

**"Estonia and the World  
at the Dawn of 2011"**  
Report of a Listening Post  
held in Tallinn on 2nd January



**Encouraging The Reflective Citizen**

**Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES**

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, 'the stuff of people's everyday lives,' that relating to the 'socio' or 'external' world of participants.

**Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES**

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under three interrelated themes presented as hypotheses in Part 3 below:

**Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION**

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts One and Two, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment. Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them.

**Hypothesis 1**

*People are helpless and afraid when confronted with natural phenomena and the vast system in place.*

The relationship between a person and Nature, as well as the association between a person and the System is complex. A person is small, whereas Nature and the System are large, dynamic, and unpredictable wholes. People/individuals picture themselves to be omnipotent, but end up being disappointed and must admit their own smallness, that their own resources are limited and that large systems win – both the system of nature and the large overall System. Paradoxically, people need both the System and Nature. They must make compromises, sometimes against their own internal being.

1) Snow was again a common topic of discussion. It was the first subject about which the participants spoke, mainly because they had difficulty finding a parking place for their cars in the midst of the snow drifts. Managing in the snow in short-topped boots

also proved to be difficult. The participants remembered last year's LP seminar and the fact that snow was a topic of discussion then too. They wondered why the city had not learned a lesson from last winter's problems and felt that today's situation showed no change. There was just too much snow on the streets of the city. The mothers of small children experienced real helplessness because their children's small carriages were not capable of moving along the walkways. The participants also spoke of snow in the cemeteries at Christmas – how difficult it was to take candles to the graves of loved ones and dig the headstones out from under the snow. It was cold, and the maintenance crew had not yet had time to do its job. The participants also spoke of floods and wondered how there could be floods of water on one side of the world while there were floods of snow on the other. What did nature want to remind people of – what was happening to the balance of nature?

2) The participants spoke of how people do not believe when they are warned. Before the Monica and Scarlet storms, drivers were warned against being out. The radio gave daily warnings and reminded people that shovels and warm clothing should accompany them on trips, that they should be prepared for difficult weather conditions and possible surprises. People were continually warned and warned and warned. At the same time, the news reported the occurrence of exactly the same situations that people had been warned about. Weather reports of snow irritated people. The group wondered why people should believe that their own strength was so great and overestimate that strength. It spoke and generalized about the fact that people cannot believe that also THEIR cars can get stuck in the snow, that also THEY can get in trouble, that also THEY could suddenly need the help of others, also the help of the System. It is so difficult for people to believe that the exact same misfortune that they had been warned against had happened to THEM. The seminar participants were not able to present any personal experiences, but instead discussed the topic on a general level. The discussion was flavoured with the attitude of how 'stupid' others are and how wise WE are.

3) The group discussed the trial of millionaire Hodorkovski in Russia in an aggressive and angry manner. No one believed at any time during the proceedings that he would be freed, and so it was. He was given an additional 6 years in prison. The participants discussed this topic tautly; they showed dissatisfaction and annoyance and were vexed and angry that the rest of the world did not interfere, but instead looked on from the sidelines and was quiet. It was noted how helpless people are in front of the System.

4) At the end of the year, the banks were overflowing with customers. Everyone wanted to exchange their kroons for euros. Both the newspapers and the radio reported that there was still time, that in January both currencies would be accepted and throughout all of 2011 kroons could be exchanged for euros. People just would not believe it or did not trust that it was so; they were afraid that the kroon would be devaluated.

## Hypothesis 2

*To question/challenge society's membership and predominant family traditions, to rebel against how things are always done. Isolation feels good, there is a need to be by one's self, to be left in peace, alone or with one's own friends, to possibly protect one's self from the angst caused by external forces.*

People experience the conflict between their own internal world and the demands of the external world as being unbearable. They feel that they do not want, or are able, to live according to the terms of the environment. Their limits have been reached. Demands are too great, not to the human scale. People are expected to present

themselves as braver than they are in reality. It does not feel good; it is a strain. People begin to believe in listening and respecting their own internal experiences, their own internal being, and act accordingly. They begin to believe that they can withdraw and abandon and cause disappointment to those close to them. They experience guilt from this, even though the realization of autonomic decisions feels good.

1) The overestimation of people's own resources was discussed. Different types of events are planned and agreed upon with friends, but, when the time for them is close and effort is needed to see that they take place, there is a lack of desire, no strength or urge, to carry through with what seemed like a good idea a couple of weeks earlier. People want to be by themselves and do something other than what was agreed upon by the group. The participants also discussed the pleasant and good feeling, as well as the inspiration and energy, involved in making plans. These feelings are felt up to the point when the plans should be initiated. The implementation, however, no longer feels so good. It no longer fits in with their plans; it causes stress and irritation (why did I commit myself to this?); it does not feel right and often requires an extreme amount of effort, work, and even extra money. Often the planned events are cancelled.

2) The fact that, this year, people spent more time at Christmas in their own surroundings than earlier was the next topic of discussion. Grandparents and their families stayed home rather than visiting. There were no overnight stays as there had been earlier. People were relaxed. They shunned stress, contacts, being in groups, extra activities, and moving about. It was said that there was no visiting a fitness centre or going swimming even though there would have been time. The lack of activity made people feel guilty, even if it felt good.

### Hypothesis 3

*Money offers possibilities and security. Official newcasts/statements are difficult to trust.*

One existential problem brought up in the discussions was the euro. Lack of knowledge and the possibility to foretell the future made people feel insecure. What would happen; what if they did not make it? On the other hand, it was agreed that there are no alternatives and that people should begin to view and adopt the attitude that the future change in the environment is understandably inevitable, and they should agree to begin to act accordingly. It does not help to fight against the inescapable. Instead people should save their energy and adjust.

1) The insecurity of the economic situation was a major topic of discussion. A new year had just begun, and the Estonian kroon had been exchanged for the euro. There were divided opinions about the introduction of the euro. The viewpoints also awakened contrasting feelings among the participants of the seminar. The discussion of the pros and cons of the euro was filled with emotion. Posters on the streets of Tallinn were telling: a handsome sinking 'Titanic' represented the destiny of the euro.

2) The following joke was told: "While in surgery, the physician said to the anaesthetist: 'Give the patient the anaesthetic.' The nurse asked: 'The domestic or non-domestic version?' To which the physician replied: 'Domestic of course.' The nurse then began to sing a lullaby."

3) The participants wondered about the fact that, on the 1st of January 2011, the sum in their bank accounts had substantially decreased, by 15:5 times. No one understood or

could conceive the sum in their account. It seemed strange. People were confused. Men's haircuts, which had earlier cost 100 kroons, were now 6.70 euros. How could it be understood, the barbershop owner wondered. People felt anxiety when they did not know what would be the outcome. Some already had new money in their wallets; it was examined with fascination and labelled ugly. The Estonian kroon was considered beautiful. The bills showed pictures of authors and other famous persons from their culture. The euro was not considered by anyone to be his or her own; it was neutral, just as the Russian ruble had been earlier. On TV, the statement of the Minister of Finance, that he cried over the loss of the kroon but that he rationally understood that the euro was for the good of Estonia, were quoted and laughed at. A funeral was held for the kroon in Tallinn. Its last escort left the bank to the accompaniment of a brass band, and speeches were given about how well the kroon had served Estonia. One seminar participant who worked in a bank yawned throughout the seminar because he had been working throughout the preceding night. He told that all of the arrangements for the transition to the euro had been carried out meticulously and that the ATM machines were full of money. They had expected some surprises, but all went well. The smallest bill in the machines was the 10 euro, but people would have wanted the 5 euro to be available. One participant told that she had also bought a beginner's coin package from the bank 2 weeks earlier. For 200 kroons she had received 12.6 euros in coin. They showed the coins to the group. The need to change wallets was also discussed in that the old models were not suitable for the euro bills, and therefore new ones were necessary.

**Comment:**

From the theme of the discussion in the LP seminar, small changes can be observed when compared with the discussion in 2010. From the discussion, it is evident that people are beginning to admit to themselves that their resources have limits: they cannot participate in everything offered, not everything can be attained, they need to recognize their own limits, they must listen to their own body and accordingly participate and accept life's challenges. They have dared to begin breaking their routines, have dared to begin to withdraw, and dared to let go of things that do not feel good or right.

**Convener: Marianne Tensing**