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*Together or Apart? The Russian-Speaking Minority in Estonia
and Its (Dis)Integration into Society after 1991*

Razem czy osobno? Mniejszość rosyjskojęzyczna w Estonii i jej (dez)integracja ze społeczeństwem
po 1991 roku

ABSTRACT

Estonia's policy towards national minorities is considered one of the most restrictive in Europe, resulting in a differentiated status of persons living in the state and an unprecedented level of statelessness. This is due to the fact that after Estonia's independence in 1991, the "zero option", which guarantees citizenship to all residents of the state, was not introduced, but only to those who were Estonian citizens before the annexation of the state by the USSR and their descendants. The others had to go through a naturalisation process in order to obtain citizenship. The restrictive naturalisation law was intended to facilitate the process of social integration by forcing people to learn the Estonian language and culture. The aim of the research conducted in the article is to analyse the assumptions of Estonia's policy towards the Russian-speaking minority after 1991. The article verifies the hypothesis that Estonia's policy towards national minorities is not conducive to the integration of representatives of national minorities into the titular nation. This is due to the strict naturalisation requirements, the failure to include representatives of the Russian-speaking minority in the integration process from the outset, and Russia's activities in the Baltic region. The article consists of three parts. The first presents the genesis of the Russian-speaking minority on the territory of present-day Estonia, the second analyses the functioning of the Russian-speaking minority in the light of the applicable law, while the third examines the state of integration of the Russian-speaking minority into Estonian society and its identification with the state. The analysis leads to the conclusion that it is difficult to make a clear assessment of Estonian policy on the integration of the Russian-speaking minority. On the one hand, a systematic increase in identification with the state can be observed, while on the other hand, significant disparities in integration have become apparent.

Keywords: Russian-speaking minority, national minorities, Estonia, citizenship, social integration, multiculturalism, multiethnicity

INTRODUCTION

The policy on national minorities is one of the most significant challenges in contemporary Estonia, and the issue does not only concern the domestic policy level, but also relations between Estonia and Russia, and even the broader international forum. The guarantee and protection of the rights of the Russian-speaking minority is a subject raised regularly by the Kremlin authorities in diplomatic contacts with Estonia. The Russian authorities have frequently made accusations against Estonia of discriminating against Russians, failing to adequately protect their rights and hindering their integration into society. In turn, Estonia's aspirations for membership of international organisations related to security and development forced Estonia to respect human rights, including the rights of national minorities [Szwed 2022: 5].

Estonia is a special case because its population of 133,796 is made up of 211 ethnic groups, the largest of which are the Estonians (67.8%), closely followed by the Russians (22%). In addition, as Manfred H. Wiegandt points out, two other issues are relevant: Estonia (like Lithuania and Latvia) was a state recognised by the international community before the Second World War, and incorporation into the USSR was a coercive act, so the natural postulate was to seek independence. Moreover, tensions between ethnic minorities were not brought to the level of open conflict¹ [Wiegandt 1995: 110].

Estonia's policy towards national minorities is undoubtedly one of the most restrictive in Europe, resulting in a differentiated status of persons living in the state and an unprecedented scale of the problem of statelessness. After the restoration of independence, citizenship was not automatically granted to all persons living in the state, but only to those who had been Estonian citizens before the annexation of the state by the USSR and their descendants. The others, in order to obtain citizenship, were required to pass a naturalisation procedure. The justification for the adopted solutions indicated that after 1940, the state was faced with forced population migrations, independent of its will, which significantly affected the demographic structure, threatening the national identity [Kuzborska-Pacha 2019: 233]. This policy is supposed to integrate and assimilate national minorities, but they perceive it as an instrument of discrimination [cf. Hyndle, Kutysz 2004]. The ultimate goal of the policy of integrating national minorities is to create a multicultural society in Estonia whose members, despite their cultural and ethnic differences, identify with Estonia and create a common culture based on the Estonian language, democratic values and tolerance. It is therefore legitimate to ask about the status of the realisation of this goal more than twenty years after the monitoring of social integration was initiated.

Undoubtedly, Estonia's policy towards the Russian-speaking minority is influenced by the Russian Federation, and this influence takes place both in bilateral contacts and at the level of international organisations and institutions. In the first

¹ The events surrounding the so-called Bronze Soldier crisis in 2007 are an exception.

case, the Russian Federation directly supports the Russian-speaking minority, e.g. by subsidising legal aid, organising cultural events dedicated to representatives of Russian history and culture, providing textbooks and school aids in Russian, providing financial support for war invalids and veterans, etc. In the second case, the Russian Federation uses soft power. Secondly, by using soft power to put pressure on Estonia to change legislation and attitudes towards the Russian-speaking minority in the direction desired by Russia [Runiewicz 2022: 16–17]. Russia's actions in the international forum, on the other hand, consisted of initiating procedures to change the situation of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia (these actions were taken in the case of organisations of which Russia is a member) or exerting international pressure on Estonia (e.g. in the case of the EU and NATO).

The aim of the research is to analyse the assumptions of Estonian policy towards the Russian-speaking minority after 1991. In this article, I will test the hypothesis that Estonia's policy towards national minorities is not conducive to the integration of members of national minorities into the titular nation. This is due to strict naturalisation requirements, the failure to involve representatives of the Russian-speaking minority in the integration process from the outset, and Russia's activities in the Baltic region. Attention will be paid to the origins of the Russian-speaking minority on the territory of present-day Estonia, the functioning of the Russian-speaking minority under current law, and the state of integration of the Russian-speaking minority into Estonian society and its identification with the state.

The research was based on a critical analysis of legal acts, documents, data from research institutes and opinion polls and literature on the subject (monographs, chapters in edited monographs, articles from scientific journals, netographs). The research mainly used the institutional-legal method (content analysis of legal acts and documents), the decision-making method and the comparative method.

In the research I use the definition of national minorities provided in the Cultural Autonomy of National Minorities Act (1993). According to the law, national minorities are defined as Estonian citizens who reside in the state, have long-standing and strong ties to Estonia, differ from Estonians in terms of ethnicity, cultural identity, religion or language, and are motivated by the common preservation of culture, religion or language, which is the basis of their common identity [Vähemusrahvuse kultuuriautonomiam seadus 1993: § 1].

ORIGINS OF THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY IN ESTONIA

The significant presence of representatives of the Russian-speaking minority in the demographic structure of Estonia is a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back to the period of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic republics. The increase in the number of Russians in Estonia was then permanent and with consequences to the present day. This does not mean, however, that in earlier years there was no migration of

Russians into the Baltic republic, which experienced a clash of opposing aspirations on many occasions, especially with regard to the preservation of cultural identity.

The intensified policy of uniformisation and Russification affected Estonian society in the 19th century, in line with the Russian Empire's idea of a homogeneous society in terms of language, culture and religion [Velliste 1995: 137]. Very soon all positions in Estonian education and state administration were filled by Russians and the official language became Russian. The difficulties of preserving a distinct culture were compounded by the fact that German and Russian influences clashed in the area, mainly in the economic sphere, but also in the religious sphere² [Dudra, Król-Mazur, Maj 2018: 106; Maj 2021: 70; Melvin 1995: 28].

The period from Estonia's proclamation of independence in 1918 until its annexation by the USSR in 1940, passed without major conflicts between the predominant Estonian community and the Russian-speaking minority.³ It was facilitated by the adopted legislation, notably the Cultural Autonomy Act of 1925, which allowed national minorities to operate under the conditions of "the most democratic and liberal policy towards minorities in the world" [Velliste 1995: 137]. Under the above mentioned law, national minorities gained the right to establish a cultural self-government, to run their schools and to participate in local elections. On its basis, cultural autonomy was established for the German (1925) and Jewish (1926) communities. The Russians, however, did not succeed in establishing a similar institution. In addition, minority languages (German, Russian and Swedish) could be used in the judiciary and local administration. The change in policy towards national minorities in Estonia came in 1934, with the radicalisation of the government. A manifestation of the new approach was the Estonianisation of personalities and geographical nomenclature [Sozański 1998: 40].

Estonia was a nationally homogeneous state when independence was proclaimed. Compared to other national minorities, especially the Baltic Germans, the Russian-speaking minority was definitely less organised, which was reflected in the results of the elections to the Riigikogu, in which Russians were unable to win more than five seats between 1918 and 1940 [Kasekamp 2000: 20]. The changes in Estonia's nationality structure are shown in Table 1.

² The question of the relationship between national identity and religion in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of analysis by Radosław Zenderowski, among others. He points out that in the case of the countries of the region it is difficult to overlook this key determinant in the construction of individual and collective notions of national community. Moreover, in his view, there is a clear difference between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe in terms of the development of national identity. While in the former case socio-political and economic conflicts were decisive, in the latter it was religious and cultural-linguistic conflicts. As Zenderowski further points out, religion in combination with ethnicity is a mobilisation tool and above all a means of self-identification for individuals and community groups, especially in times of crisis [Zenderowski 2011: 8–10; cf. Zenderowski, Michalak 2018: 48].

³ However, an important issue in this case is the confessional question related to the establishment of the autonomous Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church on the basis of the *tomos* of the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Meletius IV and the introduction of the Gregorian calendar, which triggered conflicts between the church authorities and the Russian Orthodox minority [cf. Maj 2022: 151].

Table 1. The national composition in Estonia between 1897 and 1989*

Nationality group	1897	1922	1934	1959	1970	1974	1989
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Estonians	90.6	87.6	88.1	74.6	68.2	64.7	61.5
Russians	3.9	8.2	8.2	20.1	24.7	27.9	30.3

*the table excludes: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Finns, Latvians, Germans, Lithuanians, Tatars, Jews, Poles, Swedes and others

Source: *The First General Census of the Russian Empire of 1897*; Statistics Estonia.

Between 1918 and 1939, even in spite of more intensive migration from Russia and the subsequent USSR, which was primarily determined by the more attractive living conditions in Estonia, the number of Russians remained relatively constant at just over 8% of the total population [cf. Kalev, Ruutsoo 2010: 3–21]. In 1945, after the end of military operations, border changes and population migrations, the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) still remained a state with a homogeneous national composition, with Estonians making up 97.3% of the population [Lewandowski 2002: 239; Sozański 1998: 34].

The critical moment of transition in the nationality structure occurred between 1959 and 1989. The 1959 census revealed that there were 892.7 thousand ethnic Estonians in a population of 1,1196,791 in the ESSR, which already accounted for only 74.6% of the total population [Lewandowski 2002: 239]. The next census, from 1989, gave an even more drastic picture of change: although the number of Estonians had risen to 963,300 in thirty years, their percentage representation of the total population had fallen to just 61.5% [Hyndle, Kutysz 2004: 48]. Similarly, the Russian-speaking minority represented 20.1% and 30.3% of the total population, respectively. In order to better illustrate the dynamics of population growth in the ESSR, it should be pointed out that between 1959 and 1989, Estonians recorded a population growth rate of 7.9%, while Russians had a population growth rate of 97.7% [Eberhardt 2009: 103].

The unfavourable demographic changes from Estonia's perspective were determined by two factors. The first of these was population growth, which was already significantly lower for Estonians than for Russians. The second, of fundamental importance for the future fate of the state, was the annexation of the country by the USSR and the subsequent Soviet policy model based on Sovietization and Russification. Sovietisation was intended to make Estonia more like the other Soviet republics, *inter alia*, through the imposition of the communist system with its vision of the economy and the uniformisation of society. Extensive mechanisms of control and terror were built through which segments of society that were considered potentially dangerous to the new government were harassed [cf. Włodarska-Frykowska 2017: 63–64]. Russification, on the other hand, implied a policy of encouraging the Russian-speaking population, mainly Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians, to migrate to the territory of the ESSR. Among the migrating population, two groups predom-

inated. The first of these was the members of the military and their families. These included both active duty soldiers and pensioners who were attracted by the higher standard of living, and more liberalised economic and political spheres. The second group included employees in the energy, electro-technical, food and fish sectors. This resulted from intensive industrialisation and an increasing demand for labour, including unskilled labour. However, this process led to radical transformations in the demographic structure, especially of the large cities and industrial centres located in the north-eastern part of the state (including the cities of Narva, Sillamäe and Kohla-Järve). The percentage of Russians gradually increased and, taking into account newcomers from the other Soviet republics, by the late 1980s the predominance of Estonians, was becoming illusory [Eberhardt 2009: 103].

The Russian-speaking population was not assimilated, either as a consequence of the language barrier, cultural differences (in terms of religion, customs, attitudes to work) or, finally, the style of settlement. Although the possibility of speaking the languages of the Soviet republics was maintained, the presence of the Russian language in state administration and education increased with the arrival of further waves of migrants (education at all levels was developed for the Russian-speakers). Consequently, this resulted in the emergence of the phenomenon of bilingualism among Estonians, which was caused by the fact that in public situations they were forced to use Russian increasingly (in administration, businesses), while in private life they cultivated their native language. The isolation of Estonians and Russians was further increased by the preferred settlement style. Russians settled in the cities (e.g. in the capital Tallinn), while Estonians were pushed to the periphery. Consequently, in major urban centres (such as in Kohla-Järve), Russian-speaking districts began to emerge.

The political and economic changes resulted in the return of part of the population of Russians to their homeland (e.g. part of the officer corps, specialists and factory workers). The state administration officials, who were gradually replaced in their positions by Estonians, had also lost their position. After 1989, the number of Russians in Estonia began to systematically decrease, which is confirmed by the population censuses conducted in 2000, 2011 and 2023, respectively. The phenomenon cannot be said to be highly dynamic in this case. Changes in the population composition of Estonia are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The national composition in Estonia between 2000 and 2023*

Nationality group	2000	2011	2023
	%	%	%
Estonians	67.9	69.7	67.8
Russians	25.6	25.2	22.0

*the table excludes: Ukrainians, Belarusians, Finns, Latvians, Germans, Lithuanians, Tatars, Jews, Poles, Swedes and others

Source: Statistics Estonia.

Currently, the largest Russian population resides in Harju county, which includes the capital city of Tallinn, and Ida-Vira county, where they make up 32.4% (36.4% in Tallinn) and 71.2% of the total population, respectively.

FUNCTIONING OF THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY UNDER ESTONIAN LAW

The rebirth of Estonian statehood was accompanied by a heated debate on the problem of the Russian-speaking minority, especially in the context of resolving the question of citizenship. Two opposing approaches clashed in this area, represented by the independence circles and the supporters of the existing *status quo*, whose core was the Russian-speaking population [cf. Szabaciuk 2016: 219–240]. The independence option had advocated the adoption of strict solutions that deprived of the citizenship of all migrants from the Soviet republics who had arrived in Estonia during the period of Soviet occupation. The intention of such solutions was to encourage Russians to return to their homeland. In contrast, circles associated with the International Working People's Movement opted to grant citizenship to all Estonian residents, including permanently stationed Red Army soldiers.

Eventually, proposals for an independence option were accepted, and such a decision correlated with the resolution of the Supreme Council of the ESRR of 30 March 1990 On the State Status of Estonia, which stated that Estonia had been occupied by the USSR since 1940⁴ and that Estonian statehood had never ceased to exist. Therefore, as Estonia lacked recognition as the legal successor to the ESRR, the obligation to recognise those settled in the state as citizens was not perceived [Smith, Aasland, Mole 1994: 186]. As a result, almost a third of the state's population has not been granted citizenship. Political parties representing the interests of non-Estonians have had virtually no influence on policy towards national minorities, despite their participation in the Riigikogu (since 1995) and local government [Agarin, Regelman 2012: 449; cf. Cianetti 2014: 91].

The main provisions of national law relating to national minorities are contained in the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia [Eesti Vabariigi põhiseadus 1992], Citizenship Act [Kodakondsuse seadus 1995], Aliens Act [Välismaalaste seadus 2009, repealed 1993 Act], National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act [Vähemusrahvuse kultuuriautonomiamia seadus 1993], and Language Act [Keeleseadus 2011, previous versions of the 1989 and 1995 laws repealed].

In general, the Estonian Constitution contains two types of regulations concerning the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The first is the general principle of equality of all citizens regardless of nationality, race, language, origin, religious belief, opinion, etc. and the prohibition of discrimination on these grounds (Articles 12, 9, 13, 28, and 37). The second type is the right to separate protection

⁴ The exception was the period of occupation by the Third Reich between 1941 and 1944.

of persons belonging to minorities and their right to preserve their identity (Articles 49, 50, 51 and 52) [cf. Janusz 1995: 11].

The main idea of Estonia's ethnic policy is articulated in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, which states:

With unwavering faith and a steadfast will to strengthen and develop the state which embodies the inextinguishable right of the people of Estonia to national self-determination and which was proclaimed on 24 February 1918, which is founded on liberty, justice and the rule of law, which is created to protect the peace and defend the people against aggression from the outside, and which forms a pledge to present and future generations for their social progress and welfare, which must guarantee the preservation of the Estonian people, the Estonian language and the Estonian culture through the ages. [The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia 1992]

Therefore, it expresses the principle of protecting the titular nation, its identity, culture and language. Legislation on national minorities has also been subordinated to this objective. Section 9 of the Constitution indicates that all rights, freedoms and duties are enjoyed by Estonian citizens as well as foreign citizens and stateless persons residing in Estonia, while Section 12 guarantees equality under the law for everyone and the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, faith, political or other convictions, as well as on the basis of wealth and social position or other reasons. The Constitution guarantees everyone (Estonian citizens, citizens of other states and stateless persons) the right to health care and state assistance in the case of old age, inability to work, loss of a breadwinner or poverty (Article 28), as well as the right to choose an occupation and place of work, with the proviso that exceptions to this principle may be regulated by laws. The obvious difference between Estonian citizens and citizens of other countries and stateless persons is evident in the filling of positions in the state administration and local government units, as these positions are generally filled by Estonian citizens (Article 30), as well as in activities in political parties, as only Estonian citizens are allowed to be their members (Article 48).

The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia provides for the protection of national minorities by guaranteeing the right to retain their nationality (Article 49) and to establish self-governing institutions for the preservation of their culture (Article 50). Everyone has the right to education, including education in the language of national minorities (Article 37), and in regions where at least half of the permanent residents belong to national minorities, has the right to receive answers from state institutions, local governments and their functionaries in the language of the national minority concerned (Article 51), and in regions where Estonian is not the language of the majority of residents, local governments may, to the extent and in the manner prescribed by law, conduct internal administration in the language of the majority of permanent residents of the region concerned (Article 52).

With regard to the question of citizenship, the Supreme Council of the ESRR referred to legislation from the inter-war period and reinstated the citizenship law of 11 April 1938. [Kodakondsuse seadus 1938]. This happened in February 1992, before the referendum on adopting the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia (28 June 1992) and before the first free Riigikogu and presidential elections (both of which were held on 20 September 1992) [Szabaciuk 2016: 220; <https://www.valimised.ee/>]. The possibility of non-citizens voting in parliamentary and presidential elections was put to a referendum (28 June 1992), but the result clearly rejected it.⁵

The 1938 law introduced restrictive rules for the acquisition of citizenship, including a departure from the principle of domicile⁶ laid down in the 1922 Citizenship Law. Apart from cases strictly defined in the law,⁷ the only way to obtain Estonian citizenship was through a naturalisation procedure. The law provides for a relaxation of naturalisation requirements in the case of persons of Estonian origin, persons of special merit to the state in the field of defence or social affairs who are widely known because of their talents or work, and stateless persons who have resided permanently in Estonia for at least ten years prior to the date of application [Kodakondsuse seadus 1938].

In 1994, Riigikogu initiated the preparation of a new citizenship law, as the 1938 law did not regulate all aspects (for example, it did not specify the circumstances in which citizenship could be denied) and it was not in line with modern challenges. The current Citizenship Act was adopted in 1995 and has been amended several times over the years [Kodakondsuse seadus 1995; Szwed 2022: 174–186]. The law provides for three ways of acquiring citizenship: by birth, by naturalisation and by special merit. Acquisition of citizenship by birth is possible in three cases: 1) a child whose at least one parent was an Estonian citizen at the time of his or her birth, 2) a child born after the death of a father who was an Estonian citizen, and 3) a child

⁵ The ballot question was: “Do you agree that those who applied for Estonian citizenship before 5 June 1992 obtain the right to participate in the first parliamentary and presidential elections after the ratification of this Constitution?” Voting results: total electorate: 669,080; no votes: 236,819 (53.04%); yes votes: 205,980 (46.13%); valid votes: 442,799; result: valid, motion rejected [Liivik 2011: 23; C2D: Centre for Research on Direct Democracy].

⁶ The principle of domicile allowed all persons residing on the territory of the state to obtain citizenship, regardless of nationality, religion or language.

⁷ According to the Citizenship Act of 1938, Estonian citizens were 1) persons recognised as citizens before the Act came into force; 2) persons recognised as citizens under international treaties; 3) children born while their father was an Estonian citizen; 4) children born after the father’s death, if the child’s father was an Estonian citizen at the time of death; 5) stepchildren, if the mother was an Estonian citizen at the time of the child’s birth; 6) children born in Estonia, if the father was a stateless person at the time of the child’s birth; 7) stepchildren born in Estonia, if the mother was an Estonian citizen at the time of the child’s birth; 6) children born in Estonia, if the father was a stateless person at the time of the child’s birth; 7) stepchildren born in Estonia, if the mother was a stateless person at the time of the child’s birth; 8) children found in Estonia, unless it is proved that they have the citizenship of another country; 9) children born of a marriage between an Estonian citizen and a citizen of another country, if the marriage was annulled in Estonia.

of unknown parents who was found on Estonian territory at the request of his or her guardian. Citizenship acquired by birth cannot be withdrawn [Kodakondsuse seadus 1995, § 5]. The naturalisation procedure was clarified in the 1995 law. A foreigner wishing to apply for Estonian citizenship must be at least 15 years old, have a permanent residence permit or a permanent right of residence, and have resided in Estonia for at least eight years, including five years of permanent residence prior to the date of application. It is also necessary to have a legal source of income and to demonstrate knowledge of the Estonian language at B-1 level, the Estonian Constitution, the Citizenship Act and to take an oath. Estonian citizenship may also be acquired for special merits in the fields of science, culture, sport or other fields not specifically mentioned in the law. Candidates may be proposed by members of the Council of Ministers, but no more than 10 persons may be granted citizenship in this way each year [Kodakondsuse seadus 1995, §10].

In 1993, the Estonian Parliament passed the Aliens Act (Välismaalaste seadus), which regulated the rules for non-citizens entering and staying in Estonia. To a large extent, this 1993 law dealt with persons who had not obtained citizenship under the reinstated 1938 law. The law regulated, *inter alia*, the right of Red Army soldiers to reside in the country by stating that a residence permit shall not be issued or extended to a person who is on active service in the armed forces of a foreign state or to a person who has served as a personnel soldier in the armed forces of a foreign state, including in reserve or retired [Välismaalaste seadus 1993, § 12 (6 and 7)]. In 2009, Parliament adopted a new Aliens Act. Among other things, the law regulates the right to long-term residence. According to the Act, a foreigner may apply for long-term residence if he/she has been living in Estonia on the basis of a residence permit for at least five years, holds a valid temporary residence permit, has a permanent legal income that enables him/her to live in Estonia, is insured in accordance with the Health Insurance Act or the Republic of Estonia's foreign agreement, fulfils the conditions for integration, has his/her residence data entered in the population register and there are no grounds for refusing to issue a residence permit to a long-term resident [Välismaalaste seadus 2009, § 232 (1)]. The integration condition referred to in the Act is knowledge of the Estonian language at B-1 level or its equivalent, confirmed by a state examination. Foreigners under the age of 15, foreigners over the age of 65 and adults with limited legal capacity are exempted from the integration requirement. On the other hand, persons who have received primary, secondary or higher education in Estonian are exempted from the language test.

The right to preserve the cultural identity of national minorities is guaranteed by the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act [Vähemusrahvuse kultuuriautonomiaseadus, 1993]. According to the law, cultural autonomy is the right of minorities to create cultural communities in order to realise the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. These powers include the organisation of education in the language of the national minorities, the establishment of cultural institutions, as well as the collection of funds and the provision of scholarships for the promotion of minority culture.

The law explicitly states that the German, Russian, Swedish and Jewish minorities, as well as any other minority with a population of at least 3,000, have the right to apply for cultural autonomy. The precondition for applying for cultural autonomy is the establishment of a national minority list. On this basis, the Finns were granted autonomy in 2004 and the Swedes in 2007. The Russian-speaking minority, on the other hand, did not succeed because of difficulties in drawing up a national list.

The use of the minority language is regulated by the Language Act [Keeleseadus 2011]. The first language law (which was also the first of its kind in the USSR) was adopted in 1989 [Eesti NSV Keeleseadus 1989]. It established Estonian as the official state language, while maintaining the principle of bilingualism in certain professions, but this time for both Estonians and the Russian-speaking population. Simultaneously, the law recognised the right of citizens of any nationality to cultivate their mother tongue and culture, and the equality of all citizens before the law, regardless of the language they speak [see: Erelt 2010: 704; Raun 1995: 515–534]. As Raija Kemppainen points out, “the Soviet-era, one-way bilingualism in Estonia, where the Estonians were required to learn Russian but the Russians were not required to learn Estonian, was reversed with the new law” [Kemppainen 2000: 53]. Meanwhile, the 1995 law abolished the principle of bilingualism: Estonian became the state language, while Russian became the language of the national minority⁸ [cf. Järve 2002: 78–110]. The Law of 2011 guarantees that in a municipality where at least half of the permanent residents belong to a minority, everyone has the right to contact state and local government bodies operating in the municipality and to receive answers from them and their officials and employees in the language of the minority, in addition to answers given in Estonian [Keeleseadus 2011, § 9 (1)], and that in a municipality where the language of the majority of permanent residents is not Estonian, the language of the internal local government administration may be the language of the majority of permanent residents of the municipality [Keeleseadus 2011, § 11].

The current law also allows participation in elections to the Riigikogu, the European Parliament, local elections and a referendum. To be eligible to vote, a person must be an Estonian citizen and at least 18 years old (16 for local elections). Citizens of other EU countries can vote in European Parliament and local elections, while citizens of non-EU countries and stateless persons can only vote in local elections and cannot stand as candidates.

The right to be a member of a political party is available to Estonian citizens who have full civil and political rights and who are at least 18 years of age. Citizens of other European Union countries may also exercise this right, provided that they are permanently resident in Estonia. Due to the low level of participation in public life by

⁸ According to the Act: “The language of a national minority shall be a foreign language which Estonian citizens belonging to a national minority have historically used in Estonia as their mother tongue” [Keeleseadus 1995, § 5 (2)].

representatives of the Russian-speaking minority, it has not been possible to establish a political party to represent their interests. The largest part of this electorate is concentrated in the Estonian Centre Party (Eestii Keskerakond) [Szwed 2022: 19–20].

THE POLICY OF THE INTEGRATION OF THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY INTO THE ESTONIAN SOCIETY AND ITS EFFECTS

The situation of the Russian-speaking population (including the Russian minority) changed radically after Estonia became independent. From being a privileged population in the reality of the Soviet republic, they became an undesirable and problematic community, associated with the former regime. Living in a country that was changing from a socialist, centrally planned economy to a democratic, market-based republic revealed the scale of the problems minorities faced in adapting to the new conditions. Obtaining citizenship or permanent residence, navigating the new labour market, or finally, language skills became problematic. Despite this, not many people decided to leave Estonia (although the number of Russians is steadily decreasing; see Table 2).

Indeed, a factor that significantly determines Estonian policy towards the Russian-speaking minority is Russia's activity in the post-Soviet space, which is not only related to the politics of remembrance and the rivalry between the democratic opposition circles from the Soviet era and the supporters of the Soviet vision (e.g. the conflict in 2004–2007 over the monuments commemorating the Red Army), but also the military dimension (alliances formed and armed conflicts triggered) and the economic dimension (dependence on energy resources), as well as attempts to exert pressure on the country's domestic politics [Szabaciuk 2016: 224–228]. In addition, the Moscow Patriarchate's concept of a "Russian canonical territory" is an important factor in support of Russia's activities in the cultural dimension [cf. Maj 2021: 80; Ławreszuk 2009: 91–92].

The Estonian policy towards the Russian-speaking minority could be distinguished into two clearly identifiable periods: the first, covering the first decade after Estonian independence, and the second, initiated in the early 2000s. The first period of policy towards the Russian-speaking minority was *de facto* a policy of assimilation into the new conditions that emerged after the change of political regime. The position of the Estonian authorities on the question of national minorities has been characterised by a high degree of radicalism. During this period, the most restrictive laws on minorities were drafted, including the Law on Citizenship (1995), the Law on Foreigners (1993), the Law on the Cultural Autonomy of Minorities (1993), and the Law on Languages (1989 and 1995). Representatives of the Russian-speaking minority were not consulted on the provisions contained in these laws, as their representatives did not sit in the 7th Riigikogu (1992–1995 term). The second period of Estonian policy towards the Russian-speaking minority is characterised by a liber-

alisation of the legal solutions adopted, which was dictated by the need to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria in connection with accession to the European Union. These measures concerned the requirements for obtaining citizenship (in order to reduce the unprecedented number of stateless persons in Europe) and participation in the decision-making process.

Government programmes aimed at integrating a society that was very divided both in terms of culture (language, religion, attitudes to work) and attitudes towards Estonia and its independence were also absent in the first years after independence. The first such programme was implemented in 1997 in cooperation with the United Nations. The programme, which took an asymmetrical approach to the process of social integration, did not recommend any implementable solutions, but merely literalised the problem, i.e. the lack of social integration. The subsequent programme from 1999 also favoured a one-way approach to social integration [Kuzborska-Pacha 2019: 203–205]. In the course of work on this programme, attention began to be drawn to the fact that the restrictive solutions adopted in the state with regard to naturalisation and language policy not only did not support integration, but directly undermined it. Also, the perception of the Russian-speaking minority as a threat to the state did not improve the state of relations between Estonians and Russians [Włodarska-Frykowska 2017: 170].

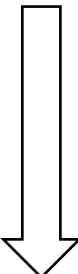
The situation changed with the adoption of the Integration Programme 2000–2007, which stated that social integration should focus on two key areas: the process of achieving social balance based on knowledge of the Estonian language and Estonian citizenship, and the opportunity to preserve and cultivate one's ethnic and national distinctiveness. Integration was to take place in three key areas: linguistic-communicative, legal-political and economic. Similar assumptions were included in the 2008–2013 programme.

Unlike previous programmes, the government's integration strategy 2015–2020 has been widely consulted with representatives of the Russian-speaking minority. The strategy, which is an example of the first programme in the Baltic republics to promote multiculturalism, refers to the postulate of building social cohesion through active citizenship and shared values [Kuzborska-Pacha 2019: 209–213].

In attempting to assess the impact of the implementation of the policy of integrating the Russian-speaking minority into Estonian society, it seems legitimate to ask what integration is from the perspective of society. In 1999, as part of the initiation of the monitoring of the social integration process in Estonia, a survey was conducted on the perceptions of Estonians and non-Estonians about social integration. The survey identified sixteen integration factors (see Table 3) and a group of Estonians and non-Estonians were asked to select what they considered to be the most important factors in determining the success of integration. For Estonians, the most important factors seemed to be knowledge of the Estonian language, loyalty of non-Estonians to the state and mutual tolerance. The least important factors were changes in the law to take account of the needs of minority representatives, their participation in political

life and authorities at different levels. For non-Estonians, the most important factors for integration were attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of others, the perception of non-Estonians as part of the state and the willingness to cooperate. Issues such as knowledge of the Estonian language, education in Estonian schools and participation in Estonian cultural life were much less important [Kruusvall 2009: 20–22].

Table 3. Perception of social integration by Estonians and non-Estonians

Importance attached to the factor in the integration process	Estonians	Non-Estonians	Factors	
factors of greatest importance	(A)	(P)	(A) Estonian language	
	(C)	(O)	(B) Estonian citizenship	
	(P)	(I)	(C) Loyalty towards the state	
	(I)	(J)	(D) Competitiveness	
	(O)	(M)	(E) Participation in politics	
	(H)	(N)	(F) Participation in cultural life	
	(B)	(B)	(G) Development of own culture	
	(J)	(D)	(H) Studies in Estonian schools	
	(L)	(E)	(I) Readiness for cooperation	
	(F)	(K)	(J) Clear integration policy	
	(G)	(G)	(K) Non-Estonians in government	
	(D)	(C)	(L) Decrease in differences	
	(M)	(L)	(M) Changes in law	
	(E)	(A)	(N) EU norms	
	factors of least importance	(K)	(H)	(O) Non-Estonians as part of Estonia
			(F)	(P) Tolerance

Source: Kruusvall [2009: 20–22].

The results of the social research conducted in 2011 on behalf of the Ministry of Culture by the think tank Praxis Center for Policy Studies Foundation, the TNS Emor Institute and researchers from the University of Tartu can be considered crucial from the perspective of social integration. The research covered issues of national identity, preferred values, the labour market, forms of social participation, media consumption and adaptation problems of new immigrants. The results showed that, twenty years after independence, the Russian-speaking minority is no longer a homogeneous group, and clear divisions have emerged in terms of levels of social integration. Taking into account factors such as knowledge of the Estonian language, acquisition of Estonian citizenship, identification of Estonia with the motherland and definition of one's national identity as Estonian, the research distinguished five groups among the Russian-speaking minority:

1) Successfully integrated (21% non-ethnic Estonians) – this group was dominated by young people born and educated in Estonia. Representatives of this group speak Estonian, identify themselves as Estonian and mostly hold Estonian citizenship; they work in an Estonian environment and do well economically. They do not show strong cultural ties with Russia (e.g. they prefer Estonian media to Russian media). They live in large cities, including the capital, but are underrepresented in the Ida-Viru County.

2) Russian-speaking patriots of Estonia (16% of non-ethnic Estonians) – people representing the middle-aged and older generation with poorer material circumstances. They identify themselves as Estonian and most of them have Estonian citizenship. They speak Estonian poorly, but try to integrate into society through various groups and bodies. An important issue for them is their cultural identity, including their religious identity. Representatives of this group live mainly in Tallinn and the towns of Ida-Viru County.

3) Estonian-speaking active and critical (13%) – this group includes the youngest and most active people with a satisfactory material situation. In the case of this group, weaker integration into society is evident, manifested in distrust of Estonian mass media, non-participation in the decision-making process, weak identification with Estonia and pointing to other countries as home. Only half of the representatives of this group have Estonian citizenship, know Estonian but rarely use it. They declare their readiness to leave the country.

4) Little integrated (29%) – people representing all age categories, with the lowest income, mainly blue collar workers, unemployed and pensioners. A significant part of the representatives of this group are persons without citizenship or of unclear status, which means that after Estonia's declaration of independence they were not able to fulfil the requirements for naturalisation or to obtain citizenship of another country. They have poor knowledge of the Estonian language, which they justify by learning difficulties. They are distrustful of the authorities and are recipients of Estonian and Russian media; they live in the cities of Ida-Viru County and Tallinn.

5) Unintegrated passive (22%) – these are mainly older people who do not speak Estonian, are not integrated into Estonian society and do not show interest in state affairs. Most of them have Russian citizenship and consider Russia as their home country. Their main source of information is the Russian language media. They live in the Ida-Viru County [Koort 2014: 68–69].

The research showed that a third (37%) of the Russian-speaking minority are well or satisfactorily integrated into Estonian society, while 13% are not integrated at all. The overall conclusion of the research was positive, especially as there was an increase in certain factors indicating integration: interest in obtaining Estonian citizenship (64% compared to 51% in 2008) or completing studies in Estonia (26% compared to 19% in 2008) [Praxis Center for Policy Studies Foundation 2012].

Interestingly, the results of the above survey correspond to the results of a survey conducted by Turu-uuringute in 2023 on behalf of the Estonian Government. They showed that 28% of people of Russian origin describe themselves exclusively as Russians, 68% as Estonian-Russians or Russian-speaking Estonians, and only 3% of ethnic Russians describe themselves as Estonians: 38% identified themselves exclusively as Russian, while 51% said they were Estonian-Russian, Russian-speaking Estonians or both Estonian and Russian. Looking at the Estonian population as a whole, the picture is as follows: 65% are Estonian, 22% are Estonian-Russian or Russian-speaking Estonians, 8% are Russians and 5% are other nationalities [Survey: *Less than...* 2023].

However, we can look at these results from the perspective of the cultural dimension, including the symbolism with which representatives of national minorities, including Russia, identify or do not identify. The cited survey asked about the perception of the significance of 9 May, which is celebrated as Victory Day in Russia and Europe Day in the countries of the European Union, and of the St. George's Ribbon. Among the respondents, 65% see the day as a commemoration of family members and other victims of the Second World War, 13% associate it with Europe Day and for 10% it has no particular significance (for Estonians the distribution of responses was the opposite, with 17%, 27% and 55%, respectively). The St. George's Ribbon, on the other hand, is a symbol from the Russian Empire and has been associated with Soviet resentment in recent years. The symbol was banned in Estonia following Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. Of the respondents, 5% said they had worn the ribbon on 9 May 2023, 16% said they had worn it in previous years, while 65% said they had never worn it [*Survey: Less than... 2023*].

CONCLUSION

Estonia's policy towards the Russian-speaking minority is difficult to assess unequivocally. On the one hand, the liberalisation of the rules governing the acquisition of citizenship or linguistic rights should be emphasised, as should the inclusion of representatives of national minorities in decision-making processes (at all levels in the case of holding Estonian citizenship, in European Parliament and local elections for citizens of other EU countries, and at local level for citizens of non-EU countries and stateless persons). It should also be emphasised that the relaxation of restrictive rules was a result of the requirements of membership in international organisations and Estonia's pro-European aspirations. On the other hand, the restrictions introduced in the first decade after Estonia's independence, aimed at protecting the state structures and the titular nation, also led to unfavourable trends in society and became an excellent breeding ground for Estonian and Russian nationalism. This was due to the lack of a well-considered integration policy that took into account the minority nation from the outset. A factor that has had a significant impact on the final shape of the policy towards the Russian-speaking minority is Russia's activity, both in the international arena and its attempts to interfere in the country's domestic politics.

A comparison between the legal solutions and the practice of social integration of Russians in Estonia reveals several interesting points. First, the Russian-speaking minority cannot be treated as a homogeneous community; there is a clear division into two factions: 1) pro-Estonian (and more broadly: pro-European), well integrated into society, perceiving Estonia as their homeland, even if members of this group cultivate certain elements related to their national and ethnic identity (e.g. religion); 2) pro-Russian, not or poorly integrated into Estonia, more easily exposed to Russian propaganda, often expressing resentment towards the Soviet Union. Second, there

is a clear relationship between education levels, language skills, income levels and national identification. Thirdly, integration policy must take into account the different levels of integration of the population and differentiate its goals towards the well-integrated and the least integrated, but above all focus on those who identify with the state but have little knowledge of the Estonian language, as well as those who know the language well but are critical of the state. Finally, integration policy must also take into account the specific characteristics of the regions (e.g. the Ida-Viru region, which is dominated by a Russian-speaking minority).

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RAZEM CZY OSOBNO? MNIEJSZOŚĆ ROSYJSKOJĘZYCZNA W ESTONII
I JEJ (DEZ)INTEGRACJA ZE SPOŁECZEŃSTWEM PO 1991 ROKU

Streszczenie: Polityka Estonii wobec mniejszości narodowych uchodzi za jedną z najbardziej restrykcyjnych w Europie, czego efektem jest zróżnicowany status osób zamieszkujących państwo oraz bezprecedensowa skala bezpaństwowości. Wynika to z faktu, że po odzyskaniu niepodległości przez Estonię w 1991 r. nie wprowadzono opcji „zerowej”, gwarantującej obywatelstwo dla wszystkich osób zamieszkujących państwo, ale jedynie tym, którzy byli obywatelami Estonii przed aneksją państwa przez ZSRR i ich zstępny. Pozostali w celu uzyskania obywatelstwa musieli przejść procedurę naturalizacji. Restrykcyjne prawo naturalizacji miało w założeniu wspomóc proces społecznej integracji, niejako wymuszając naukę języka i kultury Estonii. Celem podjętych badań zaprezentowanych w artykule jest analiza założeń polityki Estonii wobec mniejszości rosyjskojęzycznej po 1991 r. W artykule zweryfikowano hipotezę zakładającą, że polityka Estonii wobec mniejszości narodowych nie sprzyja integracji przedstawicieli mniejszości narodowych z narodem tytularnym. Wpływają na to rygorystyczne wymogi naturalizacji, brak włączenia od początku w proces integracji przedstawicieli mniejszości rosyjskiej, a także aktywność Rosji w regionie państw bałtyckich. Artykuł jest podzielony na trzy części. W pierwszej przedstawiono genezę mniejszości rosyjskojęzycznej na terytorium dzisiejszej Estonii, w drugiej zostało przeanalizowane funkcjonowanie mniejszości rosyjskojęzycznej w świetle obowiązującego prawa, natomiast w trzeciej stan integracji mniejszości rosyjskiej ze społeczeństwem Estonii i jej identyfikacji z państwem. Przeprowadzona analiza pozwala skonkludować, że trudno jest jednoznacznie ocenić politykę Estonii w zakresie integracji mniejszości rosyjskojęzycznej. Z jednej strony można bowiem wskazać na systematyczny wzrost identyfikacji z państwem, z drugiej natomiast uwidoczniły się istotne dysproporcje w integracji.

Słowa kluczowe: mniejszość rosyjskojęzyczna, mniejszości narodowe, Estonia, obywatelstwo, integracja społeczna, wielokulturowość, wieloetniczność

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