

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PARTY SYSTEM IN ESTONIA, 1991-2001

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ABSTRACT

The concepts of democratic transition, political party, the party system and institutionalization of party system are contested aspects. There is no all agreed definition available regarding these concepts. Several authors have interpreted and conceptualized these concepts in various ways. They are relevant to understand democratic transition and the institutionalization of political parties in Estonia. Estonia regained its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, the country has undergone multiple transitions in the form of economic, political, cultural and social. Estonia began its nation-building and democratization based on the values and principles of western liberal democracy. Institutional structures such as constitution, president, parliament and political parties which are necessary for democracy were established. The literature on institutional analysis of political parties indicates that institutionalization of party system is a necessary condition for the effective functioning of democracy. Institutionalization of party system is conceptualized in various ways.

The constitution of Estonia was adopted on 28 June 1992; with this unicameral legislature *Riigikogu* consisting of 101 members was formed. The members of parliament are elected for a term of four years through secret ballot on the basis of proportional representation. The president is elected by the *Riigikogu* for a five-year term. The president nominates the prime minister for the approval by the *Riigikogu*. Political parties play a very important role in Estonia as in all representative democracies. A multi-party system was developed in Estonia after independence. Since political parties act as a link between society and state, competing political parties and institutionalization of party system are significant factors for successful functioning of representative democracy in Estonia. Hence, the proposed study intends to examine democratic transition, development of political parties and institutionalization of party system in Estonia.

KEYWORDS: Constitution, President, Parliament and Political Parties