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INTEGRATING A RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITY INTO ESTONIA-WIDE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The Estonia-wide social cohesion between Estonian speakers and Russian-speaking minority has been one of the main political priority for the newly re-established Republic of Estonia since the 1990s. It has been a great challenge to the country's governmental institutions to reconstruct Estonia's national identity while at the same time democratizing the entire society, while having to 'live' with some of the remaining bits of the Soviet socio-political legacy. Despite the continuous work in the field of policy-making in order to amend the gap between the two largest societal groups, yet the issues of intra-societal ethnic tensions are still present in today's Estonian society.

Over the years, evidently, Russia has made use of a varied set of soft power instruments to maintain its influence in and over Estonia, attempting to mobilising Russian speakers, a heterogeneous segment of ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking population, by the conception of the so-called 'Russian World'. Offering a holistic overview of the Estonia-wide integration process, this thesis is to test the hypothesis that Russia's soft power strategy has been hindering Estonian societal integration. The first part of the research is aiming to bring out the deficits in the implemented integration frameworks, which have not succeeded to have a cohesive society. Also, it will analyse the current state of Estonian societal integration. The second part focuses on the Russian soft power instruments that have hindered the societal integration process in Estonian society. Having analysed those features the final part of the paper will conclude what has been the impact of Russia's strategy on Estonia-wide integration.

Keywords: Russian-speaking minority in Estonia, societal integration, Estonian integration strategies, soft power, influencing

INTRODUCTION

The 1940-1991 Soviet occupation left behind a demographic legacy that has affected Estonian society to this day. O'Connor (2003) has stated that the migration policy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (further – the USSR or Soviet Union) had changed the ethnic structure of Estonia drastically. After restoration of independence in 1991, Estonia inherited an ethnically and politically divided society. Therefore, Estonian elites faced the challenges of (re)constructing Estonia's national identity while at the same time democratizing and reconciling with the Soviet legacy (Kivirähk 2014). The collapse of the USSR left thousands of ethnic Russians and other ethnic groups living to Estonia, who immediately encountered several problems, such as having a citizenship or political rights and coping with the necessity to learn or, at least, understand the state language (Ibid). The new situation was difficult for both parties – the state and its residents. The social cohesion between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority has been one of the main political priority and a great challenge for the newly re-established Republic of Estonia since the 1990s. Throughout the entire period, the idea of integrating Estonia's heterogenous societal segment comprised of ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking minorities into the framework of the re-emerged state to re-establish a broad cross-ethnic as well as country-bound strong nationhood has been a political, social, economic, and national security imperative. In other words, further political stability of Estonia depended and still depends on the social cohesion of the society. Objectively, despite the continuous efforts of the government, the issues of *intra*-societal ethnic relation still continue attracting considerable academic and public attention in Estonia as well as at the international level.

The notion of Russian-speaking minority in this dissolution refers to the minority groups who originate from former Soviet Union Republics, settled in Estonia during migratory flows and remained to live here with their descendants after the dissolution of the USSR. This group predominantly includes ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians, and others of Eastern European background (Pehrson 2020). Very often, this segment of the country's population is commonly grouped together under the term 'Russian-speaking' in legislation, laws, and news sources in the Baltic region. However, in this research, the aforementioned

group does not include Russian-speaking Estonian citizens who are considered, via their citizenship, already integrated into Estonia-wide society.

The newly re-emerged Republic of Estonia formed its first government together with Prime Minister Mart Laar in 1992 (Vabariigi Valitsus 2020). The newly re-established state had to find a way to create its nationality policy and constitutional obligations for its citizens. Thus, naturally, many different laws were adopted in the first years before and after independence, such as the Language Law in 1989, the Citizenship Law in 1992 (based on the 1938 law), the Aliens' Law in 1993, the Law on Cultural Autonomy in 1993, the revised Citizenship Law of 1995 and amendments to it in 1998 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007). However, the subject of social integration got attention only in the late 1990's, when the government began to design its social integration program. The first strategic document in the field of integration was adopted in 1998 in the Riigikogu which was titled as 'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007' (Ministry of Culture 2012). Since the first strategic integration program was launched, it has been followed by two further developed strategic plans, which were titled as 'Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013' and the 'Integrating Estonia 2020' (Ibid).

In a considerable way, Estonian integration process differs from the nature of the societal integrational processes in the majority of other European Union (EU) Member States. Estonia was under the Soviet Union's rule for almost 50 years and is a neighbouring country to Russia. To illustrate the relations between Estonia and Russia, it must be pointed out that the Estonia's national border with Russia is still a matter of dispute in some political circles (Viktorova 2006). When it comes to integrating a Russian-speaking minority into Estonia-wide society, then there is an opportunity for Russia to contribute to the process, but, as argued, it chose another way (Kudors and Orttung 2010). Soon after the dissolution of USSR, the Russian Federation declared itself as the defender of the Russian diaspora and since then, it has made use of a varied set of soft power instruments to maintain its influence in Estonia. The implemented strategy includes a variety of military, economic, and political pressures to protect the rights of its so-called compatriots in the former Soviet Republics (Schulze 2010). It means that Russia sees a Russian-speaking minority living in Estonia as an opportunity to use its soft power measures to have an impact on the Estonian social integration as well as the process of European integration by destabilising the country and discrediting local authorities (Meister 2018). Due to the power of media, it could be suggested that one of the most effective tools to implement its soft power in Estonia is the media coverage. The media, a knowledge-projecting

source, can also be a powerful propaganda tool for shaping ideological attitudes (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017). Tamberg argued that Russia's soft power strategy's main purpose through media is to influence public opinion and political decisions among Russian minority (2016).

The issue in Estonia lies in reality where two rather separate societies are living side by side but have only superficial connections between them. Both societal groups live in separate information spaces, have different understandings and perspectives about each other as well as about the Estonian state and its history, its threat environment and its national security policies (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). The statistical indicators are also illustrating that the Russian-speaking minority has not been able to have the same opportunities as Estonian speakers in different areas of life. The lack of Estonian skills creates a language barrier which impedes for instance their chance to get great results in education system, and afterwards to get a high job position. As a result, their overall standard of living is lower compared to other citizens. It is essential to bear in mind that the Russian minority in Estonia is not uniform and there are internal divisions along the lines of knowledge of Estonian language and loyalty to the state (Kivirähk 2014). But as long as this minority group exists, it is crucial to analyse why not the implemented integration frameworks have worked for the Estonian society. The factor that also needs to be examined is whether there is a possibility that Russia's policy-driven strategy incites Russian-speaking minority and hinders the process of social integration.

The Estonian Internal Security Service (*Kaitsepolitseiamet* or KaPo) publishes annually a yearbook with an overview of the status of national security. Over the last 10 years, the reviews have identified the Russia's activism in Estonian society as a national security threat towards the Republic of Estonia (Kaitsepolitseiamet 2010-2019). The concern over the Russia's policy-driven strategy in Estonia grew after the 2007 Bronze Soldier riots (Schulze 2018). Hence, the Estonian government realized that an information field that distorts reality can damage the cohesion of population groups and create instability in society. Because of that it must pay more attention to attacks against the cohesion of society and develop more psychological protection and resistance to influencing anti-Estonian activities (Välisministeerium 2013). The basis for conducting this research work is, therefore, to get an overview of the social cohesion of modern Estonian society. This topic is relevant and worth exploring due to the reason that social integration of Russian-speaking minority into Estonian society is an on-going process. It is important to understand the nature of the current integration, what are the hindering aspects

of the process and whether the Russian Federation soft power measures have had any kind of impact on the process.

The main thesis of this dissertation is to tackle the issue on whether or not the Russia's soft power strategy has been hindering Estonian societal integration. Clearly the implemented integration strategies have not resolved the gap between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority in Estonian society as the society still has to face the issues regarding the language barrier, the barriers of closed communities and the inequalities between two societal groups. In order to analyse the current situation of Estonian integration, it needs to be understood, what is the country's normative framework on the issue currently and how has it been changing over the years since regaining independence in 1991. First of all, the thesis will give an insight of Estonian historical background from the integration policies framework. It will identify what kind of policies has the Estonian government implemented over the years to achieve a cohesive society. The research paper will analyse the implemented policies in order to understand what impact these policies have had on Estonia-wide societal integration. The second part of the dissertation emphasis is to examine the current situation of Estonia-wide integration. This considers the aspects of educational system, the labour market, the political activity and the societal activity among Estonians and Russian-speaking minority. The statistics-generated data will give a clear overview of the current state of both the country's society as a whole and its separate clusters. In the third part, the paper concentrates on Russia's foreign policy-driven strategy. It will examine what have been the soft power instruments which Russia has been using over the years to have an impact on Estonian social integration. Finally, all above findings will be combined and analysed in the context of the claim. The aim of this thesis is to discuss the actual impact of Russia's foreign policy-driven strategy and what kind of outcome has it had on Estonia-wide societal integration.

In order to answer each question a different method is required. The first research question will be investigated by the normative discourse analysis. In this case, it is the most useful tool because it will allow researching the previous strategic plans and seeing how they have progressed over the years. The second question will be answered by using statistical analysis. The analysis is based on the statistical data gathered from the Estonian Integration monitoring reports as well the statistical reports published by Statistics Estonia which will give the most accurate overview of the current situation of Estonian integration. The last research question will be examined using the content analysis. According to Nye, the soft power is a country's

ability to persuade, rather than coerce, other countries to accept its point of view (2021), but this kind of social and cultural influence is difficult to measure. Therefore, the content analysis seems to be like a reliable method to be applied in this context, because it gives possibility to analyse various forms of text, such as documents, media, books, previous research, discussions which all help to understand Russia's implemented soft power instruments. The thesis will be concluded by a discussion on the findings, contextualizing it with testing the argument.

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESTONIAN INTEGRATION POLICIES

The issues of *intra*-societal ethnic relation continue to be a prominent topic in Estonian society. It has been estimated, that around 24% of inhabitants have an immigrant background (Asari 2009). However, majority of these people have not immigrated to Estonia in and of itself but were settled in Estonia during migratory flows and remained to live here with their descendants after the dissolution of the USSR. Therefore, the social cohesion between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority has been one of the main political priority and a great challenge for the newly re-established Republic of Estonia since the 1990s (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Throughout the entire period, integrating Estonia's sizeable ethnic Russian-speaking minority into the framework of a rebuilt state and nation has been a political, social, economic, and national security imperative. Over the years, the importance and essence of the integration policies have shifted in their meaning and focus. To this day, it is an on-going progress.

1.1. Historical overview

The different nationalities have always lived in Estonia, however the World War II and subsequent Soviet occupation left Estonia a great legacy in the form of the mixed population (O'Connor 2003). Before the World War II, Estonia was a relatively homogeneous society – national minorities constituted about 12% of the population. The largest minority groups in 1934 were Russians, Germans, Swedes, Latvians, Jews, Poles, Finns, and Ingrians (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Estonia 2008). Whereas, by 1989 the number of non-Estonians accounted for more than a third of the population (Eesti Statistikaamet 1995). The proportion of Russians in Estonia increased from 11% in 1934 to 30% in 1989 (Eesti Statistikaamet 1995). The ethno-demographic transformation which was part of the Soviet policy contributed to the decline in the Estonian share of its population from 88% in 1934 to 62% in 1989 (Ibid). At the end of the 1980s, Estonians considered the extensive demographic change to be a national catastrophe (Chinn and Kaiser 1996).

The ethnic structure of Estonia changed due to the brutal migration policy of the USSR. The main idea of Soviet Nationalisation program was the russification of Estonia in order for the country to better integrate into the Soviet regime (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Estonia 2008). The migration policy was divided into two measures. Firstly, the policy's aim was to change the population structure by a forceful administrative immigration of non-Estonians from the other countries of the USSR (Tõnurist 2004). The people who came to live in Estonia were mainly military personnel and foreign workers. Those migration groups mainly consisted of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians (Ibid). Objectively, one of the main aims of this measure was to minimalize the ethnic differences and suppress the Estonian culture by spreading Soviet Union's traditions and values. The mass migration served another purpose as well. The second aim was to industrialize Estonia, thus people from other Socialist Republics were brought here particularly for workforce purposes (Schellaars 2016). Mostly those workers settled in Tallinn as well as in the north-east counties, in cities such as Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve and Narva. Those cities were ethnically cleansed, and the indigenous Estonian population was totally replaced by Russian colonists. This is also a reason the ethnic Russian population is the highest in those aforementioned locations (Ibid). Secondly, the regime carried out so called ethnic cleansing of Estonians. This measure included violent mass deportations of Estonians to the USSR, mostly to Siberia. The ethnical cleanse was held during 1941-1949 which means that up to 60 000 Estonians were executed or deported due their political views or social status (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Estonia 2008). As a result of the long period of Soviet occupation, the ethnic structure of Estonian population had been completely re-designed.

1.1.1. Dissolution of the Soviet Union

The situation changed drastically for Estonians and Russians living in Estonia, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the declaration of Estonia's re-independence in August 1991. The ethnic structure of population that was evolved had not achieved a great social cohesion under Soviet rule (Sotirovic 2018). The Russian population had not well integrated into the local society and neither did the Russification policy have an impact on majority of ethnic Estonians. As a result, for the Republic of Estonia, Russians – the then ethnicity of the state – who migrated to Estonia during the USSR times now acquired the status of being minority in the country-wide society, which immediately encountered problems regarding state's new socio-political regime. The problems were mainly involved with citizenship, state's language, and having political rights (Sotirovic 2018).

When it comes to restoration of independence, then people's views towards the action plan was divided into two. Five months before Estonia declared its independence, nearly 100% of ethnic Estonians expressed support for the complete restoration of independence (Kivirähk 2014). At the same time only one-third of the Russian-speaking population shared the same view. By contrast, more than half stated that they still prefer to see Estonia as part of the Soviet Union, however wanted a greater autonomy for its government (Ibid). Therefore, it was comprehensible that in the early years of the newly independent state, the Russian-speaking community was looked with wariness (Sotirovic 2018).

1.2. Regaining independence and applying new policies

The new Estonian government decided to restore the pre-war Estonian state instead of establishing a new independent state. Restoring the Republic of Estonia meant that the laws established during the first Republic of Estonia were adopted once again, including the laws related to its residents. Those laws started to have an effect on overall Estonian integration, especially adopting the Estonian citizenship policy (Järve and Poleshchuk 2013). Furthermore, several new laws were adopted in the first years before and after independence in 1991, such as Citizenship Law (1992), Language Law (1989), the Aliens' Law (1993), the revised Citizenship Law (1995) and amendments to it in 1998 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007).

1.2.1. Citizenship Law (1992)

The Republic of Estonia adopted the Citizenship Law in 1991 which was based on the law established in 1938. This law constituted that the citizenship was only automatically granted for people who had been Estonian citizens prior to 16 June 1940 and to their descendants, regardless of their ethnic origin (Di Gregorio 2018). By adopting this law, the state did not give all its residents an automatic citizenship (Ibid). As a result, many residents who were born and lived their entire lives in Estonia had overnight become inhabitants without a citizenship and political rights (Sotirovic 2018). Those residents did not have the right to participate either in national referendum on the new constitution or in parliamentary elections, although they were allowed to vote in the local government election (Romanov 2000). Adopting this law caused mass statelessness, because those residents who were not ethnic Estonian became *(de facto)* stateless, or in Estonian official terms "individuals with undefined citizenship" (Järve and

Poleshchuk 2013). Those residents were given a chance to become naturalized citizens under a simplified procedure (Kivirähk 2014). Naturalisation required that a person has lived in Estonia at least two years from 30 March 1990 onwards; had to pass an Estonian language test; and must take a loyalty oath to the State and to the Constitution (Di Gregorio 2018). By this measure, around 90 000 non-citizens took the path of naturalisation and became naturalized Estonian citizens in the period from 1992 to 1996 (Järve and Poleshchuk 2013). The others who did not use this option were given an opportunity to opt for the citizenship of their country of origin, remain living in Estonia with undetermined citizenship or return to their country of origin (Ibid).

Estonian new citizenship policy was criticized to be harsh, anti-democratic and even racist until the European Union introduced the requirements for Estonia's accession (in 2004) to the EU (Sotirovic 2018). One of the EU requirements was that the state had to implement more soft conditions for minorities to become a citizen (Raun 2001). Thus, the 1992 Citizenship Act needed to be changed and a new Citizenship Act entered into force in 1995 (Ibid). The new Act introduced new requirements for naturalisation (Järve and Poleshchuk 2013). From that point on, all residents who had lived in Estonia for at least five years were allowed to apply for citizenship (Ibid). The requirement of passing a test on the knowledge of the Estonian Constitution and the Citizenship Act remained the same, but the language test had some new conditions. It constituted of a written part (an essay) and the oral part (conversations with no pre-defined topics). (Järve and Poleshchuk 2013)

Although more than 110 000 people within the period from 1992 to 2000 acquired Estonian citizenship through naturalisation process, then shortly after adopting new Citizenship Act in 1995 it turned out that the problem of statelessness was not solved by this measure (Sotirovic 2018). It might be that the process was believed to be too difficult. Thus, in 1998 the government added the final amendment to the Citizenship Act which adopted the decision of granting citizenship to children of stateless parents on the basis of an application procedure (European Network on Statelessness 2014).

As of January 2018, there were still a significant number of people with undetermined citizenship in Estonia – around 80 000 people/less than 7% of the population (Statistics Estonia, 2018). Regardless of the remaining number of people being stateless, overall, the naturalisation process has been rather progressive by bringing new members to the Estonian

citizenry, making it ethnically more diverse and providing democratic participation to more residents (Järve and Poleshchuk 2013).

1.2.2. Language Law (1989)

In 1988, the Popular Fronts introduced the proposal to adopt new language law with an aim to support the idea of political independence (Romanov 2000). Under Soviet rule two official languages were allowed, both Estonian and Russian. But the new Language Law adopted in 1989 made Estonian the only official language (Rannut 2004). It meant that knowledge of the local language was now a requirement for employment and citizenship (Ibid). Thus, the adopted law was affecting a large part of the Russian-speaking population by putting them into disadvantageous position in the society.

1.3. The Estonian Integration Strategies

In the course of state reconstruction to allow for further development, Estonia came to an understanding that the state needs a strategy to create the greatest possible homogeneity of society. The matter was highlighted in the late 1990's while the government began to design its social integration program. The first strategic document in the field of integration was adopted in 1998 in the Riigikogu which was titled as 'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007' (Ministry of Culture 2012). This framework set the tone for the rest and started the cohesion process that is still ongoing. The launch of the first strategic integration program has been followed by two further developed strategic plans, which were titled as 'Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013' and the 'Integrating Estonia 2020' (Ibid). Initially the importance of integration was fundamentally perceived as of linguistic and cultural matters, however, with the further development of the country and its society, the focus of integration has been set to social cohesion in time. Therefore, in order to understand the development of Estonian integration policies and further analyse what are the shortcomings in the context of the social integration, this part will focus on the contents of these implemented frameworks.

The Estonian integration policies have mainly been focused on the so-called Russophone immigrants. Those are the people who migrated to Estonia during the USSR regime prior to Estonia re-gaining its independence. Majority of these inhabitants consider Russian as their first language – Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Georgians, and others of Eastern European

background. According to Kivirähk, the aim of the integration strategy is to create a cohesive society where all the people feel and have the right to be involved regardless of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, have equal opportunities when it comes to education, labour market and societal well-being (2014). Social integration within society also plays an important role in a state's political stability. As Ministry of Culture has stated, "a national integration strategy is necessary for ensuring the sustainability of the Republic of Estonia and is one of the prerequisites for the realisation of many other national strategies" (2014). Therefore, all implemented integration strategies have seeked to reduce inequalities, increase inter-communication and strengthen social ties, all of which would lead to a successful state.

'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007' was the very first framework and a guide in the newly re-established state for the implementation of integration policy for governmental institutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008). The first integration strategy was more focused on linguistic and cultural cohesion; thus, the framework's aim was the promotion of Estonian language-learning and the maintenance of the cultural autonomy for the minorities. However, further development of the country and its society has brought a change to the focus of integration – having a concentration more on societal integration. The latest strategy document 'Integrating Estonia 2020' is still an active framework today and the effectiveness of the program can be assessed afterwards. This integration plan differs from previous ones by moving the focus from Russophone ethnic minorities to immigrants more generally. What was innovative about this normative framework was the inclusion of new immigrants and those entering the state in the upcoming years. This adds a new dimension to the integration strategy by giving significant attention to different types of immigrants in order to achieve greater intra-societal integration.

All of the three frameworks have had the attention on Estonian linguistic skills among people of other nationalities. This shows that the state values an integration through the state language. The implemented policies wish to promote learning of the Estonian language, but at the same time allow the conservation of the different minority's cultural heritage. The state finances the Estonian language courses which makes it more accessible for the beginners. The Estonian exam is also a large component of the naturalisation process. The language skills are also important for one to be engaged and involved in a society and have extensive employment opportunities. Those aspects are all important as they lead to a cohesive society. Another segment, which is connected to the use of language and has been brought out in the strategies-

focused framework is media. People of other nationalities who lack the Estonian language skills are mostly following other media channels than the majority of ethnic Estonians and, therefore, are living in a separate information sphere. Mostly they get their information from Russian media outlets which leaves them open up to all types of Russian propaganda. Although there are Estonian newspapers and radio channels which are solely in Russian language reflecting the Estonian society, politics and worldwide news, those are not so widespread among the Russian-speaking population due to their lack of credibility (Arengukava "Lõimuv Eesti 2020" 2014).

The other important component of the implemented strategies has been the transformation of the education system. It is clear that language and education are connected, thus adjusting schools' systems improves the overall language skills as well. The educational reform started in 2007 which was meant to be finished by 2011, but is still an on-going process which tries to find the best solution. The objective of the reform in educational system is to make Russian-speaking schools more competitive as well as decrease the language barrier in society. A unified education system gives the children from different ethnic background the equal opportunities in the future. The reform stated that at least 60% of all secondary school subjects must be taught in Estonian, and the other 40% of classes is up to schools to decide to be given in Russian. This measure aims to equalize the different schools' level of education and to give equal opportunities to each young person in Estonia. According to Masso, this will in the long run help to decrease the inequalities in employment and incomes between ethnic Estonians and people from different background (2011). A positive outcome of this education reform is that after acquiring secondary education, the Estonian government grants exemption for the national Estonian exam and therefore facilitates citizenship.

Recently there has been a slowdown in the naturalisation process among Russian speakers living in Estonia. Therefore, the latest framework 'Integrating Estonia 2020' strategic plan wishes to unravel this problem and wishes to get more people of other nationalities to acquire the Estonian citizenship. The difficulties of the people acquiring the citizenship have mostly remained the same – hardship of improving one's Estonian skills as well as not having a special advantage of being a citizen, as they can still reside in the country without having Estonian citizenship. Nonetheless, they have the right to vote in the local governmental elections which gives them opportunity to have a societal and political decision right. Furthermore, the development of common values and attitude within the society is an important aspect of the

success of an integration process, moreover, the efficiency of citizen education and state identity development. Therefore, this matter in 'The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020' has set as high priority. Especially, the region Ida-Virumaa is given attention as there the integration rates in every aspect are respectively lower than in the rest of Estonia (Arengukava "Lõimuv Eesti 2020" 2014).

Despite numerous integration strategies and implemented policies, several studies have shown that the vast majority of Russian-speaking minority has still not been fully integrated into Estonian society, whether they are the first or second generation ethnic Russian resident of Estonia. The next chapter will analyse more thorough data and gives a better overview of the Estonian-wide integration's shortcomings. The fact that after each integration strategy it has been followed by the next one which tackles the very similar concerns, shows that the strategy has not met the goal and the Estonian integration still needs attention. On the ground, all of the three frameworks struggle to find the best ways to solve the issues concerning Estonian societal integration. Breaking down the barriers of closed communities and reducing the inequalities between two societal groups have been a talking point in all three frameworks. Currently, the main focus has been on the Russian speakers and how they need to be integrated to the Estonian society, but clearly the issue does not only involve the Russian speakers, but also the Estonian speakers. Therefore, they also should be given attention from the government when tackling the integration problems. In order to create social cohesion both sides need to be open to integration.

When it comes to the outside criticism on state integration, then the Institute of Baltic Studies has drawn attention to that over the years both international organizations and the Russian Federation criticized Estonia for its policy towards the Russian-speaking population (2013). The political decisions that have been given attention are numerous. As argued, the most controversial topics were as follows: a large number of people with undetermined citizenship; the low level of Estonian proficiency among the Russian-speaking population which impedes their opportunities on the labour market as well as political participation in democracy; the alienation of Soviet-era migrants from the new political regime and the serious economic, political and cultural ghettoization in some regions of Estonia where the majority were Russian-speaking (Institute of Baltic Studies 2013).

2. ESTONIA-WIDE INTEGRATION

The current problem of integration in Estonian society lies in existence of two large groups with different native language, religion, social and cultural background. In order to analyse the concept of social cohesion from Estonian perspective, the term has to be defined. According to Münch (1999), social integration is a state of society in which all parts are strongly interconnected, creating a well-defined whole. Simply put, the goal of integration is to achieve integrity and unity in society (Kõuts 2004). Thus, social integration can be considered successful when all the members of the society, irrespective of their cultural background, take actively part of it. Social cohesion is about reducing inequalities, strengthening social relations and ties within a society (Prits 2010). Those are the main factors when it comes to achieving social cohesion. In other words, the main aim of social cohesion is to create greater cooperation in society and have the integration of different nationalities. Only then, the state can achieve a well-functioning state and its future objectives.

The Council of Europe defines the concept of social cohesion through the involvement of every member of society. The capacity of society is achieved through the well-being of each member, minimizing disparities and increasing harmonization in a society (Kask 2008). All people must have an equal opportunity to participate fully in society, including to have an employment and be economically active, to have a standard of living and well-being which is recognized normal in the society in which they live (Prits 2010). A cohesive society is a mutually supportive democratic community with common goals (Kask 2008).

Since 1991, the state has managed the integration between its ethnic groups to stay calm and avoid major violent, ethnicity-based demonstrations within the society – with exception of the 2007 Bronze soldier riots (Evas 2010). Nevertheless, the state cannot deny that ethnicity does play a role in its society, especially looking from individual perspective. When it comes to individual's well-being in economic and political opportunity structures, then belonging to an ethnic minority group is rarely an advantage (Evas 2010). This chapter aims at highlighting the statistical indicators that reflect the current situation of social cohesion in Estonia's society in

2020. Mainly what are the hindering factors of complete integration for Russian-speaking minority in Estonia.

2.1. Socio-demographic overview

As of 1 January 2020, a total of 1,328,360 inhabitants lived in Estonia (Statistics Estonia, 2020). According to the 2019 survey that inquired permanent residents living in Estonia about their nationality, 68.5% defined themselves as Estonian, 24.8% as Russian, and 5.4% as another nationality. 1.3% of population ethnic nationality remains unknown. Thus, there are currently 328 299 residents who define their nationality to be Russian rather than Estonian (Statistics Estonia 2020). See *Figure 1* for more details.

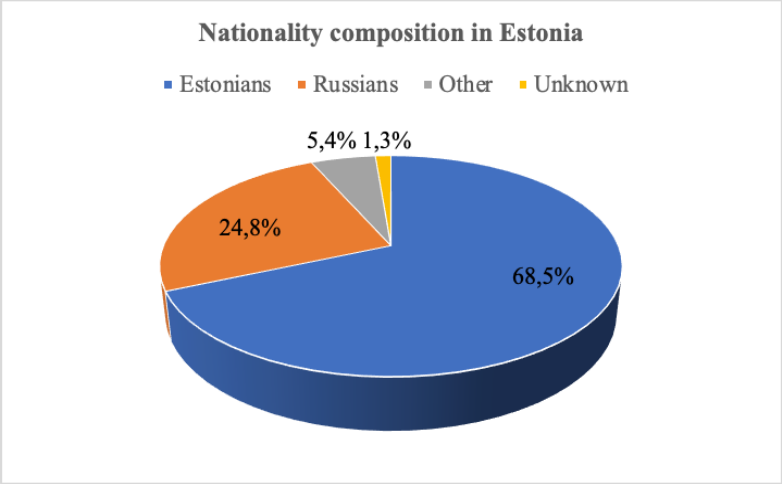


Figure 1. Nationality composition in Estonia
Source: Statistics Estonia 2020, composed by the author

Many Estonian Russian speakers consider oneself "Russian" due to cultural not political purposes. Some of those people clarify that they feel part of Russia due to the reason that their relatives still live there, or their ancestors are buried there (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). Taking into consideration that the number of inhabitants in Estonia is modest, the current minority is remarkable large. Today, the size of minority has reached around one third of the population which is almost 19% more people compared to the statistics made before the World War II.

When it comes to distribution of the Estonian population by citizenship, then the report of Integration Monitoring of the Estonian Society 2017 shows that in Estonia about 85% of the

population have Estonian citizenship, 7% are citizens of the Russian Federation, and 7% are non-citizens (Ministry of Culture 2017). See *Figure 2*.

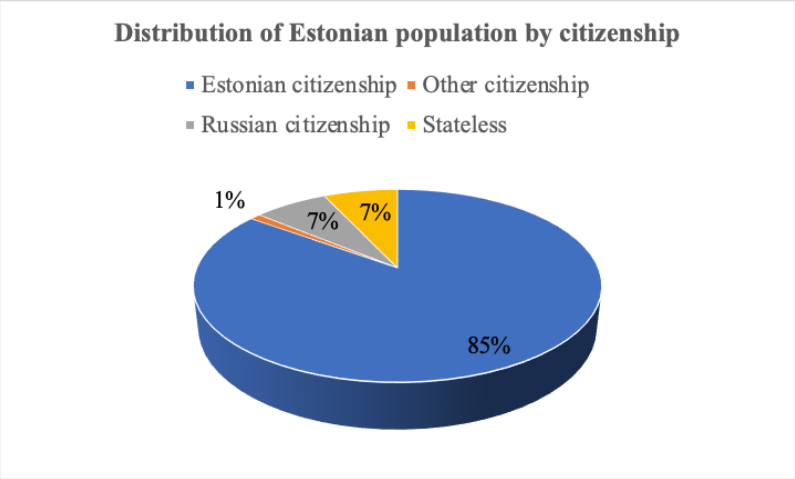


Figure 2. Distribution of Estonian population by citizenship
Source: Statistics Estonia 2020, composed by the author

After the Citizenship Act was enacted in 1992, 90% of ethnic-Estonians automatically became citizens while only 8-10% of non-Estonians gained citizenship (Pehrson 2020). Many Russians living in Estonia did not automatically receive Estonian citizenship in 1991, but instead needed to apply for it. Those who did not apply either took on Russian citizenship or stayed as non-citizens. In Estonia those people are also called as "grey passport holders" or "alien" (Ibid). In comparison with the beginning of the 1990's, the proportion of people with underdetermined citizenship has decreased from 32% to 7% (Ministry of Culture 2017). The Russian Federation's citizenship policy has made gaining its citizenship more convenient by granting Russian citizenship to former Soviet citizens, therefore people chose it over the Estonian citizenship. Some elites might consider the choice of having a Russian citizenship over Estonian one as sign of a greater loyalty to Russia than country of residence. These individuals are also the most poorly integrated in Estonian society (Schulze 2010). According to the monitoring report, the main reason why people have decided to remain non-citizens is that the absence of Estonian citizenship does not prevent them from living in Estonia. People with citizenship of the Russian Federation and with an undetermined citizenship have claimed that it is easier for them to travel between Russia and the vague region of the so-called CIS countries without having Estonian citizenship. Another hindering factor that impedes them from applying for Estonian citizenship is the fear of the citizenship exam which also includes Estonian language proficiency (Ministry of Culture 2017).

This 14% of Estonian population cluster which does not have the state citizenship is a risk to the legitimacy of Estonian democracy due to the fact that those people have no right to participate in parliamentary elections (Pehrson 2020). However, if they have become long-term residents, then they have the right to vote in communal elections (Ibid). Since Estonia joined the European Union in 2004, all residents of Estonia regardless of the citizenship have the mobility rights of the EU when it comes to employment, visa-free travelling in the Schengen area as well as the right to vote in European Parliament elections (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). Estonian citizenship and non-citizenship policy have been interpreted as an offensive act against Russians living in Estonia. Even though it is an internal matter of an independent state, then especially Russian media and its officials have criticised it as a discriminative policy towards Russians without citizenship (Meister 2018).

2.2. The current situation of the Estonian integration

2.2.1. The language barrier

Although Estonia's integration policy has evolved over the years, then it is still an on-going process to diminish the gap between the Estonian and Russian-speaking populations. One of the main differences and obstacles between the two populations is language. The language barrier is one of the main issues that must be solved in order to achieve better cohesive society. Today Estonian is the only official state language in Estonia which means that it is the only language accepted and used in the government, ministries, and in the courts. Besides being an official state language and used in state related institutions and bureaucracy, proficient language skills of country of residence are basis for getting a better education, employment or social position. From societal perspective, strong language skills of people from different national backgrounds mean a higher level of integration (Ministry of Culture 2017).

The Monitoring of Integration in Estonian Society is a survey that has been conducted during the years of 2011, 2015 and 2017. The report inquired the self-assessment of Estonian language skills by Estonian residents from other nationalities. The study asked people to assess their language skills on a five-point scale. The options to choose from were as follows: do not understand nor speak at all; understands a bit but does not speak; understands and speaks a bit; understands, speaks and writes; can speak fluently. The data was collected by regions which were divided into Ida-Virumaa, Tallinn and the rest of Estonia and are given in percent. The

reason that the data has been collected by regions is supposedly due to the segregation of the society. Most of the Russian-speaking inhabitants live in Ida-Virumaa or Tallinn, and fewer people in the rest of Estonia. The tables are presented according to each region. See following *Figures 3, 4* and *5* below.

The data collected from those surveys show that Estonian language skills of people from other national backgrounds have over the years improved to some extent. There has especially been a positive trend among the number of people who assessed their language skill as 'do not understand nor speak at all' which decreased hugely in regions like Ida-Virumaa and Tallinn. In 2011, 36% of respondents living in Ida-Virumaa claimed that they do not speak Estonian at all, but in 2017 this number has fallen to 22%. In 2011, 11% of Tallinn's inhabitants assessed their language skills to be non-existent, but by 2017 this number had been decreased by 6% being 5% at the time. When it comes to the rest of Estonia, then unfortunately there was no data gathering in 2011, but only in 2015 and 2017. The trend in this region is different, because in 2015 there were 2% of inhabitants claiming to have no Estonian language skills and by 2017 the number had increased to 4%. Therefore, according to conducted surveys the highest reduction of in the proportion of people with no command in Estonian has taken place in Ida-Virumaa.

When it comes to the trend among the number of people who assessed their language skill as 'can speak fluently', then this is also slightly in the positive trend. However, the changes in the percentages have been rather modest. While in 2011, only 4% of respondents living in Ida-Virumaa believed that they can speak Estonian fluently, then by 2017 this number had doubled to 8%. In 2011, 12% of Tallinn's inhabitants assessed their language skills to be excellent and by 2017 this was reflected by 13% of people. Thus, the change over the 6 years was having very small impact. Nevertheless, the rest of Estonia had a greater result considering the fact that there was 6% of increase among the people speaking Estonian fluently over 2 years.

Presumably the trend of people acquiring Estonian language skills in cities has taken place due to the necessity. A large number of people are concentrated in cities, therefore the competition to get a better work position is also higher. The knowledge of the state language gives a larger spectrum of positions to apply for. Besides it also rises the probability to get hired. Therefore, the people get more motivated to learn the language. On the other hand, the increase among people living in the rest of Estonia may indicate that people move outside the cities for work, because there are more open positions that does not require to have great language skills. It

also may be that the Estonian language courses provided by the state are more accessible for the people living in the cities. Although the demographic movements of people were not studied in this work, then this might have given an impact on survey's results in the division of the region as well. The slow rise of the people with an excellent Estonian knowledge in Tallinn over the years may be due to the fact that people have improved their standard of living and therefore moved from the capital city to abroad or to the outskirts of Tallinn. The vicinity of Tallinn, areas such as Tabasalu, Rae, Viimsi, etc. have increased in relation to the share of the population. Thus, those inhabitants' results are no longer part of Tallinn numbers, but are included in the rest of Estonia.

The figures below show that the general Estonian language skills of Russian-speaking background are slightly improving over the years, but at the same time the increase of the language awareness could be even greater by now. Hopefully the positive trend will continue to be on the rise in the future.

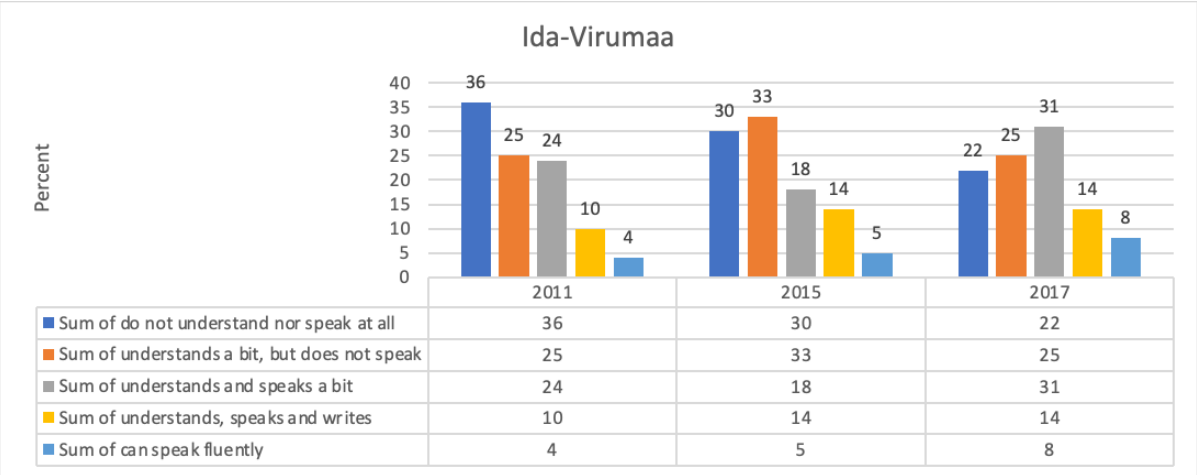


Figure 3. Self-assessment of Estonian language skills by Estonian residents of other nationalities in Ida-Virumaa
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

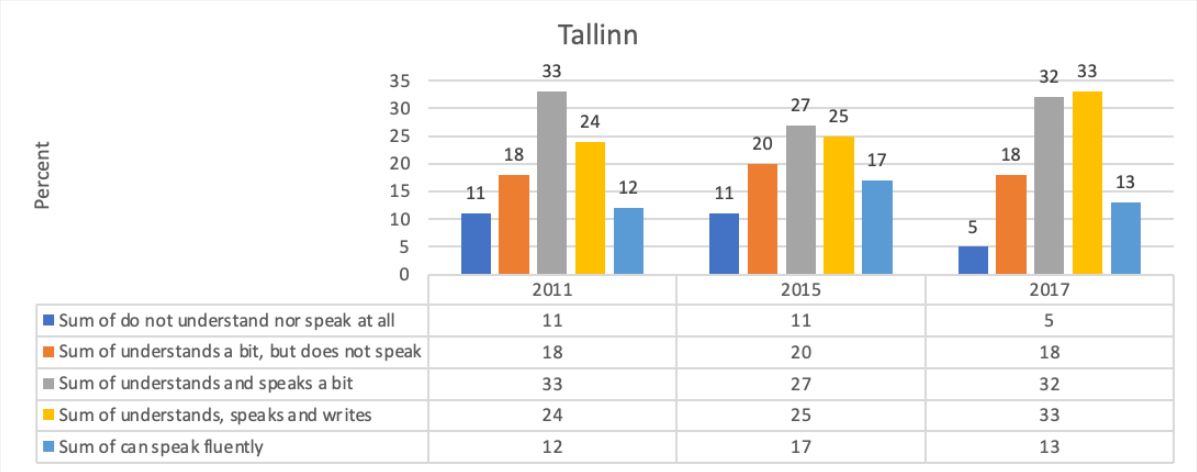


Figure 4. Self-assessment of Estonian language skills by Estonian residents of other nationalities in Tallinn
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

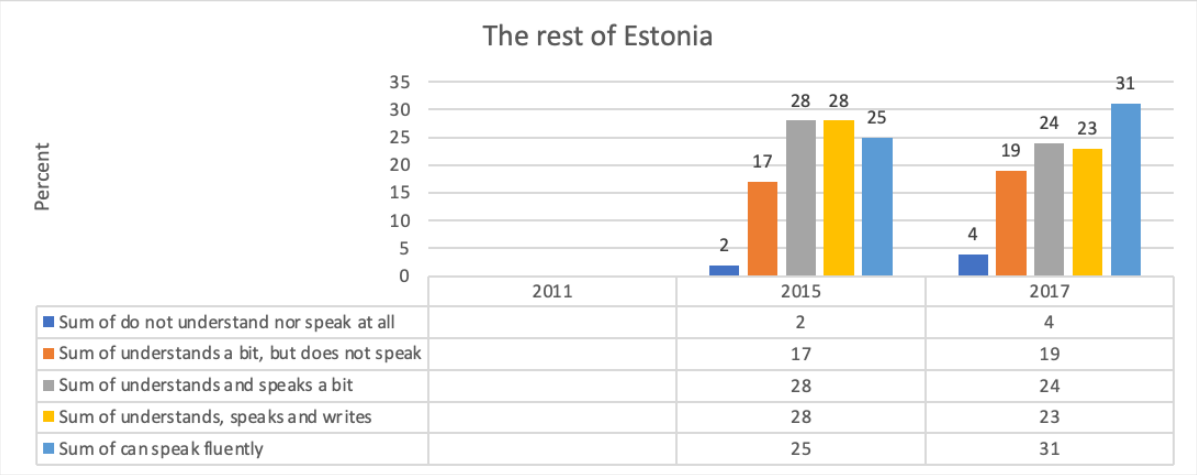


Figure 5. Self-assessment of Estonian language skills by Estonian residents of other nationalities in the rest of Estonia
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

Comparing the most recent report conducted in 2017 with the previous data collection from the year 2015 and 2011 shows that the Estonian language proficiency amongst the people from different background as well as the need for the Estonian language at the workplace and during people's leisure time is slowly but steadily improving. The 2017 report also points out that the most dominant language within the minorities is still the Russian language. The segregation of people does not provoke to acquire the Estonian language skills and the wide usage of Russian language among both Russian-speaking minority and Estonian speakers make everyday life convenient. This unfortunately creates a societal gap between different social groups. The report also reflects that approximately only one-third of the Russian-speaking minority in

Estonia is within the sphere of influence of local Estonian media. Others prefer to consume the media in Russian which results in their different cultural sphere and also knowledge of actual topics in Estonia. It is important to acknowledge that Russian media is strictly managed by the Russian Federation. Thus, unlike Estonians, who live in a relatively homogeneous media space, people of other ethnicities receive somewhat contradictory media perspectives in connection with local and global events (Ministry of Culture 2017). Therefore, the level of language skills is directly related to the integration of Estonian social and cultural life. Although Estonians and people of other ethnicities often 'occupy' very different language and cultural spaces, they still encounter each other at the workplace or public sphere which in the end might promote the process of integration of people.

2.2.2. Educational system

Educational plays a crucial role in supporting the societal integration and is strongly connected with the acquisition of the state language. Besides providing opportunities for language study, schools and kindergartens give basic set of other skills and cultural values that are needed to be successful in certain society. Estonian educational system is regulated by government, but over the years two different school networks have been developed with different languages - Estonian and Russian. Many of the Russian-speaking minority pupils attend school where Russian is the main teaching language. Even though the teaching materials is the same for both speaking schools, then Russian-speaking schools have a set of structural problems from starting from poor Estonian language skills to an aging pedagogical staff (Meister 2018). This is reflected in the high-school exams as students from Estonian-speaking schools are more successful than the ones from Russian-speaking schools. Further on this will affect high-school graduates at entering universities and at achieving university degrees in Estonia. The main obstacle in this regard is a limited knowledge of the Estonian language (Meister 2018).

The educational reform, which was pushing for 60% of materials to be taught in the Estonian language, started in 2007, but the change was not welcomed among the Russian-speaking population as in 2011 there were only 53% of those people who were in favour of the new reform (Integratsiooni Monitooring 2011). However, according to 2017 integration monitoring report shows that 78% of those people believe that studying in Estonian gives the student better opportunities on the labour market. Therefore, it shows clearly that over the years the perceptions of respondents of other ethnicities have become more favourable towards the

transition to Estonian-language instructions at upper secondary education level. In the recent years, the attitude towards studying in a mixed group of children with different ethnicities and mother tongues leads to a better overall learning outcome has also risen among both ethnic Estonians and Russian-speaking minority (Eesti Ühiskonna Integratsiooni Monitooring 2017)

In the Russian Federation, this education and language reform was interpreted as another discriminative act against the Russian-speaking minority in Estonian state. The Russian media claimed that with the language reform, the Estonian government had violated constitutional law. Therefore, it gives a reason for the Russian Federation to protect the narrative and need of protecting the rights of minority. However, the Russian media never covers the fact that this language reform applies only to non-compulsory upper secondary education and does not apply to compulsory secondary education (1^{st}-9^{th} grade), which is indeed protected by the constitution law of Estonia (Meister 2018).

2.2.3. The labour market

The labour market is definitely one of the most important indicators to analyse the current situation of Estonian integration. Analysing the labour market helps to understand whether both groups have equal opportunities in regards of employment and salary. Therefore, the labour market reflects clearly whether the integration between Estonians and people of other nationalities has been successful or not. According to the data gathered from Statistics Estonia database about the employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians by age group from 1997 to 2020 shows that the inequalities among Estonian and Russian-speaking workers are still in place. The analysis indicates that cross-ethnic differences in employment as well as unemployment have not decreased significantly over the last decade. The analysis shows that the labourers from other ethnic backgrounds in comparison with Estonians have lower employment and higher unemployment rates. Thus, could be argued that the ethnic Estonians have an advantageous position in the labour market. See following *Figures 6, 7, 8* and *9* below.

Each *Figure* presents a certain age group in the perspective of both employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and people of other nationalities from 1997 to 2020. Statistical data of employment and unemployment gap shows the correlation between Estonians and non-Estonians in the current labour market. When it comes to employment rates then if the coefficient is in a positive trend, then it means that more Estonians have been

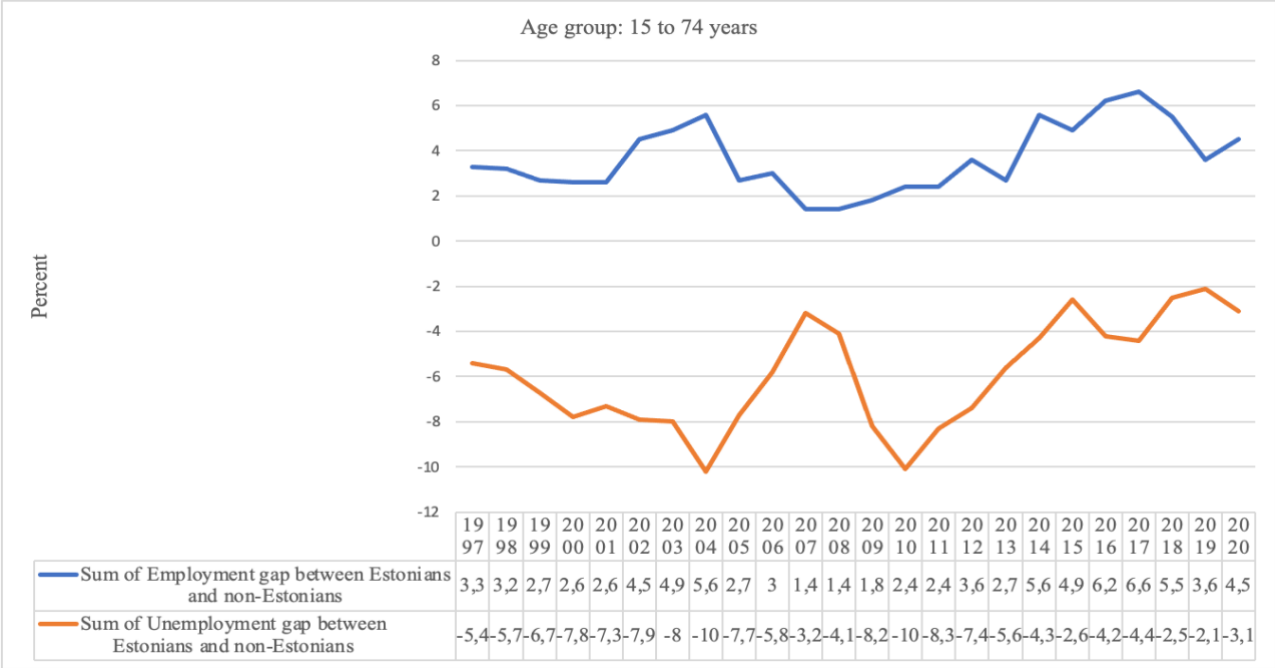
employed than Russian-speaking inhabitants. This means that the lower coefficient reflects the better labour market situation as both Estonians and people of other nationalities have more equal employment opportunities. On the other hand, when the unemployment rate is on the negative side, then more Russian-speaking working age people are unemployed compared to the number of Estonians at the same time.

The analysis of the employment gap statistics in all figures indicates that in every age group ethnic Estonians have a better position in terms of getting employed. The analysis also reflect that the employment gap rate is growing with an age. For example, in 2020 the employment rate among the age group of 15 to 24 was 1,1%, in the age group of 25 to 49 it was 3,6% and those aged between 50 to 64 the rate was 5,6%. The biggest employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians over the years appears to be in the age group of 50 to 64. It can be argued that the most equal opportunities are in the age group of 15 to 24 years where over the years the employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians have often been in negative trend. Meaning that people of other nationalities have been employed more frequently. The reason behind that might also be the opportunities for further studies after high school. Pupils who have studied in Estonian have better chances to achieve higher exam results, therefore they have greater chance to go to the university. On the other hand, others decide to start working after graduating high school. However, in the last four years the indicator has been somewhat stable and stayed near zero which shows that both nationality groups at the age between 15 to 24 have had rather similar opportunities to be active on the labour market as well as acquire education.

Analysing the unemployment rate between Estonians and non-Estonians brings out that the rate has been in the negative trend throughout this decade. Meaning that since the 1997 there have constantly be more unemployed people of other nationalities than ethnic Estonians. The unemployment gap rate also varies with age. In 2020, the unemployment rate among the age group of 15 to 24 was -8,7%, in the age group of 25 to 49 it was -3,1% and those aged between 50 to 64 the rate was -2,8%. Therefore, the biggest unemployment gap takes place in the age group of 15 to 24.

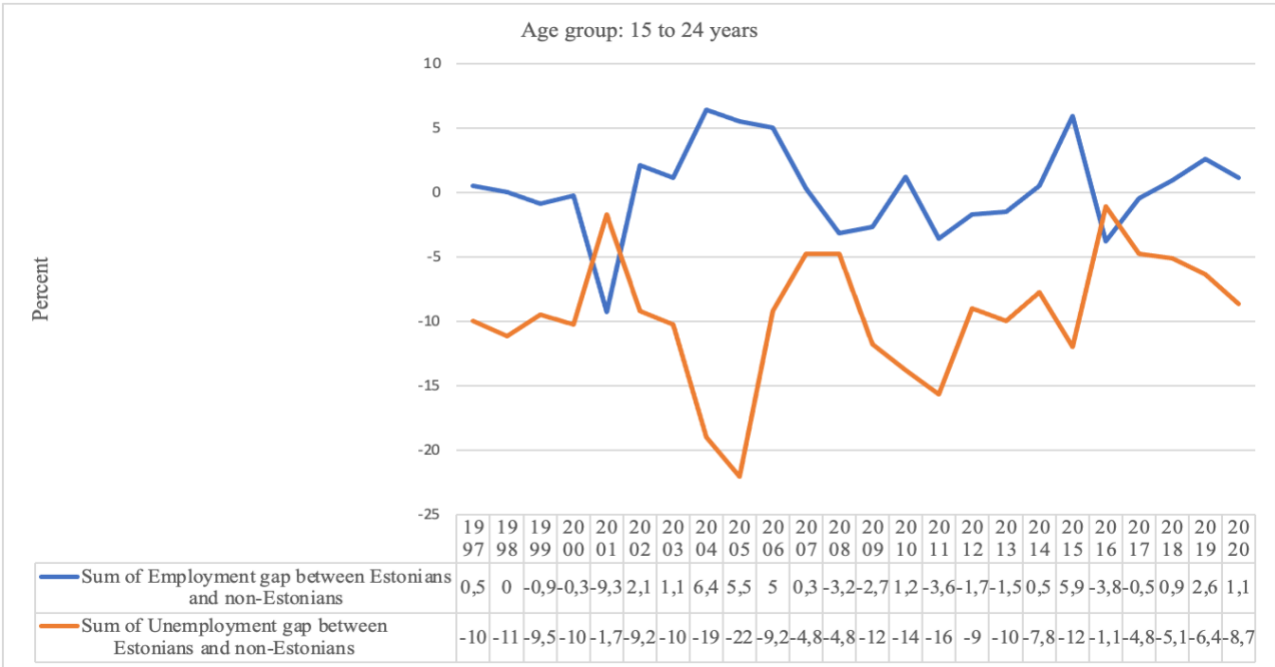
Employment and unemployment rates largely depend on the level of education. The labour market indicators of people with basic education and higher education differ approximately twice (Statistics Estonia 2020). It should also be taken into account that both employment and unemployment rates change over time due to social and economic events taking place in the

society. The last economic crisis in 2008 affected the labour market drastically. As a result, the employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians was significantly lower than usual, equalizing the opportunities for both parties. At that point of time, the person's nationality did not matter, because many people lost their jobs due to the poor economic situation.



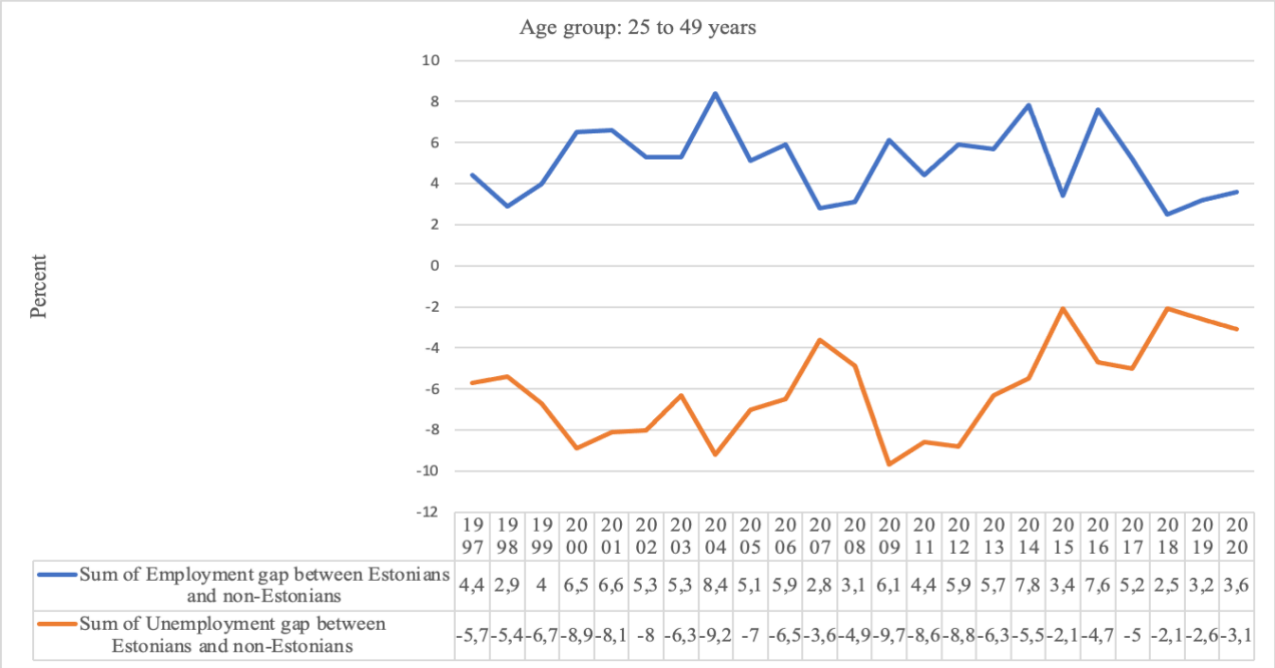
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sum of Employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	3,3	3,2	2,7	2,6	2,6	4,5	4,9	5,6	2,7	3	1,4	1,4	1,8	2,4	2,4	3,6	2,7	5,6	4,9	6,2	6,6	5,5	3,6	4,5
Sum of Unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	-5,4	-5,7	-6,7	-7,8	-7,3	-7,9	-8	-10	-7,7	-5,8	-3,2	-4,1	-8,2	-10	-8,3	-7,4	-5,6	-4,3	-2,6	-4,2	-4,4	-2,5	-2,1	-3,1

Figure 6. Employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians by age group of 15 to 74 years
Source: Statistics Estonia database from 1997 to 2020, composed by the author



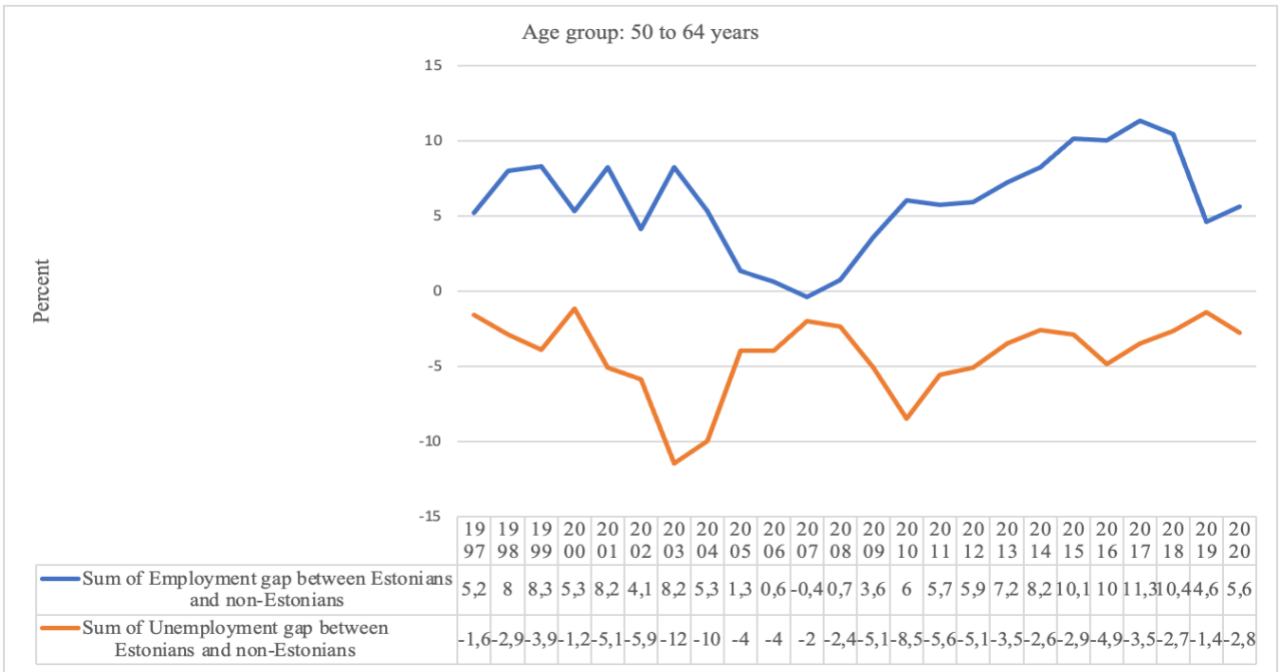
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sum of Employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	0,5	0	-0,9	-0,3	-9,3	2,1	1,1	6,4	5,5	5	0,3	-3,2	-2,7	1,2	-3,6	-1,7	-1,5	0,5	5,9	-3,8	-0,5	0,9	2,6	1,1
Sum of Unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	-10	-11	-9,5	-10	-1,7	-9,2	-10	-19	-22	-9,2	-4,8	-4,8	-12	-14	-16	-9	-10	-7,8	-12	-1,1	-4,8	-5,1	-6,4	-8,7

Figure 7. Employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians by age group of 15 to 24 years
Source: Statistics Estonia database from 1997 to 2020, composed by the author



	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sum of Employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	4,4	2,9	4	6,5	6,6	5,3	5,3	8,4	5,1	5,9	2,8	3,1	6,1	4,4	5,9	5,7	7,8	3,4	7,6	5,2	2,5	3,2	3,6
Sum of Unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	-5,7	-5,4	-6,7	-8,9	-8,1	-8	-6,3	-9,2	-7	-6,5	-3,6	-4,9	-9,7	-8,6	-8,8	-6,3	-5,5	-2,1	-4,7	-5	-2,1	-2,6	-3,1

Figure 8. Employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians by age group of 25 to 49 years
Source: Statistics Estonia database from 1997 to 2020, composed by the author



	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Sum of Employment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	5,2	8	8,3	5,3	8,2	4,1	8,2	5,3	1,3	0,6	-0,4	0,7	3,6	6	5,7	5,9	7,2	8,2	10,1	10	11,3	10,4	4,6	5,6
Sum of Unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians	-1,6	-2,9	-3,9	-1,2	-5,1	-5,9	-12	-10	-4	-4	-2	-2,4	-5,1	-8,5	-5,6	-5,1	-3,5	-2,6	-2,9	-4,9	-3,5	-2,7	-1,4	-2,8

Figure 9. Employment and unemployment gap between Estonians and non-Estonians by age group of 50 to 64 years
Source: Statistics Estonia database from 1997 to 2020, composed by the author

The conducted Estonian Integration Monitoring report in 2017 also brings out in regards of the labour market that the income and wages of labourers from other ethnic backgrounds are mostly lower in proportion to salaries of ethnic Estonians. The wage gap between those two ethnic groups is almost 12% (Ministry of Culture 2017). Therefore, people of other nationalities assess their overall position in the labour market as less secure (Ibid).

The labour market lacks integration due to the current educational system and inadequate Estonian language skills which is considered extremely important for employment in Estonia. It is illustrated by the fact that Estonian-speaking Russians are better off in the labour market compared to their counterparts who do not speak Estonian. However, regardless of the linguistic skills, they still have fewer opportunities in the labour market than ethnic Estonians (Ministry of Culture 2017). It is noteworthy that the large number of Russian residents has affected the labour market in a way where the proficiency of Russian language is also highly valued and therefore in some cases Russian speakers are more often been employed to certain positions. However, the lack of proficiency in Estonian lies also in the fact that today the work collectives are still rather ethnically segregated which does not help to solve the problems of inequalities in the labour market. On the other hand, the positive trend is that work collectives in Estonia are becoming both culturally and ethnically more diverse which might change the current inequalities in the workplace environment in the future (Ibid).

2.2.4. Civic engagement and societal involvement

In order to examine Estonian integration, it is also relevant to analyse the civic engagement and societal involvement of ethnic Estonians and Russian-speaking minority as well as the differences between those populations. The indicators that differentiate both clusters are the following: the general interest in politics, turnout in elections and participation in politics (Ministry of Culture 2014). Compared to Estonians Russian-speaking minority is less active in all respects. On the positive side the level of political activity among different ethnicities has risen over the years, but what is noteworthy is that the political values of people with similar cultural background are more converged (Ministry of Culture 2017). However, the civic engagement still remains lower for Russian-speaking minority than Estonians. There are several factors which hinder their level of participation and representation on political arena.

Despite the aforementioned growing political activity, minority communities still have a very little faith in the political institutions, and this reflects in their political participation as well

(Ministry of Culture 2017). The low engagement is mostly due to the low representation of the ethnic minorities in local municipalities and government (Pehrson 2020). Supposedly if the Russian-speaking minority were represented by more political parties, then the population would also participate in the political debate more actively. The issue remains also among people with an undetermined citizenship who do not have the full political rights. However, they still have the right to vote on local and European Parliament elections. Also, there are several restrictions in order to have the right to vote or join a political party – one must be an Estonian citizen in order to vote and join political party. Therefore, once again the language barrier impedes the Estonia-wide social integration and in this case limits their civic participation. Democracy requires civic engagement; therefore, the state has to eliminate all the hindering factors to allow more people to be politically active. Estonia should take into consideration that if a large part of Russian-speakers cannot vote, join political parties or run for government due to lack of language skills, then the state will most likely lose a significant portion of input of its population (Pehrson 2020).

When it comes to societal involvement, then once again compared to Estonian people with different ethnic background are significantly less active in participating in public events and national celebrations (Ministry of Culture 2017). Different cultural events, such as the Song and Dance Celebrations and other major events with symbolic significance are much more visited by ethnic Estonians that people of other ethnicities. The Republic's anniversary celebrations are followed by approximately 80% of Estonians versus 40% of Russians who consider it important (Ibid). Once again, the societal integration can be related to one's linguistic skills. The better one's proficiency of Estonian language is, the more active and integrated the person is in the societal life too.

3. RUSSIAN INFLUENCE ON ESTONIAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, twenty-five million ethnic Russians found themselves living outside of Russia. As stated in Schulze works, this provided Russia an opportunity to interfere in the affairs of other states and to keep them within its sphere of influence, including Estonia (2018). Russian-speaking minority makes up about 30% of the Estonian population. Being a third of country's population, Russian diaspora is a potential resource of Russian influence on internal and external policy of Estonia (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017). Although Russia does not pose a direct military threat to Estonia today, the tensions between the two countries stand still (Meister 2018).

In the 1990s, Russia's new government recognized the importance of the Russian diaspora abroad and perceived it as a congenial socio-cultural world with the potential to strengthen Russia's influence abroad (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017). Therefore, in 1999, the Russian Duma adopted the first law on state policy towards Russians living abroad, also called the compatriots (Ibid). Since then, Russia has proclaimed itself "the protector" of the Russian-speaking diaspora and therefore uses its compatriots' policy as a way of exerting soft power on neighbouring countries (Kudors and Orttung 2010). Russia's officially stated concern for this group allowed it to portray its active foreign policy towards the neighboring countries as a moral obligation. Russian policy-driven strategy has included military and economic pressure, disinformation campaigns, citizenship policy, and the use of international institutions as platforms for staging complaints against the Estonian government in order to fulfil its own foreign policy objectives (Kallas 2016). Their strategy is linked to a cultural, language and religious policy in which the Russian World Foundation and the Russian Orthodox Church play a key role and are agents of the official state policy (Meister 2018). Russia has built up its strategy on the Soviet legacy of a large Russian minority population in Estonia as well as the familiarity of the population with Russian language and culture (Grigas 2012). At the heart of the numerous confrontations between Russia and Estonia is the issue of conflicting interpretations of history in connection with the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union (Schulze 2010).

The concern over Russia's influence on Estonian internal policies grew after the Bronze Soldier riots in 2007. Also, today it seems essential to examine the Russian government's attitude and policies towards ethnic Russian speakers and others with ties to the Russian Federation in former Soviet countries due to its military seizure of Crimea in 2014. The alarming factor is that Russia justified its illegal actions in eastern Ukraine by arguing that it is protecting and defending its populations abroad (Park 2016). In order to analyse what is the impact of Russia's strategy on Estonian integration, it is necessary to examine what Russia's tactics have been so far.

Russia today makes use of a varied set of soft power instruments to maintain its influence in the Baltic States. According to KaPo, the main aim of Russia's strategy of intervention is the segregation of Russian-speaking minority to result a gap in a society (Kaitsepolitseiamet 2016). In order to achieve that, it wishes to create a Russian-oriented supranational identity among the ethnic Russian population of the Baltic States by mobilizing its audience (Park 2016). The mobilizing measures being used are language, culture and media (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). The Russian Orthodox Church is also a key in the formulation and spreading of Russian leadership's values and foreign policy towards the Orthodox World, which argues against the Western liberal way of living, for traditional family, against LGBT rights or the needs of minorities (Meister 2018). The Orthodox Church aims to spread its values abroad. Hence, Russia's conservatism tends to build bridges with conservative and right-wing groups in Europe and the United States with an attempt of destabilise the country and discredit local authorities (Ibid). By mobilizing Russian-speakers, KaPo argued that Russia seeks to destabilize and strain not only the society of Estonia but the societies of the EU and NATO member states and to undermine allied relations (Kaitsepolitseiamet 2016). Moreover, Russia also tries to expose the weaknesses across the EU that are fuelling tensions between the Member States (Ibid). With its various strategic operations on political and economic levels and military provocations, not only creates tensions in bilateral relations between Estonia and Russia but tests the EU's and NATO's reactions and persistence (Meister 2018).

3.1. A Supranational Identity

The millions of Russians who now lived abroad in the former Soviet republics belonged, at least rhetorically, to the community that made up Russia's wider nation (Kallas 2016). The term

"compatriots abroad" was introduced into the political lexicon firstly in the 1990's by the President Boris Yeltsin. However, under Yeltsin rule Russia's actions with regard to the large contingent of Russian speakers in the former Soviet republics remained limited to rhetorical reactions towards Estonian citizenship and language policies (Ibid). With the rise of Vladimir Putin, the Russian Compatriots' Policy rose to a new level of importance in the political rhetoric of the country (Kallas 2016). Therefore, the 2007 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation included reference to people who were left behind with the fall of Soviet Union in the Post-Soviet states as "our compatriots in other countries" (Saari 2014). This document emphasised the moral obligation of the Russian Federation to help the Russian diaspora no matter where they live (Park 2016). Moreover, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in the interview to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* in 2008 that Moscow's relations with its Russian compatriots residing abroad would be developed based on the principles of soft power (Kudors and Orttung 2010). According to Nye (2021), the chief proponent of the concept of *soft power*, its attractiveness is derived from three sources—culture, values and foreign policy. Nye speaks about soft power which, contrary to its "hard" variety, can alter the behaviour of countries without coercion or offering economic benefits. In other words, soft power stimulates others to wish what you wish, because you possess authority based on charisma (Nye 2021). It is more difficult to recognize someone using soft power due to the measures used. It creates authority based on charisma (Nye 2021). The 2007 Foreign Policy Concept also included the specification of soft power as a new approach to Russia's foreign policy (Saari 2014).

In order to fulfil Foreign Policy Concept's aim and defend these compatriots, Russian Federation also adopted separate policy named The Compatriots' policy in 2007 (Park 2016). This is the most important policy as well as soft power measure of creating Russian-oriented supranational identity among the ethnic Russian population living in the Baltic States (Park 2016). It was a difficult debate who the Russian foreign policy makers consider as a target audience for its compatriots' policy (Kudors and Orttung 2010). From this issue sprung the need for yet another concept named *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) which would forge a common bond between Russian and its compatriots abroad (Ibid). It is the central tool of Russia's compatriot policy which aims to construct a supranational identity that emphasizes the Russian language, culture, common historical memory that strongly focuses on Soviet victory over Nazism in WWII, and the Orthodox Church (Kallas 2016). These are the identity markers that unite members of *Russkiy Mir* into one community. Part of the Russian World are all people who "speak, think and feel Russian", which gives a very broad and fuzzy definition

for groups which belong to Russia (Laruelle 2015). The so-called Russian World outside Russia is estimated to consist of approximately 35 million people in over 90 countries, mainly concentrated in the CIS and the Baltic states (Conley and Gerber 2011). The concept seeks to reconnect the Russian diaspora with its homeland through cultural, linguistic and social programs, scholarships for foreign students, youth work, well-equipped media publications, Christian Orthodoxy and assistance in relocation (Tafuro 2014). This strategy is part of the Russia's foreign policy which seeks to mobilize its audience in order to change the political and social orientation of the Baltic States as well as make the Baltic States' attitudes towards the Kremlin more favourable (Kaitsepolitseiamet 2016).

The exporting the ideology of Russian World beyond Russia's borders includes political and financial resources from the Russian Federation. The state has established a range of compatriots' organizations which are both state-run and public aimed at uniting Russian diaspora by providing them the legal aid or protection when needed (Kallas 2016). Those institutions are such as the "Russkyi Mir" (Russian World) (2007), The Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichetsvo) (2008), Foundation for support and protection of compatriots' rights (2012), Foundation for cooperation with Russian-speaking media (2014) (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017). Additionally, Kremlin has been continuously supporting local NGOs established by the local compatriot movements (Kallas 2016). Establishing and supporting those institutions financially shows that it is apparent Russian Federation takes creating a supranational identity among its compatriots very seriously.

3.2. The role of media usage

The Russian-language media is one of the most important and the most used soft power instrument of compatriot policy through which the Russian Federation reaches Russian-speaking people living abroad by distributing Russian culture and entertainment. Besides entertaining factor, it is a great tool to spread desired information, in other words to share propagandistic information in order to have an influence on its compatriots abroad (Conley and Gerber 2011). Today fake news, hate speech, bots and propaganda repress more and more the advantages of the internet, social media and free, transnational information flows on the international level. This is also the case in Estonia where the use of media presents a great

challenge. The media deepens the gap between Estonians and ethnic Russians who live in different information spheres. Both groups receive their information from different sources, in different languages and through different media channels (Conley and Gerber 2011). Therefore, the use of media is a great challenge in the context of Estonia-wide integration. As of three-quarters of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia follows the Russian media, it opens up more opportunities for Russia to exert influence on supranational identity formation and identification with Russia and the "Russian World" project (Kallas 2016). A significant Russian audience makes the media one of the greatest measures of Russia's strategy to mobilize Russian compatriots abroad (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015).

Using its influence via the media, Russia has been particularly successful in creating a virtual community involving the Russian diaspora that remains linked culturally, linguistically and ideologically to Russia (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). Russian media channels have been the medium for the dissemination of Russian popular culture and entertainment in the Baltic States (Kallas 2016). Recently Russian broadcasting has significantly expanded in Baltic media both TV and internet. The most popular television channels among Estonia's Russian speakers are the following: First Channel; NTV Mir; a state-owned channel RTR Planet; REN TV Baltic; and the most popular Russian-language channel in Estonia, First Baltic Channel (PBK), which re-broadcasts Russia's top programmes (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). Estonia also has its own local Russian-language TV channels such as ETV+ and TV3+. The channels are aimed at the Russian-speaking minority airing both news and entertainment shows. Besides TV channels the Russian speakers also value Russian-language newspapers as an information source. Currently over 30 Russian newspapers circulate in Estonia, 4 out of 30 are the most popular ones in the country – "Youth of Estonia", "Business news", "Day by day", "Estonia" (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017). Russian-language radio channels also have a high audibility. The Radio 4, which belongs to Estonian Public Broadcasting, is being the most listened radio among Russian-speaking minority. Besides classical mediums, Russian media has also been embracing cyberspace and is delivering international and local news in Russian via news websites (Zeleneva and Ageeva 2017).

The choice of media channels and information spaces is connected to individual's integration in the society. The gap between different ethnic groups remains due to the perspective of reliability and value of importance towards different sources of information. According to the data gathered from the Estonian Integration Monitoring of 2011, 2015 and 2017 regarding

people's choice of media channels show that Estonians and people from different ethnic background tend to follow different media outlets. See following *Figures 10*, *11*, *12* and *13* below. Each figure presents Estonians or people of other nationalities personal preferences and valuation for specific media channel. The data has been divided into two sectors – whether the media outlet has been valued as very important or not important media outlet at all. The data was gathered from both nationalities group separately. The information in the figures is displayed in percentages.

An analysis of the data collected in 2011, 2015 and 2017 shows that the preferred media channels for daily information have remained the same over the years and no major changes can be seen. According to the most recent Estonian integration monitoring report indicates that 84% of Estonians believe Estonian Television (ETV) to be the most important source of information while only 27% of Russian-speakers agree with it (2017). Opinion polls bear this out: the Russian speakers tend to have a low confidence in Estonian-language media and 89% of all respondents bring out that they follow at least one Russian-language media channel. On the other hand, Estonians have even greater lack of confidence towards Russian-language media. The importance of the Russian media is slightly lower for people who have obtained Estonian citizenship and have higher Estonian language skills. Media consumption is also related to the sense of belonging – the more strongly a person identifies himself with the state of residence, the more important is Estonian-language and local Russian-language channels as sources of information. (Integration Monitoring of the Estonian Society 2017) The survey brought out a positive outcome that *ETV+* is considered among 43% of Russian-speaking respondents as trustworthy and a quite important source of information. On the other hand the data tells that the Estonian media outlets in Russian language such as TV channels including *Aktuaalne Kaamera,* newspapers, radio channels including Radio 4 and websites have lost Russian-speaking followers over the years rather than gained popularity among them. It is also noteworthy that assessment of social media channels as important information source has significantly increase among both groups.

Sum of Estonians: Very important or quite important	2011	2015	2017
Other Estonian TV channels	95	76	74
Estonian radio channels	86	75	73
Estonian newspapers	86	74	72
Estonian news portals or websites	74	65	61
Communication with friends, relatives or acquaintances	91	0	82
Estonian Television (ETV)	0	86	84
Communication at work or school	72	0	65
Social media	38	31	43
International news channels	33	0	23
Russian TV channels	19	8	7
Newspapers in English, German and other languages	13	0	11
Other Estonian radio channels in Russian	8	4	4
Estonian news portals and websites in Russian	0	8	7
"Aktuaalne kaamera" in Russian	0	7	6
PBK Estonian news	0	8	5
ETV+	0	0	12
Estonian newspapers in Russian	0	5	5
PBK other programs produced in Estonia	0	4	5
Russian newspapers	4	3	2
Radio 4	0	4	4
Estonian TV channels in Russian (except Aktuaalne Kaamera)	0	6	0
Russian newsportals and websites	0	3	3

Figure 10. Ranking of the important media channels among Estonians
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

Sum of Estonians: Not important at all	2011	2015	2017
Russian newspapers	78	87	84
Other Estonian radio channels in Russian	73	82	82
Russian TV channels	50	72	69
Russian newsportals and websites	0	84	83
Radio 4	0	82	80
Estonian newspapers in Russian	0	82	80
PBK other programs produced in Estonia	0	82	78
Estonian news portals and websites in Russian	0	79	79
PBK Estonian news	0	77	78
"Aktuaalne kaamera" in Russian	0	72	74
Newspapers in English, German and other languages	64	0	70
Social media	42	47	38
International news channels	35	0	53
Estonian TV channels in Russian (except Aktuaalne Kaamera)	0	71	0
Estonian news portals or websites	21	22	26
ETV+	0	0	60
Communication at work or school	17	0	22
Estonian newspapers	3	10	12
Estonian radio channels	2	9	12
Other Estonian TV channels	1	5	8
Estonian Television (ETV)	0	4	5
Communication with friends, relatives or acquaintances	1	0	6

Figure 11. Ranking of the not important media channels among Estonians
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

Sum of People of other nationalities: Very important or quite important	2011	2015	2017
PBK Estonian news	81	74	70
Russian TV channels	75	74	71
"Aktuaalne kaamera" in Russian	71	61	62
PBK other programs produced in Estonia	60	58	58
Estonian newspapers in Russian	66	52	57
Communication with friends, relatives or acquaintances	87	0	81
Estonian news portals and websites in Russian	54	50	54
Other Estonian radio channels in Russian	61	45	43
Radio 4	55	44	38
Communication at work or school	69	0	68
Social media	42	39	48
Russian newsportals and websites	46	27	39
Estonian Television (ETV)	48	36	27
Estonian TV channels in Russian (except Aktuaalne Kaamera)	50	44	0
Russian newspapers	31	28	34
Estonian news portals or websites	32	24	24
Other Estonian TV channels	35	22	21
Estonian newspapers	32	22	23
Estonian radio channels	31	20	20
International news channels	47	0	19
ETV+	0	0	43
Newspapers in English, German and other languages	12	0	8

Figure 12. Ranking of the important media channels among people of other nationalities
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

Sum of People of other nationalities: Not important at all	2011	2015	2017
Estonian news portals or websites	46	54	54
Estonian radio channels	43	57	54
Estonian newspapers	44	53	54
Newspapers in English, German and other languages	72	0	72
Russian newspapers	39	46	45
Other Estonian TV channels	37	44	41
Russian newsportals and websites	35	50	37
Social media	38	41	35
Estonian Television (ETV)	26	35	42
Estonian news portals and websites in Russian	34	31	33
Radio 4	23	30	36
Other Estonian radio channels in Russian	18	29	34
International news channels	29	0	52
Estonian newspapers in Russian	14	25	25
PBK other programs produced in Estonia	16	20	20
Estonian TV channels in Russian (except Aktuaalne Kaamera)	24	30	0
"Aktuaalne kaamera" in Russian	12	17	22
Communication at work or school	19	0	21
PBK Estonian news	9	12	18
Russian TV channels	8	9	15
ETV+	0	0	30
Communication with friends, relatives or acquaintances	3	0	10

Figure 13. Ranking of the not important media channels among people of other nationalities
Source: Estonian Integration Monitoring report of 2011, 2015, 2017, composed by the author

It is important to analyse from which media channels the citizens get most of their information on daily basis, because it is noteworthy that much of the Russian print and broadcast media is under state's control owned by the Russian state, by big state companies like Gazprom media or by oligarch mostly close to President Putin (Park 2016). It lacks an ethos of balanced information, fact checking, difference between opinion and facts or an understanding of itself as the Fourth Estate in a democracy (Meister 2018). Besides broadcasting great content of entertainment, it is also a tool for disseminating information that often has a Kremlin bias (Kallas 2016). Beyond the promotion of Russian language and culture, it gives a biased perception of Estonia. The narratives of the news programs featured in these channels deviate from traditional public diplomacy, and often include some characteristic of propaganda (Park 2016). Rather than giving an objective overview of current news or present an investigative journalism, the programming seeks to undermine the self-confidence of Estonia by falsely highlighting the fascist past of the Baltic States, creating a division of "us" and "them", and presenting transformed historical narratives (Saari 2014). Thus, it can be presumed that the Russian media's aim is to spread disinformation in order to confuse its audience and present alternative perspectives which are more favourable toward Russian foreign policy strategy (Zakem, Saunders and Antoun 2015). Moreover, Russia's disinformation strategy seeks to undermine the credibility of Western governments, politicians, policies and media in order to hinder the functioning of democratic institutions. Russia comprehends that the political destabilisation of one state might potentially have an effect on other EU or NATO member states too (Meister 2018). Russian media not only concentrates on one individual state and creates directed information, but also reportages a systematic negative coverage about the EU (Ibid). Therefore, the usage of media becomes an effective instrument in Russia's foreign policy arsenal. KaPo's annual yearbook has detected that Russian media has been painting a picture of post-Soviet Estonia as an economically, socially and culturally degraded country on the periphery of Europe, where neo-Nazism has taken ground and the Russian-speaking population is conspicuously discriminated against (Estonian Security Police 2010). Over the years, the KaPo has pointed out certain mediums which have intentionally disseminate lies and propaganda, such as RTR Planeta TV channel and Russia Today TV. The annual reports emphasize that it is important to prevent the spread of misinformation which might undermine Estonia's global public image.

Disinformation and propaganda have been identified as a part of Russian soft power measures (Meister 2018). Propaganda can be defined as the selective use of arguments or information to

either promote or undermine a political or public actor or to achieve a political goal. It can have a positive or negative focus, depending on the goal. Disinformation describes politically motivated messaging that is directly designed to provoke public cynicism, uncertainty, distrust and conspiracy, all of which undermine citizens' trust or confuse the public. Fake news is deliberately created non existing stories or facts with the aim to discredit a politician, state or institution. Disinformation is different from fake news, because it is based at least partly on facts or simply casts part of a story. Disinformation does not necessarily consist of outright lies or fabrications, it can consist of mostly true facts – lies removed from the context or mixed with falsehoods to support the intended message. It favours a special version of a story or event that can trigger a political reaction. (Meister 2018) Both of the aforementioned measures are also used in the context of Estonia in order to create distrust of the Estonian state among the Russian-speaking minority (Meister 2018). On top of that, the measures help to sustain a positive opinion of Putin's policies among the Russian-speaking population (Hyndle-Hussein 2015). Meaning that television channels in Russian present one-sided, Russia-friendly and EU-critical news coverage and provide a media platform for pro-Russian experts only (Zakem, Saunders and Antoun 2015).

Furthermore, these days, it is much easier to spread fake stories and conspiracy through social networks. In the digital age, the public in open societies seems to be much more vulnerable to the manipulation of information and to half-true or conspiracy theories. Therefore, besides spreading disinformation on television and printed media, Russia also distributes disinformation on online media by using online trolls, whether automated or human (Zakem, Saunders and Antoun 2015). The online trolls' task is to post pro-Moscow comments and information to various platforms, including online news, social media, and forums (Saari 2014). In a digital society as Estonia, online and social media can play an important role as a platform for spreading Kremlin-minded disinformation narratives. Given the high degree of media freedom in Estonia, it is easy to post almost anything online, whether as comments on established media pages or as posts on one's own blog (Mattiisen, Grajewski ja Supinska 2018). These commentators often obscure information, falsify facts, and edit or fabricate images to generate suspicion, confusion, and fear in the audience (Zakem, Saunders and Antoun 2015). In 2016, Marko Mihkelson, the then Chairman of the Estonian Parliament's National Defence Committee, stated that it is worrying to realize the high level of sophistication of Russia's use of media, in TV but especially in social media and the Internet (Dougherty and Kaljurand 2015). The Russia's strategy when it comes to media is alarming,

because spreading disinformation on media platforms is relatively quick, cheap, and at the same time very effective (Zakem, Saunders and Antoun 2015). With regard to news information online and social media still play a secondary role in Estonia compared to TV. However, the number of social media users has increased in recent years and the tendency will grow in the future. Therefore, the role of social media in Russian communication strategy will probably increase even more and it will try to target more Russian-speaking young people through these channels. KaPo annual report of 2019 also noted that Russia's focus over the years has shifted onto younger generations (Estonian Security Police 2020).

3.3. Influence and information operations on political and economic levels

Protecting the interests of 'compatriots' has given an excuse for the Kremlin to meddle in other state's internal affairs (Tafuro 2014). Therefore, besides aforementioned measures, Russia also implements various strategic operations on political and economic levels in order to gain a greater influence on international arena and fulfil its own political goals (Schulze 2010). The employed strategies have included military pressure, economic sanctions, disinformation campaigns launched against the Estonian government, the pressure to the Estonian government to change its restrictive citizenship policy, and the use of international institutions as platforms for staging complaints against the Estonian government (Ibid). In this case, it has approached the UN, the EU, the OSCE and NATO to criticize Estonian policies. Russia has justified its activity by arguing that European minority rights norms must apply to its compatriots abroad (Kallas 2016).

Russia activism has also included conducting information operations among Russian-speaking minority which aggregates interethnic tensions in Estonian society in ways that work against integration process (Schulze 2010). The most sizable information operation resulted to be the largest incidence of violence in Estonia in the post-independence period (Ibid). The confrontation between Russia and Estonia arose in spring of 2007 in connection with the Estonian government's decision to remove the Bronze Soldier from the centre of Tallinn, a statue marking the grave of Red Army soldiers who died in World War II (Tikk, Kaska and Vihul 2010). The statue was a focal point for the identity of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia and commemoration ceremonies were held at the site every 9th May to celebrate

Russia's victory over Germany in World War II (Schulze 2010). The justification for the removal of the statue to the outskirts of the city was that it had been the site for interethnic confrontation between national extremists and veterans of Red Army in previous years (Tikk, Kaska and Vihul 2010). The statue's removal resulted in two days of rioting in downtown Tallinn in which hundreds were arrested and injured and one was killed (Ibid). The majority of the rioters were youth groups of ethnic Russian origin; however, ethnic Estonians did join in the rioting and looting (Schulze 2010).

The Bronze Soldier riot clearly had the dimension of inter-ethnic conflict. It is most likely that this incident would have taken place without Russia's impact on the process, but their involvement exacerbated the uprising even more (Schulze 2010). The Russian Federation utilized the situation to spread the Russian propaganda and disinformation in Russian-language media in order to mobilize even the greater number of rioters (McGuinness 2017). The propaganda mainly consisted of articles accusing Estonia of glorifying Nazism and rewriting history. Also, there was a false Russian news report claiming that the statue, and its nearby Soviet war graves were being destroyed which was not true and was intentional dissemination of false information (Ibid). Thus, it is a clear indication how Russia uses media as a soft power instrument in order to meddle in other state's internal affairs and mobilize its audience. The events that preceded the crisis, including conflicts between Estonians and Russians in previous years, created inter-ethnic tensions and the crisis has had a strong negative impact on inter-ethnic relations in Estonian society (Schulze 2010). Sociological research conducted after the riots had taken place shows the growing ethnic opposition between Estonians and Russians as well as a general alienation of Russian youth from Estonian society (Ehala 2009).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to test the hypothesis on whether or not Russia's soft power-framed strategic attitude towards the Republic of Estonia has been hindering Estonia-wide societal integration. In order to examine it, the first part of this research provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Estonian integration policies, analysing their short-comings and degree of their effectiveness, whenever the latter could be measured. Normative discourse analysis was employed to see the development of Estonia's integration strategies and programs to identify the linkages between different policies that were, presumably, focused on achieve a comprehensive level of cohesiveness in the country's multi-ethnic society. Statistical data gathered from the Estonian Integration monitoring reports as well as the data generated by Statistics Estonia clearly indicated that the implemented integration-focused strategies have not eliminated the gap between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority. The analysis showed that, over the years, the integration progress has been respectively slow as the society still has to deal with the issues associated with the lack of language skills, the barriers of closed communities and the inequalities in the labour market between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority; therefore, the issues of intra-societal ethnic tensions are still present in today's Estonia.

Besides the state-promoted implemented integration strategies, there is also another component to examine in regards of Estonia-wide societal integration. The fact that Russian-speaking minority makes up a third of the country's population leads to the situation where Russian diaspora becomes a potential (and very useful) resource of Russian influence, be it with internal or external vectors. Based on the content analysis, the paper proved that the Russian Federation has been implementing its distinct Estonia-focused policy, which has been employing a varied set of soft power instruments to maintain its influence in Estonia and attempt to mobilise Russian speakers into the conceptual framework of the so-called 'Russian World'. Apparently, Russia's most extensively used soft power-framed platforms are media outlets. The world's largest country's role projected through media towards Russian speakers who live in Estonia is more than significant, as the findings bought out the point that the Russian speakers tend to have a low confidence in the Estonian language-based media sources: around 89% of them follow, at least, one Russian language-based media channel daily.

This paper highlighted the importance of detecting and then analysing from which media channels the country's residents get most of their information on a daily basis, because media consumption is also related to the sense of belonging – the more strongly a person identifies himself with the state of residence, the more important Estonian language- and local Russian language media-based sources become. The Russian print and broadcast media are an external threat to Estonian society, as they are under state control, which means they are featured by the obvious lack of well-balanced information, rigorous fact-checking procedure in place, provisions for making a difference between opinions and facts. Overall, considering a number of consecutive KaPo-issued annual reports, it can be presumed that a Russia Federation-originated media's aim is, in general, to spread plenty of well-crafted disinformation in order to confuse its audience and present alternative perspectives which are more favourable toward Russian foreign policy strategy. Hence, it is an undermining factor for the Estonia-wide integration as the choice of media channels and information spaces is connected to an individual's desire to be integrated (not assimilated) into the country-wide society.

The existing gap between different ethnic groups remains very detectable due to the perspective of reliability and value of importance towards different sources of information. Arguably, the lack of social integration between Estonians and Russian-speaking minority can be attributed to a range of ineffective integration initiatives, but the ubiquitous 'presence' of the Russian Federation in media outlets among the Russian speakers has also been generating plenty of ruining element for the aforementioned integration-focused policies, hindering the process that is supposed to be solidifying Estonia's societal power.

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