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**INTEGRATION OF RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES AND
STATELESS PERSONS IN ESTONIAN SOCIETY**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Tallinn 2016

I declare I have written the bachelor's thesis independently.

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to highlight the issue of the Russian speaking minorities and Stateless persons in the Republic of Estonia. Starting with the historical background of Estonia's occupation by the Soviet Union, the ethnic make-up of the nation will be examined, thereby establishing what the cause of the issue is. The impact of the enormity of the group of non-ethnic Estonians will also be discussed, and measured in terms of percentage of the total population. The ultimate goal of this paper is to argue that the Estonian Integration Policy is failing and the only way to achieve better integration is through educational reforms.

Language barriers and cultural differences have always been named as the main causes of the lack of integration in Estonia, whereas there is a lot of evidence that poor education and a lack of knowledge of the Estonian language by educators can also benefit. Therefore, Estonia has undertaken steps to integrate society through means of educational reforms, but this paper will discuss and try to uncover whether these steps are indeed working and that society is indeed integrating more and more each year. There is a difference between non-ethnic Estonians, Russian speakers and Stateless persons. That will all be explained in this paper.

Sources used will vary vastly across the entire thesis. The main sources used in this paper will be from government organisations or otherwise a large, multinational Non-Governmental Organisation. Most of the information that was used in this paper dates back to the year 2011, since there is a much larger amount of data available. This data has been verified and discussed upon in the Estonian parliament and therefore has been deemed more trustworthy to be used in this academic setting.

Keywords: Integration, Stateless Persons, Educational Reform, Citizenship, Criticism

INTRODUCTION

An important discussion in the political scene across the entire European Union is the integration of minorities into society. Foreigners have to adapt to the values of the society they live in, and a large portion of this is to learn and speak the local language. It is no different in Estonia.

The matter of Estonian citizenship is something that requires rigorous integration. The Estonian state has implemented an intense and thorough set of laws and bylaws that stipulate certain criteria that need to be met in order to qualify for the Estonian citizenship. Many people that do not have the citizenship but do consider themselves to be Estonians find these requirements very unfair and as such, often feel as if they are made simply to create a divide between the ethnic Estonians and the non-ethnic Estonian population. As a result, the Estonian government is often accused of considering these non-ethnic Estonians (often Russian speakers) to be second-rate citizens.

In Estonia, the Estonian language is spoken by roughly 70% of the population, with approximately 25% of the population being Russian speakers. There is an evident divide between these two language and culture groups, with heavy disagreements taking place in everyday life. There are reforms taking place in Estonian politics and daily life to ensure a better coexistence, yet this has not yet proven to be successful. Through the means of educational reforms, this could possibly be achieved on a widespread basis, but will certainly need time and better education, for all the parties involved. Through education, one can come to a better understanding and achieve mutual respect.

1. BACKGROUND

During World War II, and especially the period following the war, the makeup of Estonia's ethnicities drastically changed. Before the Soviet invasion and occupation of Estonia during World War II, less than twelve percent of the population in Estonia defined themselves as any other nationality than Estonian, the largest portion of which was German. Under Stalin's rule, large populations of ethnic Estonians were deported abroad. Most of these mass deportations occurred in the 1940s, with some sources claiming as much as 30% of the Estonian population being relocated, although figures have shown to be a far smaller number (Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015) At the same time, a large migration of Soviet citizens (primarily Russians) occurred. Most of these ethnic Russians settled in the capital, Tallinn, or the north-eastern section of the nation called Ida-Virumaa. The mass migration served two purposes. The first being Stalin's intention of russification across the entire USSR and minimising the ethnic differences. Secondly, it was to industrialise the Estonian territory, especially the north-east. This led to the opening of mines and factories, and manpower was needed to run those. For these reasons, the ethnic Russian population is closely tied around the aforementioned two centres.

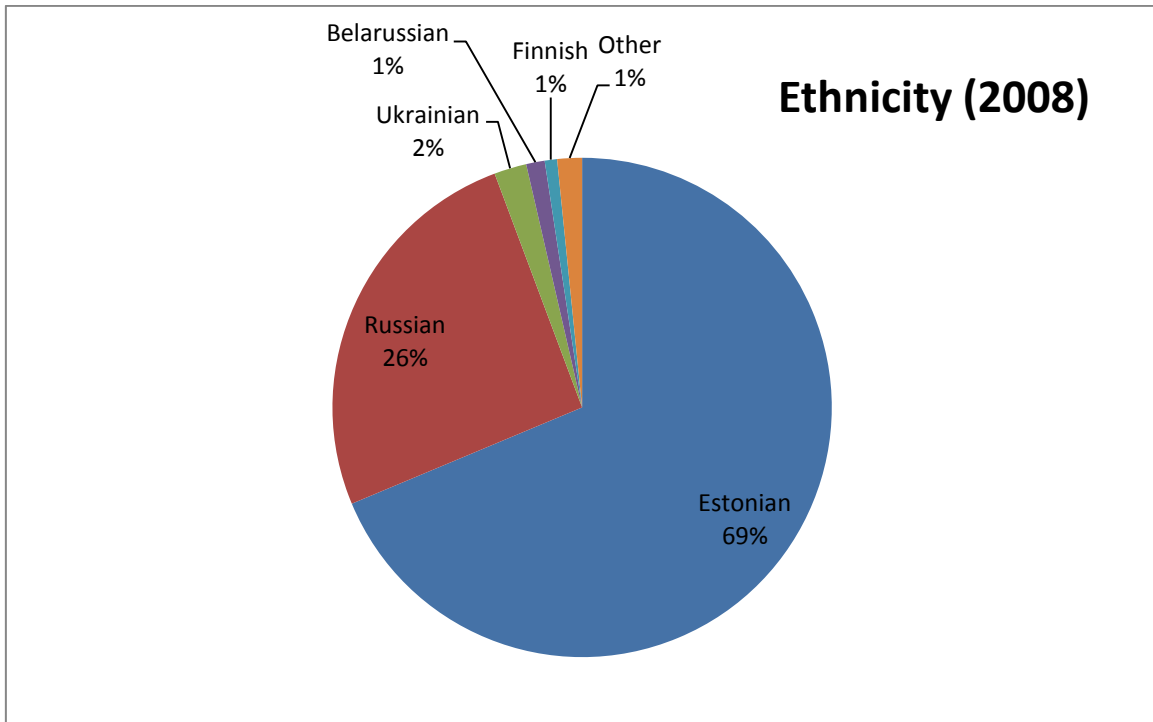


Figure 1. Make up of Ethnicities in Estonia, 2008

Source: Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015

1.1 Independence and Citizenship

The European community of nations welcomed the restoration of Estonian independence after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since the international community as well as Estonia's government considered the restoration of independence as a restoration, this led to the perception that the USSR's annexation of the Estonian territory and its occupation lasting decades to be deemed illegal. The declaration of Estonian independence was viewed as an internationally justified attempt to reimpose its sovereignty to the state that had existed before the Soviet era. In this sense, the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic had never existed legally, which led the Estonian government to claim that the migration of ethnic Russians into its territory during the Soviet Union was not legal. This had direct consequences to the Estonian policy of citizenship, with special focus on the Russian speaking minority.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation tried to enforce a policy of dual-citizenship to show support for the Russian speaking minority in Estonia. Estonia doubted the loyalty to the Estonian state among this minority. Unlike many other former

Soviet states, Estonia (and Latvia) rejected a policy of ‘zero-option,’ which would give citizenship to all the long-time inhabitants. Due to that, the Estonian citizenship policy allows for three possibilities to achieve Estonian citizenship. Firstly, through the right of birth (*Jus Sanguinis*); if a parent of a new born child has the Estonian nationality, the child has the right to it as well. Secondly, was the ‘continuity of Estonian sovereignty.’ This states that any person that was considered an Estonian national before the Nazi or Soviet occupation in the 1940s would have the Estonian national, and this also applied to their descendants. Lastly, the Estonian nationality can be achieved through means of naturalisation, as is the case with most other sovereign nations in the world.

The amount of the population of Estonia that was not an Estonian national was 40% at the time of the restoration of independence in 1991. These people had to face some choices. First of all, they could apply for citizenship in the Russian Federation, as this was the spiritual successor of the Soviet Union and largest of the former soviet republics.

Secondly, they could apply for Estonian citizenship. For this to happen, a large knowledge and broad understanding of the Estonian language, history and society was necessary. During this time, the applicants could apply for a subsidy from the Estonian state. To prove that the understanding of the Estonian language was sufficient, anyone applying for citizenship had to pass a state exam of a high level, namely B1 in the European standards. The subsidies, however, only were rewarded to those that successfully passed their examinations. For many Russian-speaking inhabitants of Estonia, this was not a realistic option.

Thirdly, they could choose to apply for permanent inhabitant status, but not having an actual recognised nationality. This is colloquially called a ‘grey passport,’ due to the colour of the cover of the document. Many Russian-speakers found this to be the most realistic option, as it gave them the right to live and work in Estonia. Since 2008, the holders of a stateless (grey) passport have had the possibility to travel to the Russian Federation without needing a visa. Concurrently, the holders of such a grey passport can travel throughout the Schengen zone without a visa, although there are some restrictions. Nevertheless, these stateless inhabitants are not considered to be full-fledged Estonian citizens, and that comes with certain judicial and practical consequences.

As mentioned, the Estonian population is consistent of a rather large Russian-speaking minority, of which only some are stateless. This means that there is a portion of the non-ethnic Estonian population that opted to have the Estonian nationality.

Among the Russian population, a vast majority of information and opinions are gotten from Russian media, with 71% claiming they get their daily information from media from Russia. Most of these Russian speakers do not consider this to be a problem, but are aware of the style of broadcasting used. They prefer the Russian media, as some claim that they would rather have someone bring across news that has the same perspective on society. The Estonian language channels on television are watched the least by the ethnic Russian population, even less than the international channels in English. Many ethnic Estonians claim that the reliability of the Russian television channels is close to none.

1.2 The underlying reasons for Estonian citizenship policy

The denial of Estonian citizenship to this group of people, which now forms part of the Russian-speaking minority, was seen as a necessary step to preserve the Estonian language and culture. Naturalization would be needed to develop ties with the Estonian sovereignty of the Russian-speakers, to learn the official language of Estonia and become familiar with the Estonian culture. Automatic granting of Estonian citizenship would include potentially resulting in a Russian representation in the Estonian Parliament, which Russian as second official language could explain. De facto, it would mean that Russian could become an official national language, as more Estonian citizens speak Russian than vice versa. However, allowing the influence of Russian culture could become too strong. Minorities and immigrants were thus seen as a destabilizing factor in the alleged homogenous state.

The integration policy in Estonia in the 1990s was thus based on the idea that the existence of two communities in one state would be dangerous from a social point of view. This could be prevented by establishing an Estonian 'cultural domain.' However, this policy already received heavy (international) criticisms, and then an integration policy was gently introduced. One of the conditions of accession to the European Union also included the increased integration of Russian speakers in the Estonian society. This integration policy has grown and still gets a lot of attention, both nationally and internationally, since around 30% of the population in Estonia still ranks among the Russian-speaking minority.

Current Population Composition

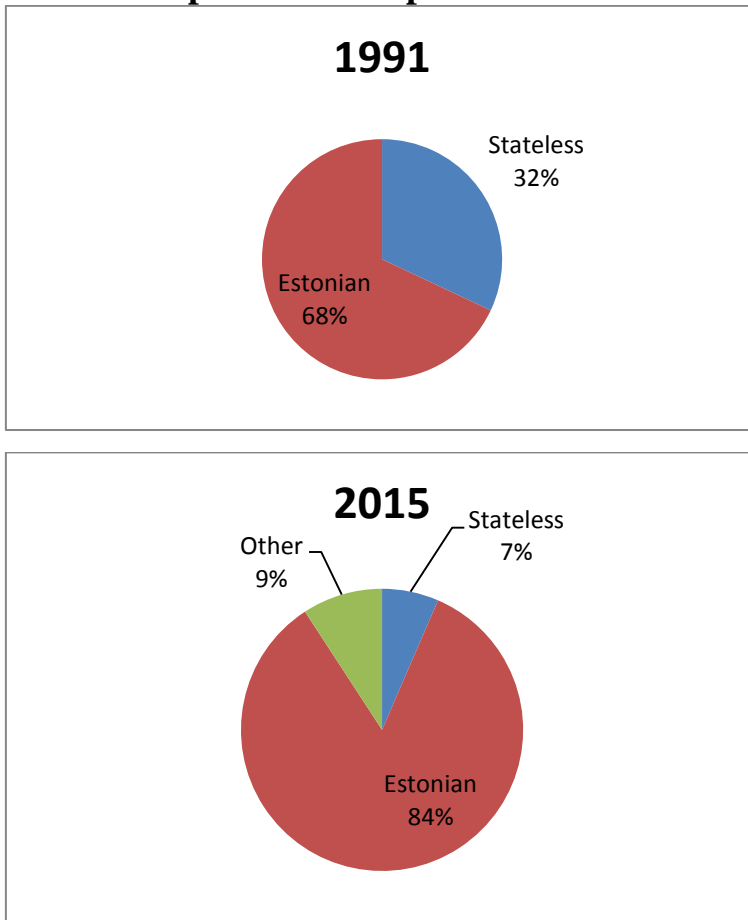


Figure 2. Compositions of Nationalities in Estonia immediately after independence in 1991 and current compositions.

(Source: Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015)

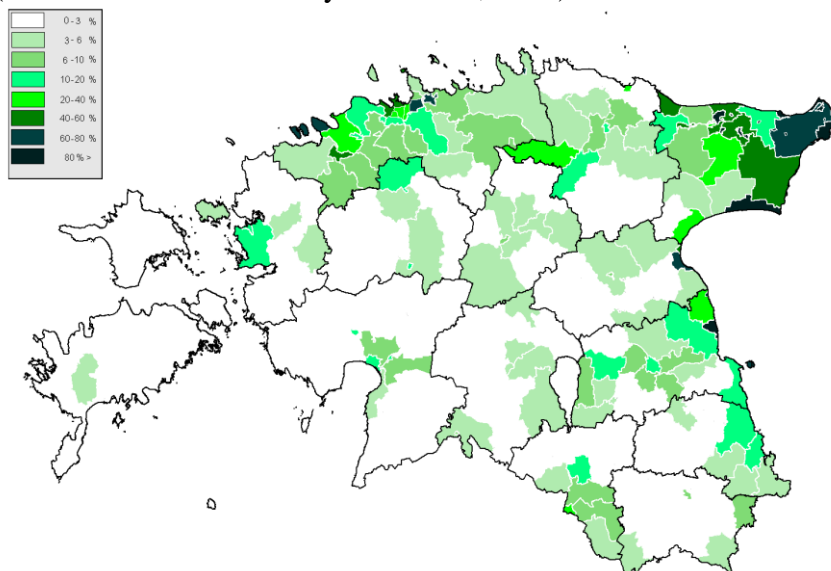


Figure 3. Distribution of the Russophone population in Estonia, according to the 2000 census. Source: Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015

2. POPULATION OF ESTONIA

2.1 Diversity among ethnic-Russian Estonians

Below, Figure 2 shows that the Russian-speaking Estonians make up 29% of the population is, assuming that Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians belong to this group. Therefore, this is a small one-third minority. About 45% of the population in Tallinn consists of ethnic Russians and other minorities. Ida-Virumaa, a county close to the Russian border includes up to 80% Russian-speaking Estonians. As should be apparent from the above, Estonia is a multicultural society with some sources claiming that over 100 nationalities are present in Estonian society (Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015).

As shown above, the Russian-speaking minority is quite diverse. The *Estonian Institute for Human Rights* states in this light that the current Russian-speaking minority also consists of individuals who were forced to speak Russian during the Soviet Union, and still do, but did not emigrate from other former Soviet countries to Estonia. This makes it difficult to speak about the Russian community or its representatives. This group, besides from a linguistic perspective, by no means homogeneous.

The nationalities within the ethnic minorities (all groups not covered by the Estonian group in previous figures and thus comprising 31% of the population) are distributed as follows:

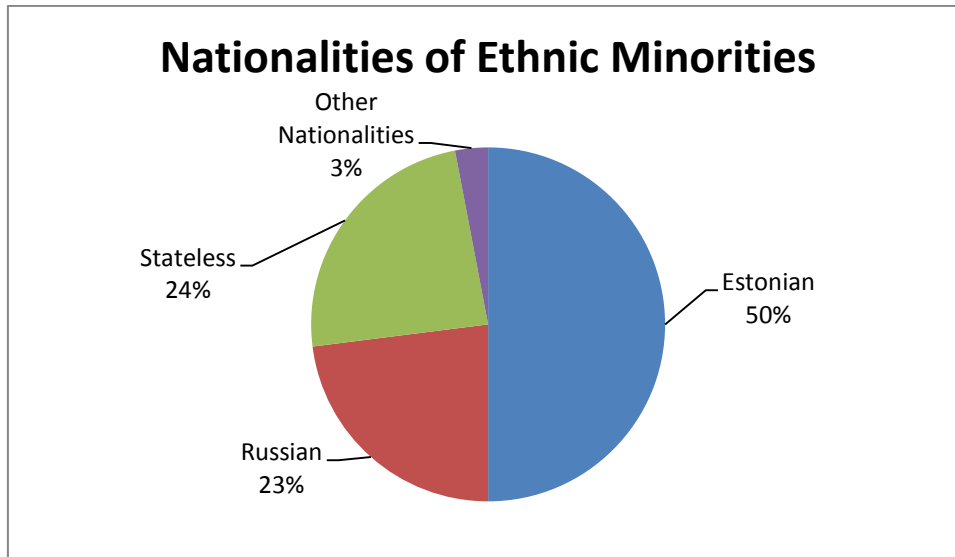


Figure 4. Nationalities of Ethnic Minorities in Estonia

Source: Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015

The figure above (Figure 4) indicates that half of the ethnic minorities have the Estonian nationality. In addition, a substantial portion, a quarter of the minorities appears to be stateless. Relative to the entire population this would go to 7.1% (96,355 inhabitants (2011)). Most recently, in April 2011, the number of stateless persons in Estonia fell below 100,000 for the first time (Estonian Ministry of Culture, 2015).

3. STATELESS PERSONS

3.1 Stateless individuals

The term of Stateless Individual is used to describe the post-Soviet form of statelessness and refers to those immigrants from the former Soviet republics and their children who are not able or willing to acquire the nationality of a country after the fall of the Soviet Union, and now have a grey passport and hence legally residing in Estonia. Their duties vary in some areas with the rights deriving from Estonian citizenship, namely:

- Ability to apply for an alien/refugee passport. This passport can grant stateless persons visa-free travel in the Schengen area for a maximum of ninety days within a period of six months.
- A grey passport gives the right to visa-free travel to the Russian Federation and other CIS (Former Soviet) countries. For people who have strong links or family in these countries, this provides a great advantage. However it should be noted that people who were born in Russia, but give up their Russian nationality are prohibited from visiting the country forever.
- Statelessness does not give the same employment rights as full citizenship. On the basis of Article 29 of the Estonian Constitution, every Estonian citizen has the right to choose his or her profession and his or her place of work. Foreign nationals and stateless persons also enjoy this right. However, only Estonian citizens can perform civil and government functions.
- Political rights: stateless persons are entitled to vote in regional elections. The law forbids membership of political parties by 'non-citizens'. However, they may form social groups, in the form of cultural communities. *Non-citizens* are also allowed to vote in local elections, but cannot themselves run for office. *Non-citizens* are excluded from national elections and politics. Citizenship is required for political

participation at the national level. This means that stateless persons are only entitled to vote in respect of local and regional elections. This group as a whole is not entitled to stand for election in respect of local, regional or national elections. *Non-citizens* are thus still excluded from democratic life in Estonia. In addition, it is worth noting that stateless persons in the other Baltic former Soviet states of Latvia and Lithuania have no right to vote in local elections, as opposed to the stateless persons in Estonia.

3.2 Estonia's Position

Formally, Estonian authorities do not recognize the group on a grey passport as stateless persons under international law. They do have a different legal status, namely persons with undetermined citizenship. This status gives a stronger legal position than statelessness, since this group of people enjoys the same rights as foreign residents in Estonia. In general, Estonian legislation does not discriminate between foreign nationals and stateless persons. International organizations such as the UNHCR and the OSCE consider this group, however, as stateless persons. The status is therefore dependent on the actor.

3.3 Free travel to Russia and within the Schengen area for stateless persons

After Estonia joined the European Union, the number of persons who wanted to obtain the Estonian nationality increased considerably. Shortly thereafter, it became possible for holders of grey passports to travel to Russia with no visa requirement by the decision of the Russian Federation on 17 June 2008 (Vemuri, 2008). At the same time, this group retained the right to travel freely within the Schengen area. This quickly meant that the number of applications for naturalization decreased.

3.4 Decreases in Stateless Persons

The number of stateless persons in Estonia is steadily decreasing as a result of migration, naturalization, natural causes and obtaining Russian citizenship. While in 1992 this amount covered 32% of the population, this number fell quickly, after which it was placed at 12% of the population in 2003. (UNHCR, 2014) At present the

number of stateless people is around 7% compared to the entire population. In addition, the number of persons who acquired Estonian citizenship has declined sharply in recent years by naturalization. In contrast, the number of Estonian nationals with the Russian nationality has increased.

3.5 Decreases in Naturalisation Applications

According to the *Legal Information Centre for Human Rights and Integration Monitoring Studies*, 51% of all the stateless individuals in 2008 wanted Estonian citizenship. This number was a lot higher in years previous to 2008. The decrease could be explained with the social unrest and rioting in Estonia in 2007. Other important reasons for this could be explained to be the following:

- Naturalization exams are considered unfair and too difficult; learning the Estonian language is considered impossible.
- Emotional aversion to Estonian citizenship, since many believe that they, like ethnic Estonians, should have automatically received Estonian citizenship. Non-ethnic Estonians feel like second-class citizens
- Preference for Russian citizenship on the basis of improved travel options and other possibilities. The conditions for Russian citizenship are relatively easier than the conditions for Estonian citizenship.
- Not being in the possession of the Estonian nationality does not prohibit anyone from residing in Estonia legally. Moreover, social security, also for non-ethnic Estonians, relatively better than in Russia.

4. CITIZENSHIP PROCEDURE

4.1 Conditions naturalization

The present naturalization requirements consist of the following requirements. There is a minimum age limit of fifteen years; one should have lived in Estonia at least eight consecutive years, including five years on a permanent basis; have a permanent legal income; have a home address, or a home; be loyal to the Estonian state (for males, this means that they must be ready and willing to serve in the Estonian armed forces); be able to speak Estonian and have knowledge of the Estonian law. This means that a language test and a test should be made on the Estonian legislation. In addition, an oath regarding the loyalty must be passed to the Estonian state.

Since March 1, 2009 there has been a renewed examination for naturalization, which would be more practical in nature. This means that questions are easier to understand, even for people with a limited knowledge of the language. The exam consists of multiple-choice questions and one can study a specialized guide book in preparation. Also a charge for the tutoring sessions can be requested, if both tests are passed. In addition, young people who want to acquire Estonian citizenship will have the language test waived if they have successfully completed their final exams in Estonian elementary or high school or higher education. The naturalization process is mainly characterized by individual effort and the degree of loyalty to the Estonian state. On this basis it would be for everyone to be able to pass the citizenship exam.

4.2 Application Procedure for Children

Under certain circumstances, the acquisition of Estonian citizenship to stateless children under 15 years of age is easier. A parent has the right to apply for Estonian citizenship for their child under fifteen years. This is only possible if the parent has no nationality (is stateless) and his or her child is born in Estonia after February 26, 1992, and also has no nationality. These children are exempt from the language test and the test on knowledge of the Estonian law. Such a construction is described by former Minister for

Education of Estonia, Mr. Jevgeni Ossinovski as a major step forward (although this would 'only' apply to about 1500 people). (Politsei.ee, 2014)

The former Estonian Ombudsman Indrek Teder suggested in 2011 that this right should be automatically given at birth, unless parents explicitly indicate otherwise. The OSCE Minorities Commissioner has also recently called on the Estonian authorities to provide all children born in Estonia Estonian citizenship automatically. This resembles the recent proposal of the Social Democratic Party (SDE), which proposed to grant Estonian citizenship to minors with undefined citizenship without the parents having to apply. The former Estonian Minister of the Interior, Ken Marti Vaher, rejected this proposal. Mr. Ossinovski has been quoted in saying that an introduction of this policy cannot quickly be implemented, based on nationalistic and historical reasons. The people, who want Estonian citizenship, are still expected to show their commitment to and involvement with Estonia.

4.3 Dual Citizenship

If individuals want to acquire another nationality, Estonian legislature states that the Estonian nationality will be removed from the individual. However, the Estonian citizenship can never be taken away from anyone. People can thus have a dual nationality in countries that allow a second nationality, but only on the basis of Estonian citizenship by birth.

5. RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY IN MODERN ESTONIAN SOCIETY

5.1 General: Legal Safeguards within Estonian Legislation

The Estonian authorities consider that the rights of national minorities are guaranteed by the current legislation, in particular by the Constitution, whereby everyone is considered equal. However, only the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act of 1993 specifically relates to the rights of minorities. On the basis of this law only Estonian citizens are considered to be national minorities. Based on the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, groups of individuals qualify as a national minority have the right to cultural autonomy if they meet the following conditions:

- Estonian citizenship;
- living in Estonia
- possess a long term, stable and constant ties with Estonia
- are different from the Estonians on ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic area
- A desire to collectively preserve cultural traditions, religion and language that serves as the basis for their common identity.

(United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1994)

A cultural autonomous organization can control regional, cultural, and ethnic cultural institutions, schools, health care, publishing, etc. establishments. The government supports these organizations financially.

Although the first condition clearly seems to exclude stateless persons, the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act lists ethnic Russians, Germans, Swedes and Jews as minorities. Only the ethnic Swedes and Ingrian-Finns have so far made use of the right to cultural autonomy. In recent years, several NGOs have been trying to form a Russian cultural minority. However, this has always failed because the Ministry of Culture would not deem the creation of such groups necessary. Organizations that attempt to preserve the Russian

language and culture would be deemed unnecessary. In addition, these groups would already have all the benefits brought about by such a status. In addition to the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act, the Equal Treatment Act plays an important role in guaranteeing equal rights in Estonian society. Unequal treatment between Estonian citizens and non-citizens, however, is legally permitted in some areas, such as in respect of the assistance, the right to be individualistic or to choose their profession and the right to form a union.

5.2 Political Representation of the Russian Minority

As has been previously mentioned, the Russian-speaking minority is characterized by its diversity. This, among other things, means that it has no clear representation. In 2011 there were elections for a Russian council, Zemskyj Sovet but the turnout for this was low, with only a few thousand voters turning out. Active protest groups such as Nočnoj Dozor, represent only a very small group.

In the nineties, the Russian-speaking minority continued quasi-political bodies in order to provide an answer to the lack of political representation in the Estonian parliament. A so-called Representative Assembly of the Non-Estonian Population was established and officially recognized by the Estonian government through the recognition of this party in the Roundtable on National Minorities. For years, this Roundtable was the main forum between the Estonian government and non-Estonian leaders. It was founded by then-president Lennart Meri in 1993. The Roundtable took an active part in the drafting of minorities. Other participants at the Roundtable included representatives from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and diplomatic missions in Estonia. In recent years, the role of the Roundtable has stopped and has not been convened under the current presidency.

Aside from this, the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, created by the current Estonian President, focuses on minority issues. The Assembly consists of a partnership between NGOs dedicated to the long term development of Estonia. The Assembly focuses on the exchange of different viewpoints in order to produce proposals on important minority issues and relevant government policies.

So-called national cultural communities (cf. Cultural autonomous organizations) are also very active. They receive some financial support from public funds. The government

would use such cultural communities as a rule to generate support for its minority politics. However, in response to the riots in 2007, the Estonian government tightened its policy, which would have, among other things resulted in a decrease in financial support to Russian oriented cultural communities and NGOs.

5.3 Integration Plan

In 2008, Estonia's Riigikogu implemented a 5 year Integration Plan. The aim of the Integration Plan 2008-2013 was to achieve a situation where all permanent inhabitants in Estonia, regardless of their ethnic origin, feel safe, know the state language; the values set in the Constitution and are able to social, participating in the economic and cultural aspects of life in Estonia. In the plan, everyone was guaranteed the right to maintain and develop his or her own language and culture. The relevant authorities had set themselves the objective of highlighting regional differences of integration and strengthen cooperation with local authorities. The need to encourage ethnic minorities to participate in the social and political life is the basis of integration. In addition, emphasis was laid on equal treatment.

Goals of the integration plan for 2013 were as follows:

- Knowledge of the Estonian language among those whose mother tongue is not Estonian has improved on all levels.
- Communication between people with different mother tongues have increased and the difference between Estonian-speaking residents and those who speak a different language has decreased with respect to participation in civil society organizations and the public sphere.
- The number of persons with undetermined citizenship among Estonian inhabitants has constantly decreased.
- The majority of Estonian inhabitants belonging to other ethnic nationalities have more confidence in each other and in the Estonian state.

- The majority whose mother tongue is not Estonian regularly receive information via mass media in Estonian and can trust this information.
- Decreased dissimilarities in unemployment and income of various nationalities.

5.4 Estonian Awareness Activities

In its entirety, the government focuses mostly on reducing the number of persons with undetermined citizenship, with the emphasis on children with undetermined citizenship. Nevertheless, and as shown in previous chapters, the Government repelled the opposition's proposal with regard to the automatic granting of citizenship to children younger than 15 years. Estonian authorities claim that they have dynamically tried and have developed an active information campaign to reduce the number of children under 15 years who do not have Estonian citizenship. According to the government this had a positive impact on the speed of naturalization. Thus started operations in February 2008 in which parents of children with undetermined citizenship were informed about the possibilities for naturalization on the basis of a simple procedure. When registering, the child's parents received information about the naturalization process, and they can, if they wish, receive personal counselling. It also gave them information about the naturalization opportunities for themselves.

5.5 Educational Reforms

One of the ways to accelerate the integration process is through educational reforms. These reforms started in 2007, and they planned on being finished with them in 2011, but have since continued these reforms. These reforms state that at least 60% of all secondary school subjects taught in Estonia have to be in Estonian. This entails a minimum of 5 courses per year. The goal of these reforms is to enable the participation of the (predominantly) Russian minority in higher education and life in society in general. A positive result of these reforms is that upon completion of secondary education, the Estonian government grants exemption for the national Estonian exam, a large component of the naturalisation process.

To achieve the minimum of 5 courses, the subject Estonian Literature became compulsorily taught in Estonian since 2007. The other courses that are compulsory in Estonian are geography, music, sociology, and (Estonian) history. Upon introducing this policy, the *Advisor on Maths, Science and Technology Education*, the component of the Ministry of Culture, made it clear that Estonian education is the ultimate goal in Russian-speaking schools. All the new educational material has been printed entirely and solely in Estonian since 2011, basically forcing the Russian-speaking schools to offer all contemporary courses and material in Estonian.

5.5.1 Criticism on Educational Reform

There have been many criticisms on this educational reform. Mainly from the Russian-speaking minority, there have been claims of agoraphobic behaviour, and the attempt to destroy Russian culture and heritage from the largest minority group in Estonia. It can be viewed as understandable, but ultimately, Estonia only has one official language, Estonian, and there is a large portion of the population that does not master that language. Estonian politicians have claimed that they are not at all trying to get rid of Russian speakers or their heritage, but rather attempting to create a nation with at least a nearly unified culture.

5.6 Integration Policies regarding Education

It is quite apparent, as well as worrisome that a clear policy concerning integration in lower education and vocational studies had not been in place until quite recently. Nevertheless, Estonian language courses for children between 3 and 5 years of age have been introduced in nursery schools where the Estonian language is not the primary language of education. Currently, vocational education courses are being created through means of compiling study material in Estonian and the re-education of teachers, lecturers and professors in the Estonian academic language.

In addition to that, the following activities took place in the last ten years:

- Study related activities were supported in 17 kindergartens

- Additional Estonian language courses were taught free of charge to 443 students in the higher education in eastern Estonia.
- Additional Estonian language courses were taught free of charge to 300 students in Secondary education in eastern Estonia.
- Out-of-School activities were organised by the Estonian Ministry of Culture.
- Multiple Estonian language refreshers courses were organised for the deans and directors of educational institutes.
- Four entire schools became members of the Language Immersion Programme in 2010.

The Estonian Human Rights Institute declares that the concentrated attention to the reforms of the secondary education system is part of a process, in which the reforms are seen as just the first step. Reforms in the other sectors of the educational systems, however, do not form a part of this debate. This is due to the claim that reforms in this part of the educational systems are more problematic and difficult to realise.

Furthermore, there is much support for the kindergartens where Estonian is taught and spoken and teachers'-aides often speak the minority language of the students. Yana Toom, a member of the Estonian Parliament representing the Centre Party, revealed in August 2011 that “The Estonian language must be taught more often and more efficiently to Russian-speaking children starting in Kindergarten.”

5.7 History Books in Russian

According to the Estonian Human Rights Institute, Russian-language history books do comply with general guidelines, but are outdated and are subject to personal interpretation of teachers. However, there are also positive signs. In 2007, Estonia became a member of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research and the Teacher's Guide to the Holocaust was drafted by the Estonian History Teachers Association and co-financed by the authorities. This included Russian speaking teachers of the Ida-Virumaa County, prompting more cooperation on the level of education.

5.8 Labour Market

The largely government-funded organization Meie Inimesed (Our People), also called the Integration Foundation, does a lot of work including the integration of the Russian-speaking minority and stateless persons in relation to the labour market (and with regard to young people). They provide (free) courses, tutoring schools, and businesses, provide information, make teaching materials available et cetera. Interestingly, this organization works almost entirely with volunteers.

The previously disclosed integration plan also aims to ensure equal opportunities with regard to economic self-realization for every resident of Estonia, regardless of ethnicity, mother tongue or place of residence. The success of a person in employment would no longer depend on ethnicity or any other ancestry.

The Estonian government says that language requirements for corporations, non-profit organizations, foundations and their employees and self-employed are only covered if it is in the public interest, or if it can be considered to be in the interest of general security, public order, public administration, for example education, health care, consumer protection and safety at work. Language requirements are at least connected to most government functions and also to a number of positions in the private sector. This seems to imply that language requirements and language classes on the regular labour market or the private sector, self-regulated by private companies and by sector, or may vary by company. As is clear from previous chapters, stateless persons are excluded from positions in government. According to Minority Rights Group International government- and the service sector employees, however, have been obliged since 1993 to master the Estonian language at the appropriate level within a period of four years. The Legal Information Centre argues that the language requirements for employees are equal on the labour market as in the naturalization exams. It also alleges that it has received a considerable number of complaints regarding the official language requirements in the public sector. This would ignore the principle of proportionality, as set out in the Language Act.

The table below gives a brief overview and comparison of unemployment among both ethnic Estonians and non-ethnic Estonians. This shows that the unemployment rate among the non-Estonian population is still higher than among Estonians.

Table 1. Unemployment ratios in Estonia, 2010

Long-term Unemployment among non-Estonians	11,2 % (2010)
Long-term Unemployment among Estonians	5,8 % (2010)
Unemployment among Non-Estonian Men	30,4 % (2010)
Unemployment among Non-Estonian Women	27,3 % (2010)

Source: UNHCR Global Report, 2015

5.9 Use of Minority Languages

The Estonian Constitution provides that Estonian is regarded as the only recognized state language. Estonian is therefore the main language in official communications, and educational institutions supported by the state. Russian as a large minority language, however, has no official status. Minority languages are regarded as foreign languages in Estonia (Article 2 Language Act).

Authorities of local municipalities can submit a request to the central authorities regarding the use of minority languages in official contacts. If such a permit is issued, the decision is made by local authorities in cooperation with the appropriate commission to what extent their meetings are held and translated in the minority language. However, authorization has never been issued in favour of this.

In areas where more than half of the population belong to a particular national minority, every individual (as opposed to certain legal entities) has the right to receive answers from the local authorities in both the Estonian and the minority language. However, this rule is often ignored by local authorities.

(Geographical) place names should be listed in Estonian, which may be deviated from in terms of historical and cultural reasons. However, these have to be approved by the Minister of Regional Affairs. Nevertheless, many have interpreted the law in many broad different ways, and therefore it is difficult to bring about such an alteration.

5.10 Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment

The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner and the Ombudsman, Prof. Dr. Ülle Madise, are keeping the central bodies for monitoring compliance with the Equal

Treatment Act, resolve disputes based on conciliation and the monitoring of anti-discrimination. They may adopt an official position if the principle of equal treatment has been damaged in an individual case. They will also publish reports regarding the implementation of the principle of gender equality and equal treatment. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner comprises but only two staff members, including the Commissioner themselves. The Chancellor of Justice is able to report on limited activities regarding discrimination.

6. RESULTS OF GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES

Below are the 2011 results posted by the Estonian Ministry of Culture, according to the Integration Plan.

1. *Knowledge of the Estonian Language among Russian-speakers has increased.*

Many ethnic Russians in Estonia are under the impression that in order to properly speak and understand Estonian, it must be taught from a young age, preferably in Kindergarten. This highlights the Russian-speaking minority's awareness of the importance of the Estonian language as an integral part of participation in society.

2. *Interaction and activity between the Estonians and the Russian Speaking minority has increased. Participation in 'Civil Society Organisation' has also increased.*

The Estonians and the Russian-speaking minority are generally quite positive about each other. An increase in the development of laying a good basis regarding interactions is stressed.

3. *Both linguistic groups acknowledge and trust each other more.*

The Russian-speaking minorities generally have less faith in governmental organisations than the ethnic Estonians. Both groups do acknowledge that their respective groups can and need to participate more in the integration process. The fear of losing one's national identity has decreased, and as a result, both sides acknowledge and respect one another.

4. *The amount of people with 'undetermined citizenship' has decreased.*

The number of stateless persons in Estonia now amounts to less than 7.5% of the overall population. However, the motivation to apply for citizenship has decreased recently.

5. *Russian-speaking minorities experience more socio-economic inequality than the ethnic Estonians.*

There is talk of income-inequality and the group of the lowest earners in the ethnic non-Estonians has increased in size, while the highest earners of the same ethnic composition have also decreased.

6. *Russian (state) media is still used widely among the Russian-speaking minority.*

The Russian-speaking minority in Estonia do not consider Estonian media as a problem, but are very aware of the style of presentation. The Russophones insist that they are in need of some source that can judge society from their point of view. The Estonian television channels are least watched by the Russian-speaking minorities, while that same group acquires about 71% of daily media from the Russian Federation. Only about 4% of the non-ethnic Estonian minorities admit to not watching or reading any Russian media. The emergence of the Russian-speaking Estonian television channel ETV+ has admittedly brought some change in this, but the exact figures are not yet available as it is a rather new channel.

7. NATIONAL CRITICISM

7.1 Positive Criticism

Positive criticism from national sources such as national NGOs and academics mainly focuses on the following aspects:

- The interaction between ethnic groups has increased in recent years. Moreover, there is a peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups in Estonia (except for the riots that took place in 2007).
- The mastery of the Estonian language among minorities has improved in recent years.
- Increased strong and constructive opinions in the media by academics that reforms towards integration requirements.
- The level of political activity has increased among various ethnicities and political values between ethnicities are more converged.
- Cultural projects get more attention and support for these projects under the ethnicities is gradually increasing.
- A severe decrease of the radical positions certain people take with regards to the ethnic differences.

However, whenever there is positive criticism, it is almost guaranteed that there will be negative criticism.

7.2 Negative Criticism

There are of course many reasons why there are societal splits, as is the case with any society in the world, both historically and present, and undoubtedly, also of the societies to

come in the near and distant future. National negative criticism is mainly focused on the following points:

7.2.1 Socio-economic:

- The non-ethnic Estonians have often declared that there is a large socio-economic split between them and the ethnic Estonians. This gap is getting bigger, resulting inter alia in a pessimistic view of the economic well-being and quality of life in the future among the ethnic groups.

7.2.2 Political:

- Stateless persons do not have full political rights. They would at least stand for election with local elections and to vote in respect of elections to the European Parliament.
- There is very little faith in the political institutions and representation. (Despite the aforementioned growing activity in minority communities)
- Representation among ethnic minorities remains low. According to Mr. Ossinovski, parliament misses the engagement issue in the political debate, especially since the Russian speakers are not represented in the government. If the Russian-speaking minority would be represented by multiple parties, they would also actively participate in the social debate.

7.2.3 Naturalization Policy:

- Many Russian speakers criticize the naturalization policy, saying it is very restrictive and a violation of human rights, while Estonians view their naturalization policy as normal and fulfils international standards. Estonian language courses would be available, but some argue that it would be too pricey. The language requirements would be too high, since in Estonia it is at a level of B1, while most other European countries require a lower level.

- Citizenship should be granted without the necessity of taking exams for those born in Estonia, for those who have graduated in Estonian schools and the elderly.

7.2.4 Government Policy

- The relevant measures taken by the government would not be comprehensive and marginal both in the official plan and execution. Also, the measures were aimed in particular at improving the language skills of minorities. The focus of integration was focused primarily on language and education, implying that other aspects of integration would have suffered. Mr. Ossinovski, there are major problems in the field of the media; there would be too few Russian-language media, (bar the recent introduction of ETV+) and this could be solved relatively easily using public funding. The Legal Information Centre for Human Rights believes that socio-economic integration cannot simply be reduced to learning the Estonian language. This also means that people never officially recognized the problem of structural discrimination of Russian-speaking within the labour market.
- Lack of a critical self-evaluation regarding integration at the political level.

7.3 Conclusion of National Criticisms

In particular, there is some talk of positive criticism of cultural-linguistic integration while developments in socio-economic and civil-political fields can be labelled as negative. Thus, the general Estonian language proficiency among the Russian speakers would then gradually improve while cultural projects also receive more attention. Conversely, stateless people are still denied fundamental political rights. This group is still excluded from both passive and active electoral rights at national level. The argument that this group is not politically active is not surprising, given the opportunity to do so is incredibly limited. In addition, the Russian-speaking minority is not represented in its entirety in the Estonian Parliament. Ethnic issues are therefore in highly politicized and now still play a significant role in the socio-economic and political structures. Mr. Ossinovski of the Social Democratic Party even suggested that the government only seeks cultural solutions towards integration (

'the government is trying to represent one solution'), thus removing all attention to the real problem, which is socio-economic in nature.

In conclusion, the largest issues in society are as follows:

- The Socio-economic inequality among the Russian-speaking minorities is large and increasing in size.
- Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia still largely follow and trust Russian media.
- The motivation to acquire Estonian citizenship has decreased among the inhabitants with 'undetermined citizenship.'

8. INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM

8.1 Positive Criticism

The positive criticism listed below is from international organizations like the Council of Europe (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for Minority Rights), the OSCE (High Commissioner on National Minorities), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Migration Integration Index (MIPEX) and Minority Rights Group International.

- The Estonian integration policy is labelled by MIPEX as one of the best in Europe because it is aimed in particular on education and employment.
- Measures have been taken to raise the interest of persons with undetermined citizenship regarding naturalization.
- The application process for naturalization has been made easier.
- In 2005, the Estonian authorities extended the validity of language certificates for employment purposes.
- Improvements have been made in the preparation of those who want to pass the naturalization exam.

8.2 Negative Criticism

The main negative international criticism has been stipulated on the following points:

8.2.1 Citizenship

- Obtaining Estonian citizenship should be made more accessible to those who require it.
- Further and more intricate measures on reducing the number of stateless persons are still needed.
- Basic civil rights are still lacking for the group of stateless persons, including the right to full political participation.
- The OSCE Minorities Commissioner has called on the Estonian authorities to grant all children born in Estonian territory automatic Estonian citizenship. This is similar to the proposal of the Social Democratic Party (SDE), which proposed to grant Estonian citizenship to minors with undefined citizenship without the parents having to ask. The Estonian Minister of the Interior rejected this proposal.
- Long-term residents, including those born in Estonia or individuals who have lived there more than twenty years, can still be deported. The riots in 2007 had a drastic effect on the Estonian legislation. After the looting, the so-called Bronze Soldier Act was adopted which states that the nationality of those who actively oppose the Estonian state and nation, can be removed. This measure has created a lot of uncertainty among naturalized Russians, mostly because it is not clearly defined what is meant exactly act under “opponent of the state.”

8.2.2 Language requirements (mainly regarding the naturalization exam)

- Estonian language courses must be freely available for all people (regardless of whether they meet the language test for naturalization exam).
- Non-citizens of the older generation should be exempt from the language test if they wish to naturalise themselves (at this point they must verbally pass the language exam).

- Other criticisms is that this group should be exempted in its entirety should be given the exams and automatic citizenship.
- Current existing language requirements regarding the language exam are too high and have a discriminatory effect (requirement of B1, while the average for comparable tests is elsewhere in Europe A2). These high language requirements would make it impossible for newcomers to pick up the language exam.
- A dialogue between the Estonian authorities and stateless persons and Russian-speaking minorities is needed regarding the civil examination, since it is not always perceived positively by the latter groups.
- Thresholds for the request to regulate legal documents and contacts in a minority language in areas where national minorities constitute an absolute majority population are extremely high as experienced.

8.2.3 Education

- Training of teachers and the production of teaching materials should be improved and further training of Russian-language teachers in the Estonian language in order to be able to offer Estonian language courses in schools.

8.2.4 Anti-Discrimination

- The official definition given by the Estonian authorities to the concept of ‘national minority’ should no longer only be accredited to Estonian nationals (but also to stateless persons, legally). The rights of national minorities should be included in a specific, separate law, the standards of which are based on international minority rights in cooperation with local parties. On the other hand, there has been significant progress in anti-discrimination legislation in relation to European standards, but unfortunately, it still does not constitute minimum requirements for these standards.

- Serious efforts should be made to raise public awareness regarding the new *Equal Treatment Act* and the authority of the *Commissioner for Gender Equality and Equal Treatment*.
- Instances for equal treatment of citizens and non-citizens are considered to be very weak. The *UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* has voiced concerns that very few instances of racial discrimination actually make it to the courts of law. This could mean that a specific and relevant legislation is missing or there is a general unawareness of the legal abilities of the courts.

8.2.5 Employment Opportunities

- A disproportionate amount of non-ethnic Estonian women are unemployed

9. EVALUATION OF ESTONIAN POLICY

It can be said that the political rights of the stateless persons in Estonia do not differ much from the Estonian citizens who basically have three (albeit important) additional rights - namely the right to vote, the right to stand for parliamentary elections and hold public functions. That stateless persons have largely the same rights as Estonian citizens has partly resulted in preventing any major ethnic mobilizations. The criticism upon the position of the Russian-speaking minority, however, focuses more on social-economic aspects.

Regarding integration, Estonia ranked on the nineteenth place in the inclusion list of 31 European and North American countries as compiled by MIPI (Migration Integration Policy Index). The integration ranking concerns in particular the creation of equal opportunities for citizens. According to the index's policy on citizenship, anti-discrimination and immigration in Estonia can be considered to be the most problematic. On the other hand, Estonia can be considered fairly liberal with regard to the naturalization requirements in comparison with other European countries in general and access to employment for immigrants and the issuance of residence permits for the long term in the specific. The biggest hurdle for the first generation of migrants is undoubtedly the B1 language requirement. Such language requirements are only instituted in six other European Union member states. In general, the Estonian citizenship policy behaves mainly on the assumption of loyalty to the Estonian state. If a person passes the Estonian naturalization exams successfully, it is assumed that this person is loyal to the Estonian state and that she/he is worth of an Estonian citizenship. However, many non-ethnic Estonians consider the Estonian citizenship as a pragmatic step towards greater socio-economic benefits associated with the Estonian citizenship, as opposed to the possibility of resolving identity disputes.

Among the Estonian authorities, there appears to be a political will to promote the integration of ethnic minorities and the granting Estonian citizenship. In combination with the objectives of the integration plan, the relevant authorities have established various campaigns in which the advantages of naturalization are highlighted in order to raise awareness and to motivate stateless persons to apply for a citizenship. According to the Estonian national authorities, these informative events have been successful as the number of people attending is growing, and the number of people with undetermined citizenship is significantly reduced

to below 100,000 since the beginning of the 2010s. In addition, the Estonian authorities have partially met the requirement of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and political parties by granting Estonian citizenship to children younger than 15 years of age if their parents request it and that group is exempt from any integration tests. This measure reflects the idea on which the Estonian integration policy is based, namely the idea that the choice of Estonian citizenship is and should be a conscious but free choice.

Protection of minorities and the development of minority cultures would also be an important priority of the Estonian Government according to the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From the integration plan, it is clear that everyone is guaranteed the right to maintain and develop his or her own language and culture. The *Estonian Human Rights Centre* also noted that this is an important point in the integration process of the Estonian government. (Runne & Kasper, 2015) The Integration Centre of Ida-Virumaa also claims that a significant part of the integration policy is used for the preservation of the national identity of groups. This means that projects aimed at promoting the culture of national minorities, including those organised by the integration centre, previously also received financing. In this light, there would be a big difference between the current and previous integration plan, in which the former is mainly one-sided and focused on the role of the Estonian language. Despite the aforementioned, other sources state that there is not enough political will to promote naturalization. One of the underlying reasons is that the problem is expected to disappear with time. Mr. Ossinovski also said that this could happen again with this issue if no major event will occur. (Ossinovski, 2016) However, the situation is tense, although this may not be inherently clear to all at first glance.

Talks with Estonian Legal Information Centre for Human Rights have shown that they consider an improved overall system for the Russian speakers as a main issue. They claim that there is evidence of structural discrimination. Although non-ethnic Estonians for example, formally do have access to "the system" they are discriminated against in practice. Highly educated non-ethnic Estonians still doing under-qualified work, are an example. Mastering the Estonian language is therefore not sufficient. Against that, other sources claim that the level of completed education, as opposed to ethnic identity, is now a major reason for the pay gap between ethnic and non-ethnic Estonians. The number of people that want to be naturalized is decreasing, where learning of the Estonian language is perceived as too difficult. Generally it

is the younger generation of non-ethnic Estonian origin who opt for naturalization, while persons who acquired Russian citizenship often belong to the older generation.

Language and the distinction that appears and is evident in society between two peoples are two recurring issues in the integration debate. However, various actors come with different solutions. Thus, information on the Russian-speaking minority must continue to be taught in Russian, but at the same time, that same minority should pay more attention to the Russian-language media in Estonian news and more translations in Estonian should take place. However, they seem to agree with the statement that language is not the only means that will lead to appropriate integration. Problems that are encountered in stateless persons are generally the same occurring with the Russian speakers. Officially, ethnic policy appears to make no distinction between citizens and non-citizens. Mr. Ossinovski has stated explicitly that in particular ethnic Estonians make a distinction between ethnic Estonians and non-ethnic Estonians, while the latter group would not do this as much. There have, however, been many retorts of this statement and its validity has been called into question, since Mr. Ossinovski is himself a non-ethnic Estonian. Such a distinction would also be part of the agenda of the government as it also is based on cultural lines distinction.

Since Estonian national courthouses have not dealt with any cases regarding discrimination (as of November, 2011), it is also impossible to assess the implementation of the Equal Treatment Act. The Chancellor of Justice has not received anything from citizens concerning this topic. This may point to a low awareness among victims of their rights, fear of retribution, lack of trust in politics and the legal system. Therefore, one of the recommendations of the *Legal Information Centre for Human Rights* is in promoting awareness and knowledge of the *Equal Treatment Act* among the Estonian population groups.

Various sources claim that the minority groups are greatly behind the ethnic Estonians in terms of the labour market. In recent years, there was a significant difference with regard to unemployment rates between ethnic Estonians and non-ethnic Estonians. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate among stateless inhabitants in recent years was lower than among Russian speakers. This is explained by the fact that there is high unemployment in Ida-Virumaa, where many Russian speaking Estonian citizens live. The structural changes in the Estonian economy and the increased language requirements contributed in particular to the increased unemployment rate amongst minorities. An intermediate level of proficiency in the Estonian language in the labour market would not be enough to compete with ethnic Estonians. The

Legal Information Centre for Human Rights hereby proposes that the government ignore the regional differences, and the importance of mastery of the Estonian language should vary by region.

The average wage of the non-ethnic Estonians is also lower than that of the ethnic Estonians. The most disadvantaged of the population are the female ethnic minorities, with the average wage for a non-ethnic Estonian woman being a mere 55% of the average wage an Estonian male earns. The unemployment rate among that same group is also very high.

Finally, there is criticism toward the independence and transparency of the post of Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, which could be improved. First, the Estonian authorities must raise awareness about the existence of this function among the Estonian population, since the Estonian population still uses this option relatively little. In addition, the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner would employ more staff and receive more financial support in order to enhance its independence.

In summary, and in relation to the integration of the Russian-speaking minority, the following points of criticism are:

- The Estonian government should take further action in order to further integrate the Russian minority in the Estonian society. This integration can be achieved through more active promotion of so-called friendship networks, efforts to increase diversity in the workplace and the promotion of non-governmental organizations that focus on shared social and political interests. Through the promotion of ethnic Estonians entering into personal relationships with ethnic Russians, the Estonian government can increase its understanding and reduce tensions nationwide.
- The Estonian government ought to make the reduction of the high unemployment figures amongst the Russian minority in Estonia one of its main priorities though the offer of Estonian language courses to Russian speaking adults and offer nationally sponsored training sessions in the workplace. Learning the Estonian language would not only help in the reduction of unemployment, but it would also contribute to a wider and more thorough integration in Estonian society.

Estonian citizenship is available to all, but is dependent on the efforts one is willing to make, and is rewarded by obtaining certain extra rights that the stateless individuals do not enjoy. Various Non-Governmental Organizations repeatedly state that the status of statelessness is a conscious choice, considering that this status allows visa-free travel between the Schengen Area and the Russian Federation. Despite this, this argument is only truly valid for the population of Narva, a city in Eastern Estonia, situated on the border with Russia. Due to the way in which these citizens show their lack of respect to the integration into Estonian society, this group loses a large opportunity to help shape the future of their peers. Nevertheless, Estonian citizenship and full understanding of the Estonian language is not a guarantee against being discriminated. Developments in respect of integration in Estonia will have to take place step-by-step. As the previously mentioned issues should clarify, one can conclude that under certain circumstances, optimised integration into the Estonian society solely on the basis of mastery for the Estonian language seems nearly impossible. Estonian authorities are still living too much in the past in this regard, and should instead look to the future to ensure a better future for all the inhabitants of the Republic of Estonia.

CONCLUSION

As has been discussed and proven in this paper, the Estonian society is severely split between cultural and linguistic groups. The causes for this divide are evident in history, with the Estonian mistrust being understandable yet also quite severe. It is not until the Russian speaking population and the stateless persons learn the Estonian language, adapt more into the culture and take an active part in daily life, that the ethnic Estonian population will be able to accept these people. On the other hand, there needs to be a certain level of forgiveness among the ethnic Estonian population, with regards to the history of oppression by the Russian-speaking governments in the past. This can only be achieved through the means of education. There have been reforms that have been implemented, but it is not until these reforms are understood and enforced that any real change will occur. This can only take time, and hopefully the time required is less than the time it has taken for these issues to be addressed in official political spheres, and the need for reforms to finally be brought to light. Estonia could theoretically flourish in the global arena, if it were to achieve more unification and heterogeneity in society.

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