PARTNERS IN
THE EUROPEAN UNION

What the Finns and
The Estonians Think
of Each Other?

Kai Torvi
www.eva.fi
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FOREWORD

The proximity of relations between Finland and Estonia has varied greatly over the decades. The inter-war period was characterised by lively economic, tourist, and cultural relations. During the Soviet occupation of Estonia there were few contacts across the Gulf of Finland until the Soviet perestroika period from the mid 1980’s onwards. As Estonia regained her independence in 1991, a major revival of relations occurred. A new level will again be reached on May 1st, 2004 as Estonia enters the European Union.

Now, on the eve of Estonian EU membership, the Centre for Finnish Business and Policy Studies EVA decided to find out what the Finns and the Estonians think of each other. What are attitudes towards each other’s country and its people like, how interested are Finns and Estonians in moving to each other’s country, do the citizens of the two countries wish to maintain and develop political, economic and cultural ties, and what kind of co-operation could the two countries pursue as members of the European Union?

This poll is a contribution to EVA’s long tradition of attitude surveys. In addition to conducting regular surveys in Finland, EVA has also carried out surveys in neighbouring countries. An extensive survey in Estonia was carried out and published in 1998 as part of the EVA report ‘Estonia’s Tomorrow’.

The survey was commissioned by EVA and conducted by Taloustutkimus Oy. It was carried out in June through August 2003. Some of the questions posed were the same in both countries, while country-specific ones were also asked. Ambassadors Jaakko Blomberg and Matti Maasikas and professor Seppo Zetterberg contributed to the design of the questionnaire, and I am grateful for their valuable input. More details on the way the survey was carried out can be found in Appendix 1. The questionnaires are presented as Appendices 2 and 3. The graphics were compiled by Mr. Pentti Kiljunen of Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy. Mr. Kiljunen also commented on the text of the report, and I wish to thank him for that task as well. The report has been written at EVA’s office by Mr. Kai Torvi.

Helsinki, September 2003
Pentti Vartia
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1 INTRODUCTION

Finland and Estonia have been rather peculiar partners over their history. They have been joined by geographic proximity, kinship between their languages, and, for lengthy periods of time, being ruled by the same great power, first Sweden and later Russia. Linguistic affinity has been given extra weight by the fact that the Finno-Ugric family of languages is very small. On the other hand there is a period in recent history during which interaction between the countries was very limited due to political reasons.

Estonia’s entry into the European Union on May 1st, 2004 opens a new phase in relations between the two countries. After a transition period the movement of people in search for a job or a place to study will be completely free, as will be the movement of goods, services and capital across national borders.

It is not self-evident, however, that co-operation between Finland and Estonia will develop positively. As an EU member, Estonia may well turn to Western Europe, as the four freedoms apply across the Union. It is also possible that e.g. attitudes towards the welfare state and NATO membership will prove to be divisive factors between the two countries.

Citizens’ attitudes and ideas have a major impact on the direction of international relations and co-operation. This survey strives to assess the extent to which Finns and Estonians are interested in developing relations between their respective countries. A general overview suggests that the results are positive: A majority of citizens in both countries appreciate these relations and wish to develop them further. The fact that Estonia will soon join Finland as an EU member is expected to be mutually beneficial.
2. GENERAL VIEW OF THE NEIGHBOUR IS POSITIVE

The Finns have a positive attitude towards Estonians. More than 70 per cent of Finns have a very or fairly positive attitude towards Estonian tourists visiting Finland. Close to six out of ten share a similar view of Estonians as partners in work or business. Negative attitudes towards Estonian tourists are virtually non-existent. Only six per cent of Finns see Estonians in a negative light even as work or business partners. (Figure 1)

The Estonians’ opinion of Finnish tourists is somewhat more negative than the corresponding Finnish view. The share of those with a negative attitude - just over ten per cent - is low, however, when one takes into account the regrettable visibility of many Finnish ‘vodka tourists’ in e.g. the streets of Tallinn. The Estonians’ view of Finns as work or business partners is roughly the same as the one in Finland towards Es-

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**Figure 1.** FINNS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS ESTONIANS AND ESTONIANS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS FINNS (%).

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Finns’ view of Estonians</th>
<th>Estonians’ view of Finns</th>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>FAIRLY POSITIVE</td>
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<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEUTRAL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>VERY NEGATIVE</td>
<td>2</td>
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<th>Estonians’ view of Finns</th>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>39</td>
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<td>50-75</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>75-100</td>
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tonians. It should be noted that the share of ‘Don’t know’ answers is relatively high in this question, probably because a large number of people in each country do not have any first-hand experience of this kind of co-operation with citizens of the neighbouring country. (Figure 1)

Among other things, a higher standard of living may have influenced the behaviour of Finnish tourists in Estonia. It may well be the single most important factor affecting the ordinary Estonians’ opinion on Finns. Almost half of the Estonian respondents agree with the notion that Finns do not treat Estonians as their equals. Only just over a fifth think that Finns do not patronise Estonians. The young (those between 15 and 29 years of age) think the Finns patronise considerably less often than their elders. (Figure 2)
3. MOVING ACROSS THE GULF IS NOT TEMPTING

There has been a lively debate in Finland on what the liberalisation of labour markets between Finland and Estonia will mean in practice, as Estonia’s EU membership takes full effect after the transition period. On the one hand, it has been said that low-wage Estonian workers will disrupt Finland’s labour market. On the other hand, there have been fears that, e.g., professionals capable of working from a distance might move from Finland to Estonia lured by lower taxes and living costs.

The results of this survey do not support expectations of large-scale migration across the Gulf of Finland. Only about a fifth of Estonians are very or fairly interested in living and studying or working in Finland, and more than half of them are not at all interested in this alternative. (Figure 3a) As was expected, mainly young Estonians find studying or working in Finland enticing, three-quarters of those over fifty have no interest in moving to Finland. (Figure 3b)

When one looks at the results from the point of view of the Finnish labour market, it should be restated that the question was about either studying or working in Finland. Thus the proportion of those who have
an interest in taking a job in Finland is even lower than the fifth reported. A willingness to carry out at least a part of one’s studies in Finland is probably one of the reasons why young persons show a greater degree of interest in moving to Finland than the others.

Interest in moving to the neighbouring country is even somewhat less keen in Finland, although the difference between the two countries is not very large. (Figure 3a) It is noteworthy that the highest level of interest is shown by those with a university degree. About a quarter of them are in principle very or fairly interested in living in Estonia, while only about a sixth of the whole population shares this view. In Estonia the correlation between interest in moving and educational attainment is the reverse, but the differences are too small to be statistically significant. (Figure 3b)
4. GREAT EXPECTATIONS OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES

Attitudes towards the future level of co-operation between Finland and Estonia are quite positive in both countries. This is borne out by answers to questions that put the matter in more concrete terms in certain fields of activity.

About two-thirds of the Finns consider economic integration between the two countries beneficial to both parties, while just over a tenth disagree. Almost three-quarters of the Estonians agree with the notion, and only a handful beg to differ. (Figure 4a) Residents of the Greater Helsinki area and of Tallinn show the highest degree of agreement, probably because these areas already have plenty of experience with interaction. Those with the highest educational attainment have the most favourable view of economic integration. (Figure 4b)

Prospects for political co-operation are also viewed positively. The proposition ‘Finland and Estonia are so different that their co-operation within the EU will not work’ is clearly rejected in both countries.

![Figure 4a](image-url)

"CLOSE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF SOUTHERN FINLAND AND ESTONIA WOULD BE BENEFICIAL TO BOTH COUNTRIES" (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>Fully Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral/DK</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Fully Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finns’ attitudes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>Estonians’ attitudes</td>
<td>22</td>
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Faith in co-operation is especially strong on the southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, less than one tenth doubt its success. Almost a fifth of respondents in Finland are sceptical. (Figure 5a) Those with a university degree are the most optimistic about co-operation in both countries. (Figure 5b)

Trust in Finnish-Estonian co-operation within the confines of the European Union is significant for the simple reason that, e.g., the role of the public sector and the welfare state has been seen very differently in these countries. It is possible that the debate on conflicts of interest between the large and small member countries of the EU has influenced the result - the citizens of the two countries may see the partner as a potential ally. We should also keep in mind that despite their many
differences the two countries are united by, i.a., their solidly Lutheran cultural heritage.

Young people are, in the long run, in a key position if two countries are to be brought closer to each other. A student exchange programme between the countries would make the nations better acquainted with each other on a personal level. Almost four out of five Estonians would
like to create such a programme, and almost two-thirds of Finns are also supportive of the idea. (Figure 6) National differences in attitudes correspond well to differences in willingness to live in the neighbouring country (see figure 3a above).

The Finns’ impression of Estonia as a close country is corroborated by the fact that in comparing the closeness of ties with Estonia to those with Sweden, the respondents are almost evenly split, with Estonia carrying the day by a small margin. The result is significant considering that the common history of Finland and Sweden spans centuries, and that these two countries have long co-operated in, i.a., the Nordic Council, EFTA, and more recently the EU. It also seems that the decades of few contacts between Finland and Estonia have not taken a heavy toll in the Finns’ feelings towards their linguistic cousins. (Figure 7)
5. THE FINNS ARE PLEASED WITH ESTONIAN EU MEMBERSHIP

The Finns believe that Estonia’s entry into the European Union is beneficial for them, too. It was reported above that a clear majority of the Finns believe economic integration and political co-operation with Estonia within the EU will be fruitful. A majority of respondents consider Estonia’s membership to be beneficial for Finland as well. Only a fifth remain doubtful. The most positive are those with a university degree.
gree. They seem to have a more favourable attitude than the rest of the Finnish population towards relations between Finland and Estonia in most respects. (Figure 8)

There are also negative aspects associated with Estonia’s EU membership, as there are bound to be with any major change. Almost 60 per cent of Finns are afraid that drugs, crime and other unwanted phenomena will increase as Estonia enters the Union and the free movement of people between the two countries becomes a reality. The worry is greatest in the countryside and least in the Greater Helsinki area, where experience with Estonians is, however, probably the greatest. It could thus be argued that the attitude is a reflection of prejudice rather than of actual experience. Educational attainment also separates opinions quite markedly. (Figure 9)

Estonia’s EU membership is expected to have a marked impact on the Finnish labour market. A majority, albeit with a narrow margin, of the Finns believe that Estonian immigrants will alleviate our imminent shortage of labour. Roughly the same proportion think that the immi-
It is obvious that a plentiful supply of Estonian workers on the Finnish labour market would both ease any shortage of labour and lower the wage level. However, as was found earlier (see figure 3a above), the Estonians do not show a great degree of interest in working in Finland. Thus any effect that Estonian immigrants might have on the Finnish labour market is bound to be rather limited. (Figure 10)
The Estonians were also asked to which countries or groups of countries Estonia should primarily develop her relations. Separate assessments were requested on political, economic and cultural relations, and in each case the respondents were asked to name the most important and the second most important alternative. Finland was not highly placed on these priority lists.

The most important country (measured by the proportion naming her either the most or second most important country) with respect to political relations was Russia, a somewhat surprising result. The EU finished second, albeit by a narrow margin. One explanation for the importance of Russia is that political relations with Russia are felt to be problematic. Estonia has, e.g., border disputes with Russia, and thus a lot of effort needs to be put on improving the relations. (Figure 11a)

Finland was at the bottom of the list of specified countries and country groups in this assessment. This is probably to a large extent explained by the fact that Finland is also an EU member and a Nordic country, both of which groups are near the top of the list. ‘Support’ for good relations with Finland has most likely been partly channelled through them. A positive interpretation would also be that, as the Finno-Estonian relations are unproblematic, there is little need to develop them in any particular way. (Figure 11a)

When the matter is looked at from an economic angle, the results are very much the same as with political relations. The European Union and Russia top the list with Finland trailing far behind. The comforting interpretation for Finland is, again, that economic relations between Finland and Estonia are already well-developed, let the measure be either trade in goods and services, cross-border investment, or tourism.
Figure 11. WHICH COUNTRIES OR GROUPS OF COUNTRIES SHOULD ESTONIA DEVELOP ITS RELATIONS WITH IN PARTICULAR (Estonians, %).

a) Political relations

- Russia: 25 (Most), 25 (2nd Most)
- EU countries as a whole: 31 (Most), 17 (2nd Most)
- Nordic countries as a whole: 14 (Most), 15 (2nd Most)
- Latvia and Lithuania: 8 (Most), 11 (2nd Most)
- United States: 7 (Most), 9 (2nd Most)
- Germany: 4 (Most), 7 (2nd Most)
- Finland: 3 (Most), 7 (2nd Most)
- Some other country: 1 (Most), 2 (2nd Most)
- Don’t know/no answer: 7 (Most), 9 (2nd Most)

b) Economic relations

- EU countries as a whole: 35 (Most), 16 (2nd Most)
- Russia: 22 (Most), 28 (2nd Most)
- Nordic countries as a whole: 12 (Most), 17 (2nd Most)
- Germany: 6 (Most), 10 (2nd Most)
- Latvia and Lithuania: 6 (Most), 9 (2nd Most)
- Finland: 7 (Most), 7 (2nd Most)
- United States: 3 (Most), 4 (2nd Most)
- Some other country: 1 (Most), 1 (2nd Most)
- Don’t know/no answer: 7 (Most), 9 (2nd Most)

c) Cultural relations

- Nordic countries as a whole: 24 (Most), 16 (2nd Most)
- EU countries as a whole: 22 (Most), 16 (2nd Most)
- Latvia and Lithuania: 15 (Most), 15 (2nd Most)
- Finland: 12 (Most), 14 (2nd Most)
- Russia: 9 (Most), 13 (2nd Most)
- Germany: 6 (Most), 8 (2nd Most)
- United States: 1 (Most), 4 (2nd Most)
- Some other country: 1 (Most), 2 (2nd Most)
- Don’t know/no answer: 9 (Most), 12 (2nd Most)

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Thus it is natural not to see any great need to develop the relations further. (Figure 11b)

The picture is rather different with respect to cultural relations. The Nordic countries are given first place in the ranking with the EU countries a close second. Estonia’s immediate neighbours are found towards the middle of the list in the order Latvia and Lithuania, Finland, and Russia. (Figure 11c)

Figure 12 looks at the same results from a slightly different angle. The figure makes clear that relations with the EU countries should be developed regardless of the particular field in question. Political and economic relations with Russia should also be developed, but in the cultu-
Cultural ties are, on the other hand, the ones that need more attention when it comes to the other neighbouring countries, i.e., the Nordic countries, Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The impression of a rather half-hearted interest in Finland is corroborated by the fact that almost half of the Estonians consider it not worth their while to study Finnish. Just over a quarter of the respondents take the opposite view. (Figure 13)

It should be noted that Finnish is now widely spoken especially in Tallinn and other parts of northern Estonia, as Finnish television can be viewed there. During the Soviet occupation this provided a window to the West, and it was widely watched. The young consider a command
of the Finnish language especially insignificant. This is proof of the influence of Finnish TV: many of the young do not personally recall the role that it played in the life of ordinary Estonians prior to independence. Those with a high level of educational attainment appreciate the Finnish language better than the average citizen, an attitude well in line with the generally positive attitudes towards Finland among the highly educated. (Figure 13)

An explanation for the unwillingness to study Finnish may be the view about the patronising attitude of the Finns towards the Estonians (see figure 2 above). One form that this attitude takes can be described as linguistic imperialism: Many Finns assume that all Estonians can speak Finnish, even though this has only been true in the northern part of the country. Estonians may also feel that membership in the EU and NATO require a good command of major western languages.

A common language is, however, a significant factor in determining where people would want to direct their country’s international relations. Those Estonians, whose mother tongue is not Estonian (for most of them it is Russian), would like to develop relations with Russia much more than Estonian-speakers. The linguistic minority would like to place less emphasis on the Nordic and EU countries, Latvia, and Lithuania. It is somewhat surprising that they put most stress on political and economic ties to Russia with cultural relations being given less weight. (Figure 14)
7. FINNISH COMPANIES ARE GOOD EMPLOYERS, BUT...

Finnish companies have invested a great deal in Estonia over the past decade or so, and many of the leading companies in Estonia are now under Finnish ownership. The Estonians’ image of Finland is thus probably also influenced by the way that these companies are seen: Are they good employers and good corporate citizens?

Finnish-owned companies are generally considered to be good employers; almost half of all respondents agree with this proposition and only about one sixth disagree. The share of the ‘Don’t know’ answers is quite large. This is natural, as many Estonians have neither worked in such a company, nor have any of their relatives or acquaintances done so. (Figure 15a)

![Figure 15. VIEWS ON FINNISH COMPANIES ACTIVE IN ESTONIA (Estonians, %).](image-url)

a) "FINNISH-OWNED COMPANIES OPERATING IN ESTONIA ARE GOOD EMPLOYERS"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral/DK</th>
<th>Mostly Disagree</th>
<th>Fully Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) "BY INVESTING IN ESTONIA FINNISH COMPANIES ARE MERELY TRYING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE LOWER WAGE LEVEL AND LOOSE LABOUR NORMS"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fully Agree</th>
<th>Mostly Agree</th>
<th>Neutral/DK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
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EVA / Taloustutkimus Oy 2003 Visualized by PGraphics
Finland companies are not, however, seen as disinterested benefactors. Almost two-thirds of Estonians think that they invest in Estonia only to take advantage of the country’s low wage level and other labour market characteristics that favour the employer. (Figure 15b) This is a very plausible argument: The markets of small and poor Estonia hardly loom large as motives for investment for manufacturing companies.

8. FINAL REMARKS

The survey shows that the Finns and Estonians share rather similar views of each other. The Finns view Estonians and their country’s EU membership positively. The Estonian view of Finns is somewhat more reserved, but in no sense negative.

Estonia’s imminent EU membership will further promote the opportunities for mutual co-operation. Great hopes are placed on this possibility in both countries, in Estonia one could even describe the attitude as enthusiastic. People would like to increase interaction between the two countries. Future co-operation is viewed with anticipation, both in the sense of economic integration and political co-operation within the EU. This does not, however, preclude problems.

The Estonians do not, however, only look north. They want to develop their country’s relations chiefly to countries other than Finland. This is only natural for a newly independent country that is just about to enter both the EU and NATO.
APPENDIX 1
HOW THE SURVEY WAS CARRIED OUT

The survey was commissioned by EVA and conducted in Finland by Taloustutkimus Oy and in Estonia by its daughter company ESTuru-uuringute AS employing the same methodology. The survey was carried out as part of the Omnibus round using personal interviews. In Finland the interviews were performed between August 4th and 17th, 2003, and in Estonia between June 6th and July 20th, 2003.

The target group was, in both countries, the population between 15 and 74 years of age, in Finland excluding the Åland Islands. The sample was compiled by quota sampling, and there were 985 interviewees in Finland and 980 in Estonia. The sample has been weighted to correspond to the target group.

The confidence interval (at the 95% level) is 1.4 percentage points in either direction.
APPENDIX 2
THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN FINLAND

N.B. Questions 1 through 3c are presented in Finland and Estonia, questions 3d through 3g in Finland only

Next we shall put forward a few questions on Estonia.

1. First we will ask what your attitude towards Estonians is. Please answer using the scale very positive, fairly positive, neutral, don’t know, fairly negative, very negative
   a) as tourists in Finland
   b) as partners in work and business

2. How interested would you be in living and studying or working in Estonia? Answer using the scale
   1) very interested
   2) fairly interested
   3) somewhat interested
   4) not at all interested
   5) cannot say

3. Do you agree or disagree with the following propositions? Answer with the scale
   fully agree
   more or less agree
   do not agree or disagree
   more or less disagree
   fully disagree
   a) Close economic integration of Southern Finland and Estonia would be beneficial to both countries
b) Finland and Estonia are so different that their co-operation within the EU will not work

c) An extensive student exchange programme should be set up between Finland and Estonia

d) Estonia’s EU membership is in Finland’s interest

e) The free movement of people enabled by Estonia’s EU membership will bring us many unwanted phenomena, including drugs and crime

f) The free movement of labour brought about by Estonia’s EU membership will alleviate Finland’s imminent shortage of labour

g) Estonian immigrants would agree to work in Finland on considerably lower pay and substandard working conditions

h) Finns feel Estonia to be closer to them than Sweden
APPENDIX 3
THE QUESTIONNAIRE IN ESTONIA

N.B. Questions 1 through 3c are presented in Estonia and Finland, questions 3d through 3g in Estonia only

Next we shall put forward a few questions on Finland.

1. First we will ask, what your attitude towards Finns is. Please answer using the scale very positive, fairly positive, neutral, don’t know, fairly negative, very negative
   a) as tourists in Estonia
   b) as partners in work and business

2. How interested would you be in living and studying or working in Finland? Answer using the scale
   1) very interested
   2) fairly interested
   3) somewhat interested
   4) not at all interested
   5) cannot say

3. Do you agree or disagree with the following propositions? Answer with the scale
   fully agree
   more or less agree
   do not agree or disagree
   more or less disagree
   fully disagree
   a) Close economic integration of Estonia and Southern Finland would be beneficial to both countries
b) Estonia and Finland are so different that their co-operation within the EU will not work

c) An extensive student exchange programme should be set up between Estonia and Finland

d) Finnish-owned companies operating in Estonia are good employers

e) By investing in Estonia Finnish companies are merely trying to take advantage of the lower wage level and loose labour norms

f) Finns do not treat Estonians as their equals

g) It is not worthwhile for Estonians to study Finnish, other languages like English, French or German are more important

h) Which countries or groups of countries should Estonia develop its relations with in particular in the following fields. Choose from the card the most important and second most important country/group of countries. PRESENT THE CARD

a) political relations most important second most important

b) economic relations most important second most important

c) cultural relations most important second most important

THE CARD:
1. Latvia and Lithuania
2. Finland
3. The Nordic countries in general
4. Germany
5. The EU countries as a whole
6. Russia
7. The United States
8. Some other country, which one?