



# LINGUISTIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND SECURITY

## Summary

This study examines integration within Estonian society and related human rights standards and perceptions (including knowledge, views and behaviour) among various target groups. The existence of separate Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking linguistic communities is a long-term societal problem that developed during the Soviet occupation due to policies that favoured the massive influx of Russian-speaking immigrants into the country. The population has become accustomed to the division and sees the separate communities (Estonian and Russian-language preschools and schools, media channels and entertainment, work collectives that speak different languages and entire monoglot neighbourhoods) as the natural state of affairs.

The study mapped the positions of the population groups on linguistic human rights issues and legal integration more broadly, proficiency in and acquisition of Estonian as the official language, use of Estonian in everyday communication and business and the perceived necessity of using Estonian, cultural and societal integration, media consumption and trust in the media, views on foreign policy and security policy and views regarding Estonia's recent history. Integration was viewed as degree to which knowledge, views and behaviour coincided with those of the mainstream population of native Estonian speakers with Estonian citizenship.

The survey results from June 2015 do not vary significantly compared to the results from August 2014. This is not just the case with regard to issues pertaining to human rights but with regard to all of the topics in the repeat survey. The surveys carried out in 2014 and 2015 found the following:

- **In the last 20 years, integration has made noteworthy progress.** Estonia has become much closer to other European countries in terms of its demographic situation. A number of trends and problems related to integration in Estonia are similar to challenges faced by other countries around the world.
- **More than 60% of Russian-speaking respondents consider the human rights of speakers of languages other than Estonian are always guaranteed or mostly guaranteed, while slightly over one-fourth consider human rights not guaranteed at all or mostly not guaranteed.** Among Estonian-speaking respondents, 88% consider the human rights of speakers of languages other than Estonian to be always guaranteed or mostly guaranteed. This is an important difference between the attitudes of Estonians and other ethnicities; at the same time, there is a lack of a significant difference based on citizenship.
- **4% of Estonian respondents perceived having been treated unfairly for their use of Estonian or for being an Estonian.** Here the experience of 18% of Estonians in Ida-Viru County in the northeast stands out, which probably expresses disappointment with the limitation/impossibility of conducting business in Estonian (service staff were unable to speak Estonian to them in shops)



in this region. This is undoubtedly a case of a human rights violation where the state must intervene.

- **Every fifth to seventh (between 15 to 20%) Russian-speaking inhabitant feels that they have been unfairly treated because of ethnicity or native language**, which is a very large share of the target group.
- A 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, they tend to classify inconveniences and difficulties encountered in use of Russian in this category, although they are not related to human rights. The responses from Russian-speaking respondents cite cases where sales and service staff, doctors and police officers was not able or willing to speak in Russian. Actually, Estonia has no fundamental right to service in foreign language; this right only prescribed for Estonian (Section 8 of the Language Act).
- **It is above all the younger age groups** (the 15-34 age group and, above all, people aged 15-24, who are 5% more likely to perceive discrimination) **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 older generations. The reason for the difference is probably insufficient Estonian proficiency acquired in Russian-language schools (although it does meet the requirements of the national curriculum), as a result of which graduates of such schools are not capable of competing for jobs and participating in further education. Several other studies (such as Integration Monitoring 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 difficulty finding work due to insufficient Estonian proficiency. Thus the Russian speaking inhabitants were unable to bring out any specific human right violation on linguistic or ethnic grounds; however, they considered inconveniences related to use of Russian in Estonia to be human rights violations even though they cannot be categorized as such.
- **More than the overall average, Russian-speaking respondents with undetermined citizenship saw problems with guarantees for human rights and mentioned perceived violations of human rights**. It is possible that their opinions are influenced by the misconception, disseminated by Russian Federation authorities and media, that members of this social group should have the right to Estonian citizenship even if they do not meet Estonia's requirements (the claim is often that the Estonian state has allegedly deprived or "stripped" them of citizenship) as well as their personal inability to qualify for Estonian citizenship due to low language proficiency. Several respondents say the fact that they have not been granted citizenship – even though they have lived all their lives in Estonia and paid their taxes – is a violation of their rights. But neither is this an automatic human right. Citizenship is a covenant 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 Russian-language population’s integration problems as a human rights violation**. With its “compatriots policy”, however, Russia in fact perpetuates segregation and is working at cross-purposes to the efforts of Estonian integration policy.
- **75% of Russian-language respondents say proficiency in Estonian as the official language is 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 percentages of ethnic Estonian respondents who say it is important are even higher: 98% of Estonians consider proficiency in Estonian to be very or somewhat important in the case of all inhabitants, while 100% of Estonians said it was important 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 proficiency in the official language particularly important**. Ninety per cent of the Russian-language 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.
- **90% of Russian-language respondents with higher education and Russian-language respondents in the highest income group (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 psycho-linguistic principle: women have been found to adapt more rapidly to and adopt a new culture, including the language. Among Russian-speaking schoolchildren, only 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 as being especially high (June 2015)**: 13% are fluent in Estonian and 25% have good proficiency (understand, speak and write Estonian). Another 25% is proficient at a conversational level (they comprehend and speak some Estonian). 25% can understand Estonian and 12% have no Estonian proficiency at all. The results are also corroborated by findings of other studies that have attempted to measure Estonian proficiency (Integration Monitoring etc). 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, while 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 rise in language proficiency is particularly visible among women, who perceive themselves as having better proficiency and have successfully passed higher levels of Estonian examinations.



- **The greatest share of Russian-language respondents have acquired proficiency through practice (57%).** Some 39% have 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 34 and under 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-speaking population, negative ratings slightly outnumber the positive 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 state'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. At the same time, free of charge language courses have been organized from year to year in Ida-Viru County, and several dozen people per year begin studying at the beginner level (much fewer at higher levels of proficiency), and only a fraction complete the course of study. Thus the actual situation and the views 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 own rights have been violated in recent years for ethnic or linguistic reasons. Thus the negative attitude toward the state's activity is broader, spanning attitudes on various issues.
- 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 state any correct answers. Estonian parties were most familiar to respondents – 52% of Russian-speaking people of other ethnicities knew that EKRE (National Conservative Party) was not (as of August 2014) one of 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 of 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 countering this may be to learn the Estonian language: of the responses from people proficient in Estonian, more than half were correct.**

- **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. 22%** of the Russian-speaking population have contacts with Estonian speaking people within their family and 35% have Estonian speakers among more distant relatives. On the other hand, 63% of respondents have friends and close acquaintances who are Estonia, 63% have Estonian neighbours, and 56% have Estonian co-workers or fellow students. Avocational and business activities seems to be more centred on the native language, on the other hand: only one-fourth of Russian-speaking respondents have Estonians among their fellow participants in hobbies and 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 and sports co-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 within 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 fellow hobby and sports 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 communication with Estonians also contributes to improved language proficiency.
- **In various social situations, Russian-speaking respondents prefer to use mainly Russian, while Estonians prefer to use 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 communicate with a stranger on the street or 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 (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, if possible, Russian-speaking people do not try to speak more in Estonian and thereby improve their Estonian ability. They prefer strategies of convenience and will use Russian even if they are fluent in Estonian. A 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.



- **The majority of Russian-speaking respondents support the idea that in future, all students could go to school together in Estonian language schools where Russian language instruction would be optional, at the basic school level (60%) as well as at the upper secondary level (67%). 81% and 86% of Estonians support this idea in the two levels of education, respectively.**
- **As expected, knowledge of Russian among all residents of Estonia is considered to be less important than knowledge of Estonian.** Among Russian-speaking respondents, 60% consider this to be very or somewhat important, while 44% of Estonians feel the same. 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 sector.
- When it comes to important world events, **Russian-speaking respondents say they trust Russian Federation media channels significantly more than Estonian ones.** Often the two countries' respective media occupy opposing positions in terms of news selection and the content transmitted. 33% of the respondents favour Russian channels, only 5% prefer Estonian channels. 24% 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 heavy contrast to Estonia, and that social integration is marginal in Tallinn and Ida-Viru County. Trust in the Russian media is very clearly related to a given 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 the bias of the information. The most important information channels for Estonia's Russian-speaking population are Russian TV channels and Pervyi Baltiyskiy Kanal (PBK), while Estonians' information space consists of various Estonian-language sources: TV and radio channels, newspapers and the Internet. Estonians only rarely stray into the Russian-language information space; on the other hand, 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 attitudes.**
- **Most Russian-speaking people avoid taking categorical positions on issues related to security and foreign policy.** Most Russian-speaking respondents prefer to remain disengaged when it comes to 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%). 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. Opinions on the Ukraine-Russia conflict are related to which media space the respondents inhabit. 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 ought to be incorporated into 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 statements is the opposite: 95% would oppose the annexation by Russia of Ukraine’s majority Russian areas; 79% oppose Russia’s claims to have influence throughout the former Soviet Union and 89% consider Russia to be the aggressor in the conflict and believe Ukraine has the right to defend itself.
- The Russian-speaking population does not consider potential Russian aggression against Estonia very likely: in August 2014, 56% considered Russian aggression against Estonia to be completely unlikely. By June 2015, this 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. Pursuant to 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 reinforce cultural ties and increase influence among Estonia’s Russian-speaking community and creating a base for the policy – are completely opposite. Russian-speakers predominantly support the 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% felt that Estonia ended up a Soviet republic because of military occupation. Thirty-six per cent of Russian-speaking respondents refrained from taking a position on the matter. The reason, we believe, can hardly be lack of knowledge in the area; it is a specific attitude that respondents cling to, something that is part of their identity that has developed over the years. The study shows that, in the case opinions on security policy as well, there is little common ground in the views of Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents; their views are mostly opposing. This also shows the general dividing lines and lack of integration between these groups in society.



- The study shows that **Estonian society's views in the fields discussed above are split along the lines of native language**, with separate Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities with opposing views on a number of significant issues. **This difference is not seen between citizens and non-citizens who have the same native language**, showing that loyalty, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour do not change through naturalization. Nor do other characteristics (gender, place of residence, age, education etc) give rise to opposing differences within the same linguistic community.
- **Estonian proficiency does not lead automatically to use of Estonian. This is partly because of the parallel possibility of conducting business and communicating in Russian. This results in a Russian-language "comfort zone" that is segregated and distant from Estonians' society. To avoid deepening a learned helplessness syndrome and language deficits, it is necessary to prioritize the 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 by the different media and information spaces, cultural and social knowledge, attitudes on security policy and foreign policy and other aspects, is becoming an increasing challenge. Eliminating segregation must be made a priority in integration activities, which must ensure that everyday communication and business takes place in the official language, Estonian.**