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affairs without so far creating any friction. Both the Foreign Minister, Trivimi Velliste, and Juri Luik, the bright 26-year-old Minister without Portfolio in charge of negotiations with Russia, are his proteges. And he is regarded in Moscow as a reasonable man with whom the Russians can do business. As a member of the Department remarked to me recently, Meri as President seems to making a better fist of running Estonia's foreign policy than he did as Foreign Minister.

7. The relationship with Russia is by far the dominant issue in Estonian diplomacy - the primary aim of which is to achieve the rapid and unconditional withdrawal of FSU troops. Seven rounds of talks took place in 1992. Discussions were held in four baskets: troop withdrawal, border issues, economic matters and social questions (the Russians prefer to call the last "human rights"). So far no date has been agreed for final departure of the troops. The Russians deploy well-known arguments for delay such as social and accommodation problems. From time to time they link withdrawal with discrimination against the Russian community in Estonia eg the Citizenship Law and other vague allegations of abuse of human rights. The Estonians countered this by inviting a CSCE team under the Moscow mechanism of the human dimension to judge this for itself. But there appears to have been a sea change in Russian strategic thinking in the middle of the year. In June, while Ambassador Svirin was still talking of 1997 or even later, the rate of actual withdrawal speeded up dramatically. Reliable estimates are that no more than 9,000 now remain, of whom 7,500 are officers or warrant officers, against some 35,000 a year ago. At the latest round of talks in December Russian delegates suggested, in private, that de facto withdrawal may be completed by July or August of this year.

8. Throughout the year the Estonians made good use of international fora to gain world support for troop withdrawal eg NACC, CSCE, the United Nations and Baltic Council. Indeed at times they had to be reined in and advised not to irritate gratuitously the Russians nor to provoke military confrontations with them. For their part the latter kept up their propaganda campaign on behalf of their minority and muttered occasional threats of economic reprisals against Estonia. However, thanks to several contributory factors, by year's end relations had improved considerably. Velliste and Kozyrev seem to have hit it off. The Estonians reacted mildly to Yeltsin's announced suspension of Baltic troop withdrawals at the end of October, reasoning that this was for home consumption. The Russians appointed a sympathetic and first-rate Ambassador to Tallinn in the summer. And the last round of