



Linguistic Human Rights and Security

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

The study dealt with several aspects of the integration of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia: legal, linguistic, cultural, media and information consumption, and foreign policy security policy. These aspects were studied by way of the target group's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in the relevant field, and data compared to data for the Estonian-speaking community as the mainstream society. The differences in the responses from the two language communities give an overview of the state of integration and trends in Estonia that were the basis for preparing the relevant integration model.

In the last 20 years, integration has made noteworthy progress. Estonia has become much closer to other European countries in terms of demographic situation. A number of trends and problems in Estonia's integration field are similar to challenges in other countries in the world.

The main characteristic on the basis of which groups can be distinguished in terms of integration is language (native language, home language). The more Estonian proficiency among people of various ethnicities approaches that of Estonians, the smaller the differences in other integration characteristics. Ethnic and regional characteristics can largely be reduced to language preferences and language proficiency. Citizenship does not play a role in the case of people with the same language.

Surprisingly, citizenship plays quite a marginal role. It should be an indicator of loyalty but in fact it does not appear to characterize this quality. Some differences in answers on the basis of citizenship can be correlated to better language proficiency among Estonian citizens, as B1 level is required to become a naturalized Estonian citizen.

The **linguistic human rights** module pointed up substantial differences in attitude between language groups. Whereas more than one-fourth of people of non-Estonian ethnicities consider human rights not guaranteed at all or mostly not guaranteed, the number of Estonians who responded in the same way was marginal. There was no major difference among non-Estonians with respect to citizenship, which could be presumed.

While the first question investigated respondents' opinion, the second question concretized the relevant experience of human rights violation. One in five to seven Russian-speaking inhabitants find that they have been unfairly treated over ethnicity or native language, and this is a very large share of the target group. The previous study by the Institute of Human Rights (2013) showed that many Russian-speaking inhabitants lack an adequate understanding of human rights. For this reason, inconveniences and difficulties in use of Russian fall into this category, these however are not related to human rights. The responses from Russian-speaking respondents cite cases where sales and service staff, doctors and policemen were not willing or able to speak in Russian. Actually, Estonia has no human right entitling a person to demand the use of a foreign language in conducting business (it can be used if both parties agree); this right only exists for Estonian (Section 8 of the Language Act).



It is above all the younger age groups (15-34, and above all the 15-24 group, where discrimination is perceived 5% more often) that more frequently mention **violation of their rights due to ethnicity or native language**. It is especially noticeable in Tallinn where the environment of segregated communities allows one community to get by without having to use Estonian. At the same time, language requirements are high in the workplace. No doubt people who have spent a larger part of their lives in the independent Republic of Estonia have higher expectations regarding equal treatment than the older generations do. The reason is probably the insufficient Estonian proficiency instilled by the Russian-language education system (although it does correspond to the outdated curriculum), as a result of which graduates of Russian-language schools are not capable of competing for jobs and participating in further education. Several other studies (such as IM 2013) have found the same embitterment and general anti-Estonian attitude among current graduates of Russian schools. Pensioners and people with lower educational attainment have the least problems, as they do not compete for jobs that require better language proficiency. In more than 10 cases, respondents complained about difficulties in finding work due to insufficient Estonian proficiency. Thus the Russian speaking inhabitants were unable to identify any specific human right violation for linguistic or ethnic grounds; however, they did consider inconveniences related to use of Russian in Estonia to be human rights violations even though they cannot be categorized as such.

To a greater extent than average, Russian-speaking respondents with undetermined citizenship see problems with guarantees for human rights and perceive violations of human rights. It is possible that their opinions are influenced by a misconception disseminated by the Russian Federation – that members of this social group have the right to Estonian citizenship even if they do not meet the requirements (the Estonian state has allegedly deprived or “stripped” them of citizenship) as well as by the personal inability to receive Estonian citizenship due to low language proficiency. Several respondents consider it a violation of their rights that they have not been given citizenship even though they have lived all their lives in Estonia and paid their taxes. But neither is this a human right. Citizenship is a legal bond between individual and state that is predicated on loyalty; taxes are to be paid even in the absence of loyalty. A negative attitude from Estonians is also cited (for example, being urged in Internet comment sections to move back to Russia).

Another important factor to be considered is that in international forums, Russia tries to portray the integration problems experienced by the Russian-language population as a violation of their human rights. With its “compatriots policy”, Russia is in fact perpetuating segregation, working at cross purposes to the efforts of Estonian integration policy.

Here the experience of **18% of Estonians in Ida-Viru County** in the northeast stands out, **which probably expresses disillusionment with the limitation/impossibility of conducting business in Estonian** (sales staff were unable to speak Estonian to them in shops) in this region. In addition, other sources have reported that doctors not proficient in Estonian have misdiagnosed patients in Ida-Viru County, and that service staff have refused to communicate in Estonian, among other episodes. This is undoubtedly a case of a human rights violation where the state must intervene.

The use of Estonian, the official language, is tied to proficiency. **Proficiency in Estonian as the official language** is considered by 75% of Russian-language respondents to be necessary for all Estonian inhabitants, while 99% consider it necessary for city council members and state and local government officials, 98% say it is necessary for medical personnel, 95% for sales and service staff and 94% for teachers. The percentage of ethnic Estonian respondents who say it is necessary is even higher: 98% of



Estonians consider proficiency in Estonian to be very or somewhat necessary in the case of all inhabitants, while 100% of Estonians said it was necessary for the rest of the categories.

There are large disparities between the various language environments, and in regions with poorer proficiency in the official language, fewer people consider the official language particularly important. **Ninety per cent of the Russian-speaking respondents in Tallinn and just over half (54%) of Ida-Viru County residents find that all Estonian inhabitants should be proficient in Estonian at the necessary level.**

Perception of the need for Estonian proficiency is related to success. Ninety per cent of Russian-language respondents with higher education and Russian-language respondents in the highest income bracket (over 650 euros per family member) consider proficiency in Estonian to be very or somewhat necessary in the case of all inhabitants. Women, too, stress the necessity. This is a well-known psycholinguistic principle where women adapt more rapidly to and adopt a new culture, including language. Among Russian-speaking schoolchildren, 9% consider Estonian proficiency very necessary, which above all shows disillusionment and antagonism toward the state.

Although Estonian proficiency is considered important, **Russian-speaking respondents do not perceive their own Estonian proficiency to be very high (June 2015):** 13% are fluent in it and 25% have good proficiency (understand, speak and write). A further 25% is proficient at a conversational level (they comprehend and speak some Estonian). Twenty-five per cent can understand Estonian and 12% have no proficiency. These indicators vary significantly depending on the age, place of residence and educational level of the respondents: more than half of respondents who are under 35 and have higher education have good proficiency in Estonian, even as only 42% in Ida-Viru County are capable of speaking basic Estonian. Still, this is an important step forward, as a census taken a generation ago (1989) found that only 14% of people of other nationalities spoke Estonian.

The greatest share of Russian-speaking respondents has acquired proficiency in the course of practical training (57%). A total of 39% had picked up the language in Russian-language schools, and 23% at language courses. It appears that the most important factor contributing to acquisition of Estonian is Estonian language study in general educational schools, which is also shown by the high Estonian proficiency in the up-to-34 age group. At the same time, the segregated environment is a key impediment to improving and reinforcing Estonian proficiency, as it does not promote the retention of Estonian proficiency by way of practice. The better language proficiency, the more the language has been learned at school and through practical communication and, in the case of younger respondents, in early childhood at school and pre-school. Language courses have been more important than the average for people who have medium proficiency in Estonian. Of those who have attended courses and taken the official Estonian examination, the greatest share have attained B2 (33%) or B1 (24%) level.

Estonian proficiency and the importance ascribed to the proficiency are also correlated. **Respondents who do not consider Estonian proficiency to be important do not make efforts to acquire the language, either.** It is likely that Estonian proficiency is not necessary for them in their professional lives and thus there is no instrumental motivation for learning the language.

Among the Russian-language population, negative ratings slightly outnumber positive assessments as to whether the Estonian state is doing enough to make it possible for people of different ethnicities to acquire the necessary level of Estonian proficiency. **Those who have poorer Estonian proficiency themselves take a more critical attitude toward the state's activities. This is no doubt an entrenched attitude that is not linked to knowledge about the actual situation regarding possibilities of learning**



the language. While 54% of Russian-speaking respondents outside Tallinn and Ida-Viru County give a positive rating to the government's activity in organizing language learning, the respective figure for Tallinn is 43%, and only 20% for Ida-Viru County. The state's activity is viewed negatively by 58% in Ida-Viru County. Even so, free of charge language courses have been organized for years in Ida-Viru County, and this autumn, over 1,000 people nationwide registered for free Estonian A1 courses. Thus the actual situation and the attitudes do not coincide. The perception as to the state's activity in ensuring language study is very strongly related to whether the respondent feels that their rights have been violated in recent years on ethnic or linguistic grounds. **Thus the negative attitude toward the state's activity is broader, spanning attitudes on various issues.**

The degree to which Estonian speakers and Russian-speaking people communicate with each other is of key importance when it comes to integration and avoiding segregation. Twenty-two per cent of the Russian-speaking population has contacts with Estonian speaking people within the family, 35% has contact with Estonian-speakers among other relatives. On the other hand, 63% of respondents have friends and close acquaintances who are Estonian, 63% have Estonian neighbours, and 56% have Estonian co-workers or fellow students. Avocational and business activity seems to remain more centred on native language, on the other hand: only one-fourth of Russian-speaking respondents have Estonians among their fellow participants in hobby activities or sports, while 35% have Estonians among business and cooperation partners.

Estonians have fewer contacts with Russian-speaking people: within the family, 13%; among relatives, 23%; among friends and close acquaintances 53%; among co-workers or fellow students 48%; among neighbours 36%, among business and cooperation partners 23% and among hobby co-participants or fellow sports participants 17%. The higher the language proficiency of Russian-speaking respondents, the more contacts they have with Estonians: 46% of non-Estonians who speak Estonian fluently have Estonians in their family; 53% of them have Estonians among their relatives; 82% among friends and close acquaintances; 84% among co-workers or fellow students; 85% among neighbours; 65% among business or cooperation partners and 56% among hobby and sports co-participants. The correlation here undoubtedly goes both ways: people of other ethnicities who have better Estonian proficiency more easily strike up a relationship with Estonians, and closer relations with Estonians also contributes to improved language proficiency.

In various social situations, Russian-speaking respondents prefer to use mainly Russian, while Estonians prefer Estonian. In dealings with their Estonian-speaking acquaintances or co-workers, 69% of respondents use mainly Russian, while only one-fourth prefers to communicate in Estonian. Of the respondents, 72% use primarily Russian to talk with a stranger on the street or service personnel in stores and service establishments, while 84% use primarily Russian to talk to medical workers. Non-Estonians living outside Tallinn and Ida-Viru County are more likely to use Estonian, and the same is true for younger respondents (respondents in the 34 and under group have a fairly equal preference as to language in communicating with friends and co-workers: 48% prefer to use Russian and 43% Estonian). In general, Russian-speaking people do not try to speak more in Estonian where possible or to improve their Estonian ability. They prefer strategies of convenience and will use Russian even if they are fluent in Estonian. Only one-half of respondents who speak other native languages and who deem their Estonian proficiency good use it in communication. Use is marginal among those who rate their Estonian proficiency lower. At the same time, a large share of communication meets the A2 linguistic proficiency level, especially in service situations. Such elementary daily language use would offer important support not only for acquisition of common phrases but also for expanding vocabulary, acquiring new



grammatical constructions, reducing one's accent and better understanding conversational partners. On the other hand, ignoring this opportunity feeds learned helplessness, deepening of language deficits and unjustifiable demands that they receive service in their own native language. Such an abnormal situation – where the official language is unable to fulfil the function of the general language of communication and business – is telling evidence that integration policy has fallen short of its goals.

When it comes to restructuring language study in the education system, the responses from the separate communities bear both differences and commonalities. Fifty per cent of respondents consider it very necessary or somewhat necessary to make a 60% transition to Estonian-language instruction at upper secondary schools, but 38% consider it somewhat or completely unnecessary. The youngest respondents (15-24 year-olds) express the greatest opposition (52%) to the reform, some of them have experienced it personally. The situation has apparently developed through a combination of several factors, including segregated behaviour, unjustified criticism of Estonian education policy disseminated by Russian information sources and media, as well as personal negative experiences related to their low competitiveness in Estonian education and vying for job positions, due in particular to low language proficiency. This question was purely political and above all indicates which country's media is the basis for forming one's opinions. Considering that the transition began to be talked about back in 1993 (a generation ago) and the critical number of students in the relevant system is low (under 4,000 students) this can be hardly be painted as a case of state assimilation pressure. It is also clear that proficiency in Estonian would allow students to exit the current segregated environment and be competitive in pursuing further education and vying for jobs. However, these rational arguments have been subsumed by emotive propaganda from Russia.

At the same time, the idea that **in future all students could study together in Estonian-language schools**, where Russian language instruction would be optional, is supported by most Russian-speaking respondents – in the case of basic school (60%) and in the case of the upper secondary school level (67%). Estonians' support for this idea stands at 81% and 86%, respectively. A broad (beginning in pre-school with Estonian both as a subject and language of instruction) and challenging (B2 level proficiency as a minimum in basic school) solution would be acceptable to the majority of people in Estonian society. Thus there is a key concurrence supported by a number of previous studies. For current students, the more extensive transition to Estonian at the upper secondary school level probably comes too late, and thus the poor proficiency in the official language is compensated for by greater antagonism in society. It should be added that relevant proposals for restructuring the non-Estonian-language part of the education system have been made repeatedly over the last ten years but they have not influenced official education policy.

Above all, poor Estonian proficiency is correlated with the low required level of Estonian in the national curriculum, which does not ensure competitiveness in Estonian society. Only a level of at least B2 enables the ability to draft written Estonian-language documents, general formalized use of language and business; only 60% of upper secondary school graduates attain this level. As only half of basic school graduates go on to upper secondary school, fewer than one-third of Russian school students achieve the minimum level of B2, which also explains the low competitiveness, greater unemployment and resulting disillusionment, more extensive emigration, greater number of offences and many other problems for this community.

In particular, the segregation of Estonia's Russian schools should be emphasized, this being a relic of the Soviet education system. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has criticized such an education system in the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies 2012, its deleterious



impact on social unity has been analysed in a UNESCO report entitled *The Influence of Education on Conflict and Peace Building* (Smith 2010).

Russian proficiency for all Estonian inhabitants is, as expected, considered less important than Estonian proficiency – 60% of Russian-speaking respondents consider it very necessary or somewhat necessary; the figure is 44% for Estonians. However, Russian-speaking respondents (90%) consider it important that local government officials, city council members, sales and service staff, medics and teachers be proficient in Russian – i.e. categories of employees who need to communicate with the Russian-speaking population. In particular this is deemed important by Russian-speaking respondents who have to this point grown accustomed to preferring Russian in communication even if they are proficient in Estonian. It is precisely this habit as regards choice of language (and the state's lack of success in establishing the official language as the general language of business and communication) that has led to an artificial demand for Russian proficiency in the service sphere.

To study **cultural and societal integration**, the respondents' knowledge on the following was tested: the animated film character Lotte, Estonian singers, film directors, composers and political parties. Of five questions, 3% of Russian-speaking respondents gave the right answer to all. One-third were unable to come up any correct answers. Estonian parties were most familiar to respondents: 52% of Russian-speaking people of other ethnicities knew that EKRE was not (as of August 2014) one of the parties in Parliament. One-third knew of the most internationally famous Estonian composer currently, Arvo Pärt, and also that the Estonian animated film character Lotte was a dog. Pop singer Uku Suviste was less known (24%) and only a few were able to identify Elmo Nüganen as director of the film 1944. In comparison, Estonian respondents' figures: 89% knew that Uku Suviste had not represented Estonia at Eurovision, 87% knew who Arvo Pärt was and that EKRE was not in Parliament. 78% knew what animal Lotte was and 62% identified Nüganen as the director of 1944. Thus 48% of Estonian respondents knew all five right answers, 25% knew four of five, 14% answered three correctly, 10% answered two correctly and 2% got one right answer. **Thus knowledge about Estonian society and cultural life varied extremely widely among Estonian-speakers and the Russian-speaking population, which shows the persistent segregated state of the Russian population.** The most effective way of exiting this situation is to learn the Estonian language: of the responses from people proficient in Estonian, more than half were correct.

When international news stories develop, Russian-speaking respondents say they trust Russian Federation media channels significantly more than Estonian ones. Often the countries' media take opposing positions in terms of news selection and the content transmitted. Thirty-three per cent of the respondents favour Russian channels, only 5% Estonian channels. Twenty-four per cent puts stock in both to some degree, but 26% say they do not trust the information from either. This shows that the Russian-speaking population predominantly lives in a different information space, one that is in opposition to Estonia, and that social integration is marginal in Tallinn and Ida-Viru County. Trust in the Russian media is very clearly related to the respondent's place of residence: close to half of the Russian-speaking respondents living in Ida-Viru County (49%), 26% of Tallinners and 21% of those living elsewhere in Estonia trust the Russian media more. Of Russian citizens, 48% trust the information originating from the Russian media, as do 35% of respondents with undetermined citizenship and 25% of Russian-speaking Estonian citizens.

The information channels consumed determine the information received and its bias. The most important information channels for Estonia's Russian-speaking population are Russian TV channels and PBK, Estonians' information space is made up of various Estonian-language sources: TV and radio channels,



newspapers and the Internet. Estonians only rarely stray into Russian-language information space; Russian-speaking respondents have slightly more contact with Estonian-language information channels (Estonian-language TV channels 35%, Estonian-language information websites 23%). Thus the information sources used by the Estonian- and Russian-speaking communities are predominantly different. **The information space is characterized by extensive language-based segregation that results in differentiated and opposing mindsets and views.**

There is a very clear correlation between language proficiency and trust placed in Estonian TV and other Estonian TV channels. The lower Estonian proficiency, the lower the trust in these channels.

Most Russian-speaking people avoid taking categorical positions on issues related to security and foreign policy. Most Russian-speaking respondents prefer to remain aloof on the topic of the current, ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine: 49% do not support either side. Yet the supporters of the Russia-backed separatists hold a clear edge over those who back the central government in Kyiv (8%). The greatest contingent of Russian citizens support Russia in this conflict (37%). In Ida-Viru County as well, support for Russia is higher than the average – 36% (this is partially due to the higher percentage of Russian citizens among the region’s population). Estonians’ sympathies lie clearly with Ukraine: Kyiv’s central government is supported by 65%, the separatists by only 1%. Twenty-three per cent do not support either side. The opinion on the Ukraine-Russia conflict is related to which media space the respondents reside in. The Russian-speaking respondents who consider information obtained from Estonian TV channels as important show a slightly greater than average support for Ukraine and less support for separatists and Russia.

A total of 39% of Russian-speaking respondents support the position that Ukraine’s predominantly Russian-speaking regions should be part of Russia and 35% say Russia has the right to have influence throughout the entire former Soviet Union. Only 19% agree with the statement that Russia is committing aggression in eastern Ukraine and that Ukraine has the right to defend itself against such aggression. The attitude of Estonian-speaking respondents toward these four statements is the opposite: 95% supports the right of Ukraine to territorial integrity: 79% do not accept Ukrainian territory with Russian-speaking population to be annexed by Russia; 89% deny Russia’s claim that it should have influence throughout the former Soviet Union and 91% considers Russia the aggressor and believes Ukraine has the right to defend itself.

The Russian-speaking population does not consider potential Russian aggression against Estonia as very likely: in August 2014, 56% considered Russian aggression against Estonia to be completely unlikely. By June 2015, their percentage had grown to 75%. **At the same time, 7% of Estonians considered military aggression on the part of Russia against Estonia very likely and 33% considered it somewhat likely.** Based on the assessment of the threat from Russia, measures for protecting Estonian national security are also seen differently by the respective linguistic communities. Whereas 83% of Estonians support a greater NATO presence in Estonia, only 19% of Russian-speaking people of other ethnicities do, and 62% of Russian-speakers oppose a greater NATO presence.

The attitudes of the two linguistic communities toward Russia’s compatriots policy – which is intended to increase influence among Estonia’s Russian-speaking community – are completely opposite. Russian-speakers predominantly support compatriots policy while Estonians do not.

The Russian-speaking community continues to be reluctant to acknowledge the occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union. Entirely 46% of Russian-speaking respondents said in August 2014 that Estonia voluntarily joined the USSR in 1940, and only 18% considered the reason that Estonia ended up a Soviet



republic to be the military occupation. Thirty-six per cent of Russian-speaking respondents refrained from taking a position on the matter. The reason can hardly be lack of knowledge in the area; it is a specific attitude that is clung to, something that is part of their identity as it has developed. The study shows that in opinions on security policy as well, Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents have little common ground; their views are mostly opposing. This also shows the general divide in mindset and lack of integration between these groups in society.

4.2 Recommendations

The study highlights a number of deficits in the field of language, education, media and security policy, and also discloses regional development gaps and disparities. A policy for Ida-Viru County should be developed separately with the language environment purposes of ensuring use of Estonian and guarantees for human rights related to education and meeting related obligations.

Awareness of linguistic human rights and associated obligations should be raised among the Russian-speaking population, who are currently not sufficiently informed about these areas and, influenced by Russian Federation media and news, tends to consider inconveniences to be outright discrimination. Media policies oriented at the Russian community are currently marginal. It is necessary to engage the Russian community positively and involve them in Estonian-language media by including the media content in school curricula.

As respondents see it, Estonia's Russian schools require further qualitative steps to intensify integration processes, ensuring that graduates of Russian-language schools have the fundamental right to enjoy equal opportunity. Respondents say that unified schools would be suitable for this purpose. Such schools would allow both Estonian and ethnically Russian students to study together and thereby increase the integrative function of the Estonian language and prevent segregation. Views on Estonian-language preschools as a preparatory level for the unified school are positive. To attain this, curricula will have to increase the amount of the Estonian language above all as a language of instruction, at the same time increasing requirements in the national curriculum to B2 language proficiency level as the minimum. The Russian school curriculum should not lag behind when it comes to acquisition of Estonian culture and literature. An integrated educational system should be established, enabling and facilitating students graduating from a level of study to make the transition to Estonian-language schools. The current system, segregated on the basis of language, requires more thorough analysis as to whether reforms should not be launched immediately at the primary school and secondary school level.

Estonian proficiency does not lead by itself to use of Estonian. This is partly because the parallel possibility that exists for conducting business and relations in Russian. This results in a Russian-language comfort zone that is segregated and distant from Estonians' society. To avoid deepening learned helplessness syndrome and language deficits, it is necessary to prioritize predominant use of Estonian in everyday relations and business. In the legislative field, a number of norms in the Language Act and other legal acts governing language must be refined and updated.

The language-based segregation in Estonian society, expressed in separate media and information spaces, cultural and social knowledge, attitudes on security policy and foreign policy and other aspect, is an increasing challenge. Eliminating segregation must be made a priority in integration activities and should ensure that communication and business is conducted in the official language, Estonian.



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APPENDICES

1 Appendix 1 – Questionnaires: August 2014 and June 2015

2 Appendix 2 – Tabulated results

Appendix 2.1 – Overall results August 2014

Appendix 2.2 – Estonian-speaking respondents August 2014

Appendix 2.3 – Russian-speaking respondents August 2014

Appendix 2.4 – Overall results June 2015

Appendix 2.5 – Estonian-speaking respondents June 2015

Appendix 2.6 – Russian-speaking respondents June 2015

Appendix 2.7 – Comparison of overall results 2014/2015 for Estonian-speaking respondents

Appendix 2.8 – Comparison of overall results 2014/2015 for Russian-speaking respondents