at a very late stage of the process (a decision that surprised the team and which we have difficulty in understanding since the Department seems to be an essential part of the Political Science community in Estonia), the team finally ended up evaluating the three remaining units.

The evaluation was carried out through an examination of self-evaluation reports provided by the units and on-site visits. Interviews were held with members of staff, including researchers as well as post-graduate students (the latter group was interviewed separately). Each department was asked to provide the team with a limited number of publications, representing the best work done at the unit during the evaluation period (1997-2002). Despite the obvious shortcomings associated with citation indexes, we also inspected such an index to see how often scholars from the different units were cited. Altogether, these different types of material provided us with a solid basis for evaluating the quantity and quality of research, while taking into account conditions for doing research in Estonia in general as well as in each respective unit.

The report is organized in the following way. We start by commenting upon the general conditions for conducting research in Political Science in Estonia, with a special focus on funding and working conditions and on factors that influence what type of research is carried out. After this, we present evaluations of each unit. The team has been requested to distinguish and comment upon separate research groups if more than one such group exist within a unit. As the size of all units under study is limited, and we do not want to comment upon individual scholars, we have decided to focus mainly on each research environment as a whole. There is not, in any of the places we visited, distinctive research groups that could be evaluated and graded separately. We conclude by giving some final remarks.

## **Conditions for research**

Political Science is a relatively new discipline in Estonia. During the Soviet era, research on politics was impossible to carry out. It is therefore not until the late 1980s that we can talk in a meaningful way about Political Science research in the country. This means that the scholars involved were faced with a huge task in building both research capacity and teaching curricula. It seems as if the university departments with teaching responsibilities prioritised the latter task during most of the 1990s. This had obvious consequences for their research activities, leading to research being carried out mainly on an ad hoc-basis, without any over-all, strategic planning.

A major problem confronting the social sciences in general, and Political Science in particular, is the level and types of funding. The amount of state funding available each year is by international standards very small. Of the two main types of funding, Estonian Science Foundation grants are extremely small, and are most often used for conference participation, employment of Master students for limited research assignments etcetera. Targeted funding, which is more long-term and involves larger sums of money, is the mode of financing that provides for continuity and stable working conditions for research. At the moment, there are only two Political Science departments that receive such grants (one being the Department of Public Administration in Tartu). One more unit has handed in an application for next year. The practical effect of not having targeted funding seems to be that the unit concerned is unable to carry out strategically planned research. Receiving targeted funding also facilitates the creation of interaction and co-operation between unit members. The difficulty in acquiring such basic funding we consider to be a major stumbling block for the development of research in the discipline and has to be remedied if Political Science in Estonia is to achieve international reputation.

To this problematic situation must also be added that a system which does not diminish the teaching load of a scholar if she or he receives research funding is detrimental to good research. A working situation where research has to be conducted alongside burdensome teaching and administrative activities invites superficial research, as no time is provided neither for empirical research nor for developing theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, a system with five-year assessments of all holders of university positions may perhaps tend to improve efficiency in the short run, but it also gives disincentives for producing full-length monographs and other research that requires long and careful preparations. There is in the present situation a high risk that promising scholars may be 'killed' by their workload and will therefore not produce research which is up to the standards they have demonstrated that they can actually achieve.

A comment is also necessary as regards the situation of PhD students. Producing PhDs of high quality is a *sine qua non* for the future of Estonian Political Science. The financial situation confronting today's students, in combination with the temptation of lucrative alternatives (for example, within the civil service), doesn't bode well for the future. The very small number of PhD students also renders it difficult to offer the students high quality doctoral courses. The current project with a doctoral school for all social science disciplines in Tallinn is, seen in this context, a good idea. We would in addition recommend that the possibility for the Political Science departments in Tartu and Tallinn to create joint courses should be investigated as this would increase the number of students and thus be cost-efficient. Another possibility well worth considering is to let more students participate in doctoral courses offered in Finland or other Nordic countries.

In general, more co-operation between the different units is recommended. Integration seems to be on its way as regards teaching curricula between the two departments at the University of Tartu; this should be extended to research co-ordination and co-operation. Careful consideration should be given to the pros and cons of a possible future merger between the departments. In the long run, Political Science at the Institute for International and Social Studies could arguably be integrated with the research environment of the Department of Government in Tallinn. We believe that

stronger research milieus, in terms of number of personnel, than those which exist today are valuable, both for encouraging joint research projects and for giving PhD and Master students a more lively and diverse research context. We want to strongly underline, however, that potential integration should and must not be taken as an excuse for diminishing the number of scholars engaged in research.

### **Some comments on the type of Political Science research pursued in Estonia**

The type and nature of research in Estonia seem to be formed by a number of special circumstances. First, a high demand for applied research, often in connection with government plans and projects, channels scholarly work into R&D projects. This is indeed both natural and valuable, as political scientists may in this way contribute with their expertise to the consolidation of democracy and good governance in the country. The flipside of the coin is that if scholars receive too many such assignments, this tends to diminish their chances of producing more theoretically based research. We have indeed noticed that some very good scholars seem to be involved in far too many tasks at the same time. This may be inevitable at this stage of Estonia's development but it is nevertheless extremely dangerous for the quality of academic output. Secondly, there is the 'Estonian case-syndrome': we have during the last decade witnessed a high demand for country chapters in edited volumes on democratic transition and similar topics. Such chapters are necessary, and several of the scholars involved in this evaluation have contributed chapters to volumes published by very respected international publishing companies. Once again, however, the risk is that relatively descriptive chapters are produced instead of more penetrating theoretical work – often the theoretical design (if any) is the product of the editor. We therefore recommend that Estonian scholars try to publish more in refereed journals than in edited volumes.

The fact that almost all Estonian scholars write primarily about their own country, or on the Baltic region, is in itself no problem. It is natural that the conditions and the problems of the home country colours research, especially in small states. We would, however, like to point out that research on Estonia should ideally, and to the extent possible, be put in a truly comparative perspective, by utilising a general theoretical framework for analysis and/or by introducing comparisons with other nations. This is not always the case in the research we have evaluated, and the situation could thus be improved.

In brief, the following general recommendations are proposed by the evaluation team:

- funding of research has to reach a level that renders long term work on publications for an international audience possible
- a funding system should be crafted that creates incentives for producing monographs and refereed articles for international journals, instead of creating disincentives for doing so
- an investigation should be undertaken which would analyse the advantages and disadvantages of reducing the number of organisational units carrying out research in Political Science, thereby creating sustainable research environments
- while pursuing the present emphasis on studies on Estonia, often of an applied nature, efforts should be made to initiate more theoretically based and comparative research programmes

- efforts should, at the departmental level, be made to focus more on publication in refereed journals, instead of in edited book volumes

## **Department of Political Science, University of Tartu**

### **Institutional structure**

Since its set-up in 1995 the Department of Political Science has developed into a complete academic institution in the sense that there are BA, MA and PhD programmes as well as research in various fields. These activities are carried out by an all-male staff mixture of old and new generations. Technically the Department is subdivided into two parts, 'General Political Science' and 'International Relations', chaired by a Professor (Rein Ruutsoo, PhD, Pol. Sci.) and an Associate Professor (Kaido Jaanson, Cand.hist, IR) respectively. Yet another person (Vello Pettai, Lecturer, PhD candidate) performs the function of Department Head. Moreover two Associate Professors (Eiki Berg, PhD and Andres Kasekamp, PhD), three Lecturers (Evald Mikkel, PhD candidate, Jüri Ruus, PhD candidate, Rein Toomla, PhD candidate), one Researcher (Allan Sikk, PhD candidate) and one Professor Emeritus (Rein Taagepera, PhD) carry out teaching and research duties. Everyone has full-time positions. On top of this the teachers/researchers are assisted by two persons who fulfil administrative tasks (Reelika Niit and Karmo Tüür, both holding BAs). As a factor contributing to the academic atmosphere of the Department we would also like to mention the additional four PhD candidates who are not members of staff. Set up in 1999, the PhD Programme operates with a planned acceptance of three new PhD students each year. Obviously the basis for the PhD programme is the MA programme, currently involving 20 students of which ten are set to graduate in 2002.

By any standard the Department is rather small, especially considering there are only four PhD holders which is far less than comparable departments in the Nordic countries, but it is also fair to claim that the department is close to developing into a multi-faceted Political Science department, with a well-organised research strategy. Given the proper resources it is reasonable to surmise the Department will take this very important step in the not too distant future. Such a development, based on absolutely essential resources, would also make it possible to reach a more normal situation where MA and PhD students mainly carry out studies, with some additional lecturing activities perhaps, while proper positions and leading departmental roles were fulfilled by PhD holders.

Surprisingly, there is no functioning research seminar at the Department. Such an arena would give staff members, PhD students and perhaps also MA students the opportunity to create an even better academic atmosphere. Especially in a country like Estonia, where the subject of Political Science is still in its infancy, scholars need an arena where the characteristics of good Political Science is discussed. A seminar would also provide a forum for invited scholars, Estonian as well as foreign, thus bringing in new ideas and knowledge to the Department on a regular basis. In our experience, lacking a properly run research seminar, a department of any kind risks becoming a set of individuals rather than a joint force. By institutionalising such an

arena the Department would force itself to keep up an ongoing academic debate and to focus on research instead of relying on ad hoc opportunities for such activities. This would be a way of cutting corners in the march towards a critical mass.

One drawback of the present staff structure is the non-existence of PhD holders who have actually graduated in Political Science. On the other hand, the PhD dissertations of these persons focussed on topics of direct political relevance. Still, the influx of proper Political Science knowledge into the departmental structure would be welcome.

Apart from the chair-holders, the age structure of the Department is quite young. All these young scholars appear to be dedicated to their tasks. Sometimes the dedication to their subject lures them into accepting too many tasks outside of the Department, contributing their knowledge to society at large, but leading to impossible workloads. A further reason for these extra assignments is the constant need to bring in new resources both to the separate individuals and to the Department as a whole.

### **Purpose and strategy**

According to the Department's self-evaluation report, 'the Department remains the only full-fledged department of Political Science in Estonia'. While we would be somewhat hesitant in labelling the Department full-fledged we appreciate the Department's aim to cover important aspects of Political Science. The subdivision mentioned above offers an opportunity to specialise under the Political Science umbrella. Under the 'General Political Science' subtitle for instance, fields like parties and party systems, electoral systems and democratic transition and ethnic identities are covered. 'International Relations' cover areas like geopolitics and Baltic Sea/Region international relations. These sub-areas and these research fields are perfectly reasonable. However, the absolute majority of the actual research appears to be focussed on Estonian politics. This already being so, one is slightly surprised to learn that a third departmental chair in 'Baltic Politics' is to be opened in 2003. One way of seeing this strategy would of course be to emphasise the Department's undeniable knowledge about Estonian affairs and that a separate chair in this field is a normal and healthy development. Another way would instead be to fear that there will in the future be three chairs focussing on Estonian (Baltic) affairs. In our experience area-studies are risky. They might bear fruit since they attract scholars with a lot of knowledge about a certain area. But the risks are evident. In the long run, area-focus tends to squeeze out the theoretical framework from research leaving room only for compilation of data without any strong theoretical clout and purpose.

A different departmental strategy would be to try and set up subdivisions in the traditional, classic, Political Science fields: comparative politics, political philosophy, international relations, public administration/policy. On top of this one could have had more specialised fields like Baltic Sea/Region studies. Now the Department has chosen to begin in the specialised field. Be that as it may, we strongly hope the future will lead to the normal subdivisions, thus creating a common language between political scientists in Estonia and elsewhere. This future development must take its time of course. However, in Tartu University there is already a developed, well-staffed Department of Public Administration. In this Department several typical

Political Science research areas are covered, including a fair amount of political philosophy. While we fully appreciate the difficulties connected with joining forces we find it absurd that these two departments should be so separate (even taken already BA/MA co-operation into account). A merger would in one sweep really make possible a 'full-fledged' department covering all aspects of Political Science. A move like this would create a strong department in Tartu. The Department should reflect on the pros and cons of this and/or other co-operation measures.

So far, the Department has failed to attract 'target funding' grants from the Ministry of Education. The express strategy of the Department, therefore, is to secure such funding. In line with this strategy an application for the 2003-2007 period has been set up and submitted. According to the application, extensive empirical surveys (mass and exit poll studies, focus group and structured interviews) will be carried out. The project's theoretical framework states 'Forms of political alienation' as dependent variable and as independent variables 'Institutional structure,' 'Elite political culture,' 'Functioning of political networks' and 'Political communication.' These variables appear intuitively sound. However, the exact relationship between the independent variables remains unclear and does not seem to be crafted from a carefully thought-out theoretical framework. Moreover, the dependent variable, 'alienation', does not connect to the established language in this type of research field.

A clearer research puzzle drawn from a body of theory to which the researchers wanted to provide new generalisable results would have made the proposal even stronger. One way of doing this would have been to challenge the huge literature on political trust with the intention of providing better understanding of this field through the addition of the Estonian data. On the other hand, it is absolutely clear that several of the proposed variables are often encountered in international research. Since the researchers clearly appear to be able people one could therefore be rather confident that the future end-results have a potential to contribute to the Estonian research milieu. Given, what we consider absolutely essential, comparative angles, this project will also be able to be taken seriously by the international research community.

The application is a joint departmental affair and thus covers several of the Department's scholars. With this in mind it stands out that of the two subdivisions, 'General Political Science' and 'International Relations,' only the first division is actually visible in the proposal. None of the application's proposed *problematicues* consists of International Relations-related topics. In general, the IR people in the Department do not really form a coherent research group. Having said this we want to underline that certain individuals listed under the 'International Relations' heading in the Department's self-evaluation report appear to be excellent scholars and have strong publication records.

## **Research**

The Department's research comprises several fields, among them 'democratic transition,' 'parties and party systems,' 'electoral systems,' 'civil society,' 'right-wing extremism and skepticism, 'ethnopolitics' and 'geopolitics.'

Some of the publications have certainly contributed to the international research

community. The problem is that most of these are from the same pen, Professor Taagepera's, who is not a product of the Department (rather one could claim the Department was his product) and who is now retired, although still working as Emeritus. Apart from him, the works on geopolitics and on right-wing extremism hold qualities that definitely have left an imprint internationally. Several of the other articles, chapters etc. are rather repetitive and untheoretically descriptive but with certain distinct and promising exceptions. However, these exceptions are not in themselves internationally top standard but definitely show the authors' potential for development in the future, given the right resources. As regards citation index compilations parts of the staff have made some imprint.

As in all the departments visited by the panel the shortage of monographs is striking. Being strict, there is only one monograph we would like to count here. On the other hand this monograph is excellent. One entry in the list is an edited volume, and with due respect to the qualities of edited volumes, it is not a monograph. The two books on Finno-Ugric questions are more or less the same and somewhat peripheral from the point of view of Political Science but could be of value for Ethnology. Finally the monograph on Inter-Ethnic relations in Estonia is really a compilation of articles and the author left the Department in 1999.

Overall we judge the Department's research to be **good**.

## **Resources**

The Department is in desperate need of new resources to be able to let its potential bear fruit. Without resources for research, Estonian higher education authorities would kill an institution that is close to becoming functioning as a normal department in the international sense of the word. That would be a stupid move. Another absolutely essential resource improvement is the immediate funding of library resources. The panel members were shocked by what we learned about Tartu university's library, including the library operated by the Faculty of Social Sciences. How could research be carried out without access to the discourse in the field? Apart from the extreme shortage of books, most leading journals were missing. Of course, resources on libraries should not come at the expense of resources on staff etc. Both things are absolutely essential.

## **Strengths and weaknesses**

Considering the material circumstances, the short time period since Estonian independence and a host of other limiting structural factors, a major strength of the Department staff is its staying power. Most people would probably have left already but dedication can be strong, as we have seen here. The people certainly are able to carry out many tasks at the same time and several individuals are excellent. However, the research groups that do exist do not really function as groups. The Department appears a bit fragmented and there seems to be lacking a forum for general and continuous academic discussion. Moreover, the staff members appear to underestimate the need to refrain from some assignments, however tempting they may

be, in favour of gathering the strength for major research efforts which will lead to theoretically informed monographs.

### **Recommendations**

- The central authorities should supply the Department with proper, long-term and basic funding.
- The central authorities should set up a decent library.
- The Department should create a research seminar.
- The staff members should carry out major research leading to monographs rather than repetitive Estonian information.
- The Department should grow so that leading roles (including lecturing) could be carried out mainly by PhD scholars.
- The Department should co-operate much closer with the Department of Public Administration at the University in order to reach a critical academic mass.

Overall we rate the Department to be **good**.

### **Department of Government**

#### **Institute for International and Social Studies, Tallinn Pedagogical University**

##### Institutional structure

The Institute for International and Social Studies was founded in 1988 at the Estonian Academy of Sciences. In 1998 the Institute was affiliated to the Tallinn Pedagogical University. The current personnel of the Department of Government consists of Research theme leader Raivo Vetik (PhD), three researchers Klara Hallik (PhD), Mart Kivimäe (PhD) and Mai Luuk (MA) and one assistant Larissa Kus (MA student). The number of the staff of the Department is small and it is engaged in many different activities. The educational and academic background of the staff is good and corresponds to the research interests of the Department.

The essential problem for the Department is that it does not have any basic funding. Its existence as well as the number of the staff is totally depending on external funding. This encourages applying money for short-term research projects, which basically are policy-oriented applied studies.

On the national level the Department is involved in compiling and publishing various national reports. In this area the Department co-operates with other relevant national research units.

The international visibility of the Department and its personnel is clear. However, the active international participation depends mainly on one person. The director of the Department has actively participated in international conferences and visited foreign

academic units. On the other hand the international citation index tells about low contribution of the Department to the international academic community.

### **Purpose and strategy**

Integrating research and teaching is declared to be one of the priorities of the Unit. In this respect the small staff of the Unit functions as a reserve for various departments at the Tallinn Pedagogical University and also other universities in Estonia in the fields of Political Science, sociology, social anthropology and philosophy.

In the field of research, the existence of the Department is based very much on policy-oriented applied research and on the target funding the Unit is granted since 1999. However, the applications for external funding are consistent with the basic research orientation defined by the Unit itself. Many of the short-term research projects are made for and financed by Estonian state organisations. This research has an important role in two respects: it is part of the Estonian transition process and it is connected to a wider European integration process. It should be mentioned that this policy-oriented research often includes a wider comparative element. Still, the role of basic academic and more general research is rather marginal. In fact, the lack of basic funding makes basic theoretical research almost impossible at the Department.

In the self-evaluation report the Department presents research groups and during the site visit this was confirmed. However, the evaluation team found that the Unit is just one research group, although there are different research areas in this group. The basic reason to treat the Department as one unit is that most of the scholars contribute to several research areas and that some projects are just individual research projects.

### **Research**

In the beginning of 2002 the main research areas of the Institute are the following:

Democratic governance and national integration;

Changing values and ways of life in Estonia in the 1990s;

1. Social stratification and mobility in the changing society;
2. Factor of culture and sustainable development of Estonia in global risk society;
3. Crime and crime control in Estonia.

The task of the Department of Government is to cover the first research area. This area is further divided into three sub-themes:

- Democratic multiculturalism, which again consists of three sub-areas;
- Social dialogue as a medium of integration and multiculturalism – historical cultural approach;
- Factors affecting cultural adaptation – interrelationship with psychological well being.

Compared to the size of the current staff the agenda seems to be relatively wide.

Since much of the research is done directly for Estonian state institutions there are good reasons to say that the research has been important and relevant for the public

administration. It is also legitimate to assume that the results of research at the Department have been used in planning and decision-making. In this respect the Department has contributed to the Estonian transition process. The research on 'national integration strategy' is a good example of this kind of work.

Because the work of the Department is very much policy oriented it is understandable that most of the results have been published in 'in-house' publication series or in volumes by Estonian publishers. Only a minority of the results has been published in international publications. In these cases the scholars of the Department have contributed to comparative studies with the Estonian case. This indicates that they have been invited to contribute rather than that they have provided the results of their own research work for international publishers.

The scholars of the Department are theory-consumers rather than theory-producers. On some occasions the scholars have also introduced international theoretical works or scholars to the Estonian audience. However, there are also a few studies, which are universal in their character and that contribute to the international academic knowledge. This means that there is good potential in the Department also for work of high international value. Considering the quality of the research the team rate it **good**.

In general it is true to say that the Department or the staff of the unit has been active in publishing. This is partly due to the applied research and the Department has been successful in gaining external resources for several policy oriented short-term research projects and it has received targeted funding. The work of these projects has to be reported and therefore the results are not always published for a wider audience, not to mention international audiences. In this respect it looks like the best channels for publishing have been used. But this also means that international visibility is not very remarkable.

At this point we also have to make clear that it has not been easy to make a correct estimation about the output of the Department. One reason for this is that many of the director's articles also form his dissertation and in this respect they have been listed twice. The other reason is that some of the articles have been published in slightly different versions in different contexts. This is not necessarily a negative thing since on some occasions it is possible to say that latter versions are more elaborated than the previous versions, which indicates, that the work is in progress and there are real research projects at the Department.

## **Resources**

In comparing the over-all output and the number of the scholars at the Department it is possible to say that the Unit is active. The academic education and background of the personnel is good in relation to the research orientations of the Department. However, in relation to the thematic agenda of the Department the number of scholars is too small. All the areas mentioned in the agenda are not properly covered in the output of the Department.

Although the Department does not have any permanent long-term basic financing the basic material premises are good. The Department has been successful in raising long

term target funding. Scholars are equipped with computers and access to internet and electronic databases. The infrastructure is in good condition. However, the information about the limited participation of the personnel in international conferences indicates that basic funding for international activities is rather limited except in the case of the director of the Unit.

On the national level the Department has done interesting and important work and therefore been able to get funding for applied and policy oriented short-term research projects.

### **Strengths and weaknesses**

A really positive aspect in the functioning of this small research Department is that it has an interesting and important clearly expressed research agenda, which is also flexible. But it is not quite clear whether the Department is fully able to work according to its own research agenda. This is partly due to the small size of the Department and partly due to the fact that the Department has constantly to apply for external funding. This means that the scholars all the time have to develop new short-term projects for the future existence of the Unit. It also means that the focus of research is on Estonian society and the audience of publications is often the Estonian authorities. Another kind of a weakness caused by short-term funding is possible work overload resulting in diminishing contributions to 'real' research.

On the national level the Department has an important place and role. There is no doubt about that. However, on the international level the role of the Department is less impressive although it has some visibility. The international role of the Unit is depending on certain social demand and interest in learning about what is going on in Estonia and in general in Central Eastern Europe. However, Estonia will not be a transition society forever and therefore it is important also to widen the research agenda beyond Estonia and to find a way to contribute to the international academic community on a more general level, too. This is important also in the case that the Department wants to enrich teaching at the Department of Government in the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The role the Department has adapted for itself in the Estonian transition and development process has to be appreciated. With the resources available to the Department it has done extremely good and in the national context its capability is excellent. However, there is a difference between the national and international standards. On the international level the Department has been able to contribute to the international community with the specific Estonian case. Otherwise its international capability has remained modest but on a good international level.

On a more general level it is possible to say that at the moment the wide research agenda of the Department has made it possible to cover broad areas in Estonian society. But in the longer run there is a risk in this strategy since it does not leave enough time for producing high standard academic monographs. This again might in the future reduce the chance of receiving for instance target funding for the Department.

## **Recommendations**

It is evident that the Department has successfully contributed to the Estonian transition process, national integration and also integration into the European Union. It has also contributed to introducing Western social and especially Political Science in Estonia. But its more theoretical contribution to the international academic community has remained marginal. In this respect the Department should expand its agenda also beyond the Estonian case and apply more comparative approaches. On the other hand due to a limited staff the Department should also consider a more focused research agenda.

To our understanding the Department has justified its existence in the field of social sciences. It also has demonstrated good research potential. However, it constantly faces the threat of ceasing to exist. Therefore we recommend that permanent basic funding for the Department should be organised somehow.

Overall we grade the Institute to be **Good**.

## **Department of Government, Tallinn Pedagogical University**

### **Institutional structure**

The Department of Government (before 1998 Department of Social Sciences) created a BA curriculum in public administration in 1994; the first students graduated in 1998. The MA curriculum in political science and public administration was created in 1996. There are currently two professors (Georg Sootla, chair of public policy, and Raivo Vetik, chair of comparative politics) and one associate professor (Anu Toots). All of these professors hold PhD degree. In addition, there are four researchers and teachers (Heino Kadagmaa, Annika Velthut, Jaana Krimpe, and Tõny Inurm). The age structure of the staff is quite young and the gender structure is balanced. Prof. Vetik is also the head of the Institute for the International and Social Studies of the Department of Government at the TPU. Being in leading position in two different institutions can create a problem of unbearable burden of work. There is also a chair of economics at the Department and a plan to establish chairs in Human Development and European Studies. Full time teachers hold at least MA degrees and those having that only, are studying to achieve a PhD degree.

Professors have two main tasks, research and teaching. It is not our task here to evaluate teaching, but it is obvious that although teaching duties of professors are – considering international practice - normal in formal terms (six hours at classroom per week), the professors are overburdened by teaching and also by administrative work. There is also some ‘development activity’. That means a lot of co-operation with the state administration in different policy areas or, as it is phrased in the self-evaluation, there are ‘applied small research projects requested by public institutions’. Although there can be areas in which co-operation between a university department and the state administration are advantageous to both, it seems to us, that many of the projects

carried out have not much scientific value and instead entail an unnecessary burden to proper university work.

### **Purpose and strategy**

According to the plans, the Department aims to set up a chair in Human Development this year. The panel is not entirely convinced that this is a good idea. While the Human Development is undoubtedly a topic of great importance, it is not as such a sub-discipline of political science and it is unclear how the scheduled chair is related to Political Science and other disciplines. We have already indicated – in the section of Political Science in Tartu – that we believe that a more traditional discipline organisation is the right way to arrange a department of Political Science. Anyway, the chair must be based on careful analysis and planning to ensure that it contributes fully to both teaching and research.

The Department also plans to establish a chair of European studies in a mid-term perspective. The idea is good. But we believe that it would be more appropriate to fund a post-doctoral position in this field (as is the short-term intention of the Department). In addition, to have four chairs in such a small Department – and almost no other teaching staff with PhDs – would make the unit very top-heavy.

### **Research**

It has been somewhat difficult to assess the number and types of publications produced by the Department. Its self-evaluation does not include a list enumerating the number of publications in terms of monographs, refereed journal articles etcetera, as has been done by the other departments. Furthermore, the CVs list material from 1995 and onwards (and not from 1997, as requested). Professor Vetik's production is included in its entirety (as it is in the list from the Institute for International and Social Studies). We have considered it proper to count only the publications he has produced since entering the Department as belonging to the Departmental production record (and to include his other works in the Institute's record).

There are the following three main research areas: 'the core executive: structure and actors', 'development of local governance', and 'trust towards state institutions in Estonia'. According to the self-evaluation of the department, the research is, in an academic sense, much influenced by 'institutional theory'. It seems that this means that the research subjects are mostly concerning Estonian political institutions. Taking into account the smallness of the Department and the transitional nature of the Estonian society, it is perhaps natural that this approach has been adopted. However, it is necessary to enlarge Department's research perspectives in the future. It seems to us that it would be good to encourage the junior members of the staff to apply for participation in different international conferences, for example those organised by the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) with Estonian papers.

However, it is problematic if all international publications concern only Estonia or the Baltic region in general. The writers of the 'country chapters' must, more or less, follow instruction given by the editors of books or journals, and it is quite usual that

there is no room for any theoretical elaboration in these chapters. They are indeed intended to be a source material for the editor themselves, who then can make comparative analysis. There are exceptions, of course, as all guidelines are not very strict.

It is important to publish articles in international publications, but if we think of the whole career of a political scientist, it would be a strong negative feature, if one would not be able to research some subject thoroughly and publish a monograph about this subject. When the panel looked at the publication lists, it did not find any publication that could be called a monograph in the scientific sense of the word. (A book of collection of articles by one author can be an impressive work, but it is not a monograph.) Considering the fact that these research projects have been going on for five to ten years, it is notable that so few major works have appeared. When we evaluated the scientific value of publications given to us, we estimated the research to be **good to satisfactory**, according to evaluation scale we were given. That said, we must emphasise that the staff, consisting of relatively young persons, works under a heavy burden and demands are hard. It might be that the scholars are now, after years of data collection ready to analyse this material and produce publications. Still, the existing output is quite limited.

## **Resources**

The panel was amazed when it realised that most MA and PhD students work outside the department and do not have adequate resources to make their research full-time. Taking into consideration the need for qualified academic personnel, it is necessary to develop the material conditions of MA and PhD students in order to ensure that they are able to graduate. The number of master students in the period 1992-2001 was 53. Of them, 6 students graduated, 35 students still continued their studies, and 12 students were 'exmatriculated', i.e. possibly (but not necessarily) abandoned their studies altogether. There are students who have been able to study abroad, but the periods have been relatively short. We are worried that there will, in the future, not be sufficient human resources to develop Political Science and especially to improve its theoretical level in Estonia.

Material resources, such as library, computer facilities, etc. are impressive and this is, of course, a very positive thing. But we cannot avoid the question how wise it is to invest intensely only in material things but forget the most important investment, investment in human beings. Both are equally essential.

## **Strengths and weaknesses**

The department has two much qualified professors and their expertise and experiences constitute a major asset for future research. We believe that the recent appointment of Raivo Vetik as a professor may create synergetic effect in co-operation with professor Sootla. The newly started research project on trust (or, in other words, legitimacy) in Estonian society bears evidence on this.

At the same time, however, the Department is heavily dependent upon few individuals. It seems that they have not enough time for all tasks of administration, teaching, and research. The Department has still to apply for targeted funding and has in the meantime not been able to focus its energy and resources on a clear scientific research programme and on a publication strategy.

### **Recommendations**

As said above, the panel doubts the wisdom of introducing a new chair of Human Development. We see a risk that the main task of the holder of the chair will be to write annual Human Development Reports inspired by the United Nation Development Programme. It should be emphasised that it is necessary to define the tasks of the chair in broad terms in order to be sure that the goal is to develop the area fruitfully. The multidisciplinary nature of the planned chair can be an advantage, but it can also be a disadvantage, if the holder of the chair diversifies her or his research field too much.

Our advice is also for the staff not to spread their energy and talents by writing large numbers of short articles, often quasi-scientific papers and chapters, instead of fewer publications with a higher level of quality, both for national and international audiences. We believe it is important to publish in both English (or in another ‘big’ language) and in Estonian.

Overall we rate the Department to be **good to satisfactory**.

### **Political Science research in Estonia: Final remarks**

First, we would like to emphasise that we have taken the criteria for grading the assessed units, given to us by the Accreditation Center, very seriously. Thus, **excellent** is taken to be a grade, which will probably be rarely used in a research environment like the Estonian one, as the grade refers to the qualitatively best 10 per cent of European research groups in one field of academic research. For a department to get a rating as **good** is in fact a considerable achievement, given the contextual factors elaborated above.

Political Science is an important academic discipline for many reasons. Besides the general value provided by producing scientific knowledge about political life, it also provides crucial inputs into societal development and government policy. Therefore, the existence of top quality research units in the field is of utmost importance in any country. Our evaluation points to a number of weaknesses in the departments studied. In general, these weaknesses are rather easily explained by reference to the background factors outlined in the first part of this text. Limited resources and problematic working conditions, characterised by work overload, hinder the development of strong research. This is the basic *problematique* of Estonian Political Science. To a certain degree, increased co-operation and a stronger focus on strategic research areas may help to improve the situation. Primarily, however, we believe that

fund-granting institutions should seriously consider allocating relatively more resources to Political Science research in the country.

Tallinn, 12 May 2002

Ole Elgström (chairman) Jonas Hinnfors Jyrki Käkönen Jukka Paastela