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**THE INEFFECTIVENESS OF THE ESTONIAN
INTEGRATION PROGRAMS AND THE FUTURE
PERSPECTIVE OF ACHIEVING SOCIAL COHESION**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Tallinn 2017

I have written the Bachelor's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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LIST OF IMPORTANT TERMS

(New)Immigrant is a person who has immigrated to the State, including foreign-workers and their family members, asylum seekers and refugees, who have come to the Republic of Estonia after the re-independence in 1991 (Integratsiooni monitoring 2011).

Refugee is a foreigner, who has good reason to be scared of returning their home country or seeking for protection from their home country due to persecution, because of racial, political, cultural, religious, societal or any other reasons. In addition, there are no exclusive circumstances when given the refugee status (The Law of providing international protection to a foreigner RT I 2006, 2-3).

Asylum seeker is a foreigner who has applied for status of asylum seeker, in order to receive international protection. The status of an asylum seeker remains until the Police and Boarder Guard Board or the court of justice have made a decision (The Law of providing international protection to a foreigner RT I 2006, 2-3).

Application for asylum seeker status is an application applied by a foreigner, to declare themselves as a refugee or subject to additional protection or international protection (The Law of providing international protection to a foreigner RT I 2006, 2-3).

Citizenship is a legal relationship between the person and the state, which brings rights and responsibilities to both sides. Every Estonian citizen also has citizenship of the European Union (Ministry of the Interior – Citizenship).

Citizen of a Third Country is a foreigner, who has a citizenship of any other State than The European Union Member State, Member State of the European Economic Community (EEC) or The Swiss Confederation (The Law of providing international protection to a foreigner RT I 2006, 2-3).

Vao refugee center is an Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers, an agency administered by the AS Hoolekandeteenused, which is responsible of organizing the provision of necessary services and care to applicants during the asylum process (Accommodation center for Asylum seekers – Who we are 2017).

ABSTRACT

The aim of this Bachelor's thesis is to give a comprehensive overview of the development of Estonian integration policies and legal aspects of the process in order to evaluate and analyze the degree of their effectiveness through the prism social acceptance. The claim here is that the aforementioned policies' implementation has not been successful, resulting in different forms of societal and political discordances.

In the first part of this work, an overview of the historical aspects, which have been influencing the build-up of the Estonia's socio-ethnic composition, is presented, following with a prolegomenous discussion on the legal framework related to the country's integrational process. The paper then presents an analysis on defining the main current elements of the Estonian Republic's socio-ethnic composition. The empirical side of this material was solidified by the findings generated through conducting a number of face-to-face, semi-structural interviews with residents of the Vao Refugee Centre, located in Lääne-Virumaa County (Estonia).

The final part of the paper is featured by the observations-driven recommendation on further development of the Estonian integration programs.

Keywords: integration, refugees, asylum application, integration programs effectiveness, society, social cohesion, Vao, refugee center.

INTRODUCTION

Since its independence was regained in 1991, the Republic of Estonia has issued multiple laws and legal framework, as well as three large-scale integration programs to increase the levels of social cohesion within the country. However, resulting from the Soviet past, Estonia has quite large numbers of foreigners (according to the Statistics Estonia 197,638 as of year 2016, i.e. 15 %), when compared to the total population of the State, which is 1 317 800 as of January 2017 (Statistics Estonia 2017).

Moreover, the most recent migration crisis in wider Europe has also influenced Estonia with an inflow of refugees and asylum seekers, creating a situation, which the State was arguably not well-prepared to face and to show its capacity to integrate these people into the broader Estonian society. On the ethnical side, the largest minority among the inhabitants of Estonia are the Russian immigrants, followed by Ukrainian, Belarussian, Finnish, Swedish, Polish, others. Unfortunately, numerous research works as well as annual integration monitoring reports have shown that a significant share of these minorities have not been fully integrated into the socium of the Estonian Republic. Certainly, there is a question on whether it is resulting from the lack of motivation or linguistic skills, which are perceivable in their educational and professional lives, as well as the activity level within the social sphere. The situation is the most difficult for the ethnic Russian population, especially for the younger people, aged up to 24, and older people at the age of 45 and up. People who migrated to Estonia during the Soviet occupation period and their descendants represent the most challenging case-study for the State integration wise – as the first immigrants and their descendants have lived in Estonia in the time when the USSR-backed Russian language was dominant for a large part of their lives, they feel unmotivated or even unwilling to contribute to the Estonian cultural and linguistic spheres, while permanently living in Estonia without any or with very poor ability to communicate in the Estonian language.

Arguably, the biggest setback in the process of establishing a proper inter-ethnic dialogue within the Estonia-wide society occurred during the re-location of the Bronze soldier monument in 2007 – a World War II memorial, which traditionally was considered important by many ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in Estonia, was relocated from the central part of Tallinn to a more remote area in the uptown. Fueled by Russia-broadcasted and Russia-published media, this

resulted in the unprecedented diplomatic conflict between Estonia and Russia, and massive street riots, previously unseen in the Estonian capital's modern history. The event clearly emphasized a gap of social cohesion between many ethnic Russians, Russian citizens and Russian speakers (on the one side) and the Estonians, including some of those of non-Estonian ethnic decent, but who hold Estonian citizenship (on the other side). However, in a broader sense, the State impels this in an implicit way – permanent inhabitants of the country have the same rights as citizens – for example, the right to vote on local governmental elections, which give them an opportunity to influence local political decisions. Moreover, they feel distanced from the Estonian cultural sphere and media, since they have more connections with the Russia-originated and/or Estonia-originated Russian language media, as their lack of Estonian language skill is keeping them further away from fully following and contributing in the Estonian cultural sphere.

This paper claims that the integration-focused policies' implementation has not been successful in the Estonia's post-occupational period, resulting in different forms of societal and political discordances. In order to tackle this thesis, an overview of the historical aspects, which have been influencing the build-up of the Estonia's socio-ethnic composition, was completed. In a significant addition, a normative discourse analysis-bound observation of the legal framework related to the country's integrational process was also required. On the top, the empirical side of research was solidified by the findings generated through conducting few interviews at the Vao Refugee Centre, located in Lääne-Virumaa County (Estonia). The author conducted a number of face-to-face semi-structural interviews with residents of the Centre, the institution's manager and a social worker.

The results of this paper are academically intriguing, indicating on a need for a further research on the topic. In Estonia, a range of different governmental bodies and agencies, to whom concern are the issues regarding immigration and integration, show low signs of cooperation in order to improve the Estonian societal integration quality wise. Rather, they are working independently, in some ways even in an adversative mode towards one another. This situation is resulting in a deceleration in the naturalization process and higher unemployment rates among foreigners. Moreover, the research-gathered statistical data mostly show Estonia-wide situation, however, the actual status quo in regards of the topic of this paper differs from a region to a region in the country. For example, the level of linguistic skills in the Estonian language is higher in

Tallinn, Pärnu or Saaremaa, than it is in the Eastern Estonia – in Narva or Jõhvi, it is challengingly difficult to find a personality who can possess a decent Estonian language skills.

In its final segment, this research work is featured by the observations-driven recommendation on further development of the Estonian integration programs. More specifically, this paper insists for the State-run bodies and agencies to increase their cooperation in the process of solving numerous issues, associated with societal integration and immigration. Currently, there is a gap in effective communication between different ministries and other legal bodies in Estonia. Another recommendation could be on decreasing the share of Russian language-based schools in the country's educational system, whilst broadening the scope of motivational elements for non-Estonian speakers to learn the Estonian language and get involved into the Estonian cultural sphere.

1. BACKGROUND

Immigration to Europe at large has long historical background, but for the Western countries it started to increase substantially after the World War II, with many European countries having sizeable immigrant populations today. Similarly, for Estonia, immigration rates increased substantially in the time of the Soviet occupation, as the Soviet troops moved around across borders and this has resulted in a large amount of Russian people in the Republic of Estonia even today. Many of those soldiers or other Russian people engaged with the Soviet Union, who had to migrate to Estonia, stayed here and established their lives and families, who all are now living still in Estonia. But the question is whether they have or have not been fully integrated into the Estonian society and culture, whether they feel as a part of the Republic of Estonia and how much responsibility in this factor is resulted from the Estonian integration policies and legal framework. Second largest wave of immigration to Estonia started with the immigration crisis of the wider Europe, in 2015. This has also increased largely the number of refugee seekers and immigrants migrating to the Republic of Estonia. However, Estonia is somewhat not well prepared for the doubled numbers, as it is connected with the laws and regulations, as well as accommodation centers for the immigrants. There are three facilities in Estonia, reception and accommodation centers for the refugees – one in Viru county, one in Tartu and one in the municipality of Illuka, Estonia. The accommodation center in Vao, Viru county, is able to accommodate up to 70 people. However, currently the demand for a place is higher than the market, there are 64 asylum seekers and 18 refugees as of March 2017. (History. Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers 2017)

International migration is the result of the globalization of economics, politics and culture, therefore inevitable in today's global world (Garcia 1997, 214). Immigration can improve and enhance the society on one hand, but also may impose different threats or difficulties. Moreover, when the society is not *well prepared* in terms of legal acts, policies or functioning integration strategies. Different societal researches conducted in the republic of Estonia have showed somewhat rooted skepticism and rather negative attitude towards immigrants and asylum seekers entering Estonia, as their destination country. According to the Statistics of Estonia, the population has increased in the years 2015 and 2016, whereas in the years prior the population rates have been steadily negative. This is directly connected to immigration – more people immigrated to Estonia

than emigrated. However, immigration in this context is hard to determine, because the outcome is connected to changes of residence in the population register. In a situation, where migration rates and birth rates are constantly in the negative perspective and in one year, more people emigrate from the Republic of Estonia to live and work in another State, one shall take into account that immigration is of growing importance from the perspective of Estonia, regarding the issues around financing the State's social system and providing competition in the labor market. Moreover, there has been established a term of 'new-immigrant' within the sphere of national integration development plans, in order to increase the importance of the 'new-immigrants' as an essential part of the society and State today. The purpose is to help the new-immigrants to establish their position in the society, find work and live fully in our society. However, the integration policies are still on the conservative side and even if the State contributes to the integration of immigrants, then reality the discussion involves a very small amount of the whole of immigrants.

Emanating from numerous public opinion surveys conducted in the Republic of Estonia, there is a tendency of very slow changes in the mindset and opinion of citizens towards immigrants entering the State. These surveys display a time consuming process and necessary different approaches to the problematic topics, in order to improve the social disparities and create a wider public discussion on the topic. In parallel, if one addresses the refugee inflow, the Estonian strict policies on immigration have been targeted of criticism and frustration, specifically on the low numbers of refugee status and the ways how the asylum seekers have been done by during their application process and waiting time for the results of the application.

However, it is difficult to display accurate statistics on the numbers of new-immigrants in Estonia, regarding the fact, that EU citizens do not need visa or any other permission to enter the country, despite, the magnitude and implicit numbers in the statistics give and approximate estimation of the reality.

2. THE CREATION AND EXECUTION OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF ESTONIAN IMMIGRATION POLICIES

Each State has their sovereign right to create and develop their migration and integration policies. Each State has the right to decide to whom and on what reasons or conditions, they offer the right to enter and stay on the State's territory. With joining international organizations and signing international agreements, therefore taking obligations towards individuals, the State constrains their sovereign power to decide in the process of forming their immigration policies (Annus 2009).

According to the migration analysis conducted by the Estonian Migration Fund, the first post-war legal act, which was used to help regulate the immigration to Estonia, was the Immigration Law of the Republic of Estonia, established in the 1990, by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Estonia. Regarding this legal act, an exceptional fact is, that on the time of the establishment of the Law, Estonia was not an independent State (The Republic of Estonia regained its independence in 1991). This in fact decreased the effectiveness of the Law close to minimal, as the migration policies belonged to the central power of Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), not to the local administrative power. However, the immigration Law has been an important factor in the precedent of which were used in the later established legal acts, to determine the legal frames of foreign population and immigrants.

The Immigration Law defined its mission to be actively important in the process of forming and conservating of the Estonian immanent population and the regulation of people from SSR and other countries to enter The Republic of Estonia. The Immigration Law also established the immigration quota for Estonia, which was 0,1% of the State's population. As an inclement measure, it also provided the Supreme Soviet with the privilege to establish the right to suspend all immigration if necessary. In addition, the Immigration Law also defined many concepts and terminology of immigration – such as different types (different agendas) of immigration and meanings of being a refugee, immigrant or asylum seeker.

The Immigration Law also imposed the permit of residence as a legal basis for being a resident of the State. Within the Law, there were different types of the residence permit declared – temporary (up to 6 months), temporary deadline (up to 3 years) and permanent (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017). In addition, there was established a working permit, which needed to be claimed as an additional legal act for the temporary deadline residence permit.

Furthermore, the Immigration Law, established in 1 July 1990, did not have any ex post facto law, therefore it did not legally reach to most of the people and citizens of the SSR whom were living in The Republic of Estonia. Therefore, the only legal framework which gave them legal permission to reside in the country, was the address registration in the State registry (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017). In the spring of 1992, the Supreme Soviet annulled all obligations to registration of address in the State registry, without establishing new legal grounds for residing in the State. This legal gap remained until the establishment of the Foreigner Law (FL) in July 1993. The Foreigner Law regulated the arrival, stay, living and working, as well as the legal obligation grounds of the foreigners. In its preamble, the FL declared its necessity to give an internationally recognized status to the foreigners living in Estonia and determine their rights and obligations, while enacting State defense. Considering the situation, where there were approximately 600 000 foreigners in Estonia at the time (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017), without any legal documents or permission, even though for the time of establishing the Foreigner Law, the State had already had almost 2 years of independence from the SSR and was a subject of international law.

The Foreigner Law included all foreigners residing in Estonia, without taking into account the time of arrival or other circumstances. This enabled the possibility to adjust the internationally known standards to the foreigners residing in Estonia, in addition, it started the possibility of documenting and keeping records (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017). By doing this, it created the grounds where it was possible to eliminate the system of registration of the address and also enabled the possibility to remove the SSR passports from the circulation. Furthermore, the FL defined multiple important concepts related to migration. The law defines everyone, who does not have the status of a citizen of The Republic of Estonia, as a Foreigner. To be defined as an immanent inhabitant of Estonia, one has to live in the State's territory for at least 183 days per one year (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017). The Foreigner Law defines the obligations and entitlements of a Foreigner residing in Estonia. In addition, similarly to the Immigration Law, within the

Foreigner Law there is a quota set for immigration. At first, the quota figure was 0,1% for the population of Estonia, however, later it was diminished to 0,05% (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017) but with this change, there were some adjustments made for defining the people who do not undergo the Immigration quota (i.e. citizens of the European Union and other developed countries, immigrants who have come to Estonia for family-oriented reasons and others). The Foreigner Law defines the legal grounds for foreigners to reside in the territory of the Republic of Estonia, which usually is either a visa or residence permit. For a short-term stay, usually the legal document needed is visa, except in the cases where short-term stay in Estonia is visa-free for a foreigner (from a EU Member state for example). For a long-term stay, the legal binding necessary is the residence permit, which may be provided for up to 5 years depending on the circumstances. For foreigners who are immigrating to Estonia to work, start a business, study or for family-oriented reasons, is given the temporary deadline residence permit by a successful application process. One of the main tasks for the Foreigner Law is to protect the Republic of Estonia in order to guarantee balance in national population, in the labor market, while protecting the State against illegal immigration and human trafficking, assuring the State's security and the responsibilities to be fulfilled in front of other States. Therefore, the Foreigner Law has established conditions for one to receive a permit of residence, with immaculate detailing and persistence on fulfilling these conditions. In addition, there have been restrictions filed against individuals, who do not have the legal or moral right to receive a permit of residence nor a temporary deadline residence permit.

The establishment of the Foreigner Law received some repercussion from the Russian Federation, due to Estonia being able to leave the former address registration system of the population reckoning and creating grounds for a more internationally recognized system, as it is suitable for an independent State. The FL established legal grounds for Estonia to realistically track their immigration processes within the State, which eventually brought the Country international attention and culminated with the decision from the experts of the Council of Europe to declare the Foreigner Law as compatible with the valid European norms (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017).

Today, there are multiple sub-regulations subsidizing the Foreigner Law to assure the rights and obligations for everyone subject to the Law. According to the analysis of the Immigration Laws effective in Estonia, in 2006 took effect the Law which protects the foreigners accordingly

with international protection. This harmonized the following EU directives with the Foreigner Law:

- 2001/55/EC – minimum requirements for providing temporary protection for displaced people in a large-scale inflow to the State, as well as, defining methods of the Member States to balance their efforts when providing temporary protection for these people
- 2003/9/EC – defines minimum regulations for the intake of asylum seekers
- 2003/86/EC – about the family reunification rights
- 2004/83/EC – handles third party State citizens and non-citizens to be qualified as refugees or other subjects to international protection, sets the minimum requirements

Furthermore, there are five other laws subject to the Foreigner Law – The Law which regulates the deportation from the State and prohibition of entry (took effect in 1999), Law of the Citizenship (took effect in 1995), The Law of the European Union Citizen (took effect in 2004), The Law of Personal Identification Documents (took effect in 2000), The Law of the Registry of the Population (took effect in 2001) (Seadusandluse analüüs 2017). Additionally, as a Member State of the European Union, there are multiple legal acts established by the European Union, which the Republic of Estonia is subject to and obligated to follow, as well as the international law.

There are multiple instances in the Republic of Estonia, to whom concern are all topics related to immigration, migration, integration and refugees belong to. However, since the year 2009, with the dissolving of the Office of the Minister of Ethnic Affairs within government austerity program, since then the conductive institution developing integration policies is the Ministry of Culture, at the head with the Cultural Diversity Department. Within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, it is to “coordinate goals related to integration policy, creating conditions for the development of cultural life of ethnic minorities and their integration to Estonian society, supporting cultural ties with compatriots and kin ethnicities [e.g. other Fenno-Ugric ethnicities], making propositions to ensure the development of these fields, and preparing respective legislation”. Within the sphere of integration, the Ministry of Culture:

- Develops and organizes the drafting of the State’s integration programs;
- Monitors integration processes;

- Organizes citizenship ceremonies for naturalized citizens (by now, this has been subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior);
- Coordinates policies related to the cultural autonomy of national minorities and organizes the attestation and financing of different minority cultural associations (Statute of the Cultural Diversity Department: §5).

Moreover, in unison with the Ministry of Culture, there are four other ministries dealing with the different perspectives of migration and integration. Firstly, The *Ministry of the Interior* is responsible of the developing and implementing immigrational legal framework and policy. Importantly, they organize an introductory accustoming program called Welcome Program for new immigrants, to ease their adaptation, being responsible of citizenship, migration policy and the issuing of residence permits. Furthermore, the Ministry of Interior also finances the associations and instances dealing with migration and asylum seekers/applicants.

For linguistic matters, the *Ministry of Education and Research* is responsible of language policy and language study programs for non-native speakers. Moreover, the Ministry of Education monitors and is responsible of the transition process for Middle Schools with the study language of Russian to teach in Estonian language. This is largely concatenating from the Soviet times, where ever since there existed a separate school network, where the study language is Russian – there have been attempts to gradually decrease the Russian language proportion, but with the second wider integration program (Estonian Integration Strategy 2007-2013) the policy regarding linguistic matters has been made more strict and conservative. For equality within the Society of Estonia, the *Ministry of Social Affairs* has it in their obligations, to develop legal framework regarding non-discrimination and equal conditions and treatment for all. As a sub task, the Ministry of Social Affairs also addresses the coordination of work in the refugee housing centers of Estonia. From the international perspective and legal framework, the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* assures that all international conventions on human rights and visa policy are implemented accordingly.

Other ministries in the Estonian political sphere, that are involved in the fields one way or another are the *Ministry of Finance*, which coordinates the dividing of financial funding for the topic handled, and the *Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications*, which acts in harmonize with the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry along with the Office of The President in order to implement the ‘talent policy’, which has been established for highly-skilled (regarding labor perspective) immigrants. As the Estonian sifter for immigrants entering the Country is quite

strong in its strict policies and requirements, however, highly skilled immigrants are ‘more welcomed’ for their skills in the Estonian labor market, in order to increase variety and divergence of professional skills. Elaborate variety of skills increases the professional level of the Estonian labor market, creating more competition, whilst helping to improve the economy. Unfortunately, today, it is difficult for both the minorities and the employers of the labor market in the private sector, to establish a certain level of mutual understanding on the presumption of a competitive and high-skilled labor market.

3. INTEGRATION POLICIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA TODAY AND IN THE PAST – WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Integration is an immensely important topic on the national docket of Estonia. It has been estimated, that around 24% of inhabitants have an immigrant background (Asari 2009, 12). However, most of these have not immigrated to Estonia in and of itself, largely they are here because of the Soviet Union and its collapse, as well as the re-establishment of sovereign nation-states (Vihalemm 1997). This increases the inevitable importance of (successful) integration policies for Estonia and the need of higher-level integration success involving foreign people into the Estonian society, while emphasizing the value of political reasoning. Moreover, integration has a rather debatable definition within the Estonian society and the conceptual meaning of integrations has different meaning among the different clusters of the society. After the re-establishment of the Republic of Estonia, the importance and essence of the State's integration policies and legal-acts have shifted in their meaning and focus. Moreover, 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 (Nimmerfeldt, Rikmann and Hallik. 2014). In the more recent years, the goal for integration strategy policies and legalities have been starting to notice new immigrants here today and entering the State in the upcoming years. This enables integration policies to achieve higher levels of social cohesion, as different types of immigrants are given important attention and focus. Although Estonia has had a rather conservative and incommutable immigration and asylum policy (European Migration Network 2012: 6) in the course of time, small changes have still been made

The main focus of the Estonian integration policies are the so-called *Russophone immigrants* – people who migrated to Estonia from other Soviet Union States, and also their descendants, during the Soviet occupation prior to Estonia re-gaining its independence. Majority of these inhabitants consider Russian as their first language (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians, Tatars, Armenians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Polish and others) An additional project for 'new immigrants' is being developed, but this group is still rather small and is in part, inseparable from

the *Russophone* programs since some of the main countries of immigration are still Russia, Ukraine etc. In the recent years, the annual immigration rate has been around 4,000 people, but this number also includes return migrants (Kallas and Pohla 2014). As stated earlier, previous integration strategies and programs have mainly focused on linguistic and cultural improvements within the society – to promote learning of the Estonian language, the conservation of the different minority’s cultural heritage. However, numerous studies have shown that despite the linguistic and cultural efforts – vast majority of Russian-speaking inhabitants have still not been fully integrated to the Estonian society, whether being first or second generation native Russian inhabitants of Estonia. Poor integration affects all levels of the society – the labor market, cultural sphere, levels of interaction, politics etc. In addition, it creates further inconsistencies within the society and agitates intolerance between different cultures and nationalities. For example, quite many societal issues in Estonia have risen from the mutual misunderstandings between the Russian and Estonian inhabitants, regardless of age or any other characteristic differences. Moreover, the large amount of Russian-speaking inhabitants has created an atmosphere where the skill of Russian language is immensely important in the labor market and perhaps causes discouragement among Estonian-speaking (younger) population.

Moreover, the issues regarding the *Russophone* minority in the Estonian society is a highly debatable topic in the Estonian media, both in Russian and in Estonian canal. For example, the Integration Monitoring reports which are published twice in a year are usually causing heated debates on the issue. Unfortunately, due to still very scanty integration rates and little social cohesion between different minorities, it is very difficult to find unanimous decisions and future perspectives for integration progress in Estonia. It is a highly contradictional topic on both sides – some Estonians part from the conservative political movements, whom are violently patriotic perhaps, feel that integration is unnecessary – if one does not ‘fit’ into the Estonian society and feels unmotivated that they should leave. On the other hand, similarly there are Russian-speaking inhabitants who feel that the proposed issue of integration causes tendency to feel even more unmotivated to put effort into social interaction and cohesion between different cultures. In addition, the topic of interethnic and intercultural relations is considered as a political debate – used to channel voters between different political parties. The ethnic cleavage (in combination with geopolitical and historical memory) is one of the most prominent dividing lines in the Estonian party system (Ehin and Solvak 2012 ;Saarts 2011; Vogt and Lagerspetz 2013). The most

influential political party in the Estonian society for the ‘*Russophone*’ minority voters is the Centre Party, which falls into the category of a conservative, more leftist party. Moreover, The Social Democratic Party delivers consideration and interest towards the Russian-speaking minority. In the fall of 2016 started a political movement – the creation of a Russian Party called The Party of Estonian People. The goal of the creation of the party is to run for Parliament elections in 2019 (ERR 2017). The leaders of the movement and creators of the Party have said that this emphasizes social cohesion and equal rights for all Estonian citizens, however to the wider public it still represents Russian-oriented propaganda. Moreover, the support of five hundred (500) people is needed in order to register the Party (ERR 2017), the representatives believe that this is realistic and achievable.

An important breaking-point in post re-independence era for Estonia regarding integration issues was the re-location of the Bronze Soldier – a WWII memorial statue with high importance for the ‘*Russophone*’ minority. Historically, the monument was set in honor of the ‘liberators of Tallinn’ i.e. the Soviet troops that occupied Tallinn in 1944. The monument was moved from Tõnismägi, in the centre of Tallinn, to a military graveyard on the 26 April 2007, without any prior information or consultations. The re-location of the World War II monument resulted in riots and a sizeable decrease in attitudinal integration indicators (Integration Monitoring 2008). Ever since, each year on the time of the celebrational day for the Bronze Soldier, the government and legal instances have been paying higher levels of attention and been prepared for any possible anxiety or riot to occur.

So far, there have been 3 integration strategies in the post-Soviet Republic of Estonia: *Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007* and *Estonian Integration Strategy 2007-2013*. The third strategy, *The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020* is still in process and the result on its effectiveness can be evaluated after the program, the goal is to create a positive change within the society – decrease in the social cohesion and involving people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds is constantly becoming more important from the perspective of the societal well-being, economic reasoning, labor market and State’s political stability. From the State’s perspective, it is important to decrease inequality and divertissement, increase inter-communication and consolidate social ties which would result in a cohesive society.

As stated in *The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020* preamble, current integrational issues in Estonia are the following:

1. Less activity within the societal atmosphere, as a result of inadequate linguistic skills in Estonian
2. Differences in employment and citizen society participation
3. Hindered process of naturalization
4. Different values and stance within the society

(Ministry of Culture 2012).

3.1. Inadequate linguistic skills resulting in minor activity in the society

According to the statistics of Integration Monitoring 2011 (IM 2011), the Estonian language linguistic skill of foreigners is slowly, but steadily improving. Latest researches have shown, how in the past 10 years the Estonian language usage skills have improved among the foreigners, i.e. people whose native language is different from Estonian, in majority there have been passive, not active, linguistic skills acquired. However, the most dominant language within the minorities, used to interact with each other, is still the Russian language. Moreover, the lack of Estonian language skills and the wide usage of Russian language among the foreigners is creating a societal gap between different social groups. According to IM 2011 statistics, approximately only one-third of the Russian population in Estonia is consuming the Estonian media, however, they are still following the Russian media more intensely, which results in their different cultural sphere and information access, knowledge of actual topics in Estonia. Moreover, as it is known to the wider public, Russia strictly observes what they release and publish in the media, therefore, this may result in false presumptions on different topics and issues, actual in the Estonian, as well as international periphery.

3.2. Unemployment rates among foreigners

Unemployment rates are different widely through different linguistic skills. For example, a person who speaks fluently both in Estonian and in Russian, is highly valuable in the Estonian labor market, due to many job descriptions needing the skill of Russian language in addition to the Estonian language, especially in the tertiary sector. However, if one lacks Estonian language skills, but speaks fluent Russian, they are still facing difficulties to find a job in most regions. Very often,

informational 'blackout' resulting from poor linguistic skills also makes it difficult to find a job, simply as the foreigners do not find information on possible job offers. If the local labor market was more rich in the sense of cultural diversity and a variety of professional skills, this would also be beneficial for the State, regarding global economic competitiveness.

3.3. Educational system linguistic aspects

Estonia has a unified educational system, but there has been developed two different school networks, with different languages – Estonian and Russian. In parallel with Russian language high schools switching to the State's official language, step by step the Estonian language skills of schools and kindergartens and also the education given in Estonian has improved. In the recent years, there has been a steady raise of the percentage of Russian native foreigners studying in Estonian educational institutions, this has created a need for educationalists being able to work in multi-cultural environment, therefore professional trainings have been conducted for educationalists. Education has an immensely important role in the integration processes for foreigners, for both linguistic skills and an overall socializing tool for younger generations and families 'blending in' to the society. In order for the society's cohesive functioning and therefore foreigners being able to compete in the labor market, there is a need to continuously support the active usage of the Estonian language, with the purpose of helping the target audience to increase participation rate in the labor market. Moreover, it is necessary to expand the methods for linguistic education, which would help to affirm theoretically studied language skills and put them in to practice.

3.4. Hindered process of naturalization

Citizenship has great value as a requirement and also a result of the integration process. According to the statistics of IM 2011, the target group with the highest potential to increase the applicants of the Estonian citizenship are people of age up to 45 years. Older generation, from 45 and up are the most difficult societal group, due to their lack of linguistic skills in the Estonian language. In contrast, as it was gleaming from the IM 2011, another "sore sport" for the society and integration of foreigners are young people from ages 15 to 24, as their citizen identity is very low, even though linguistic skills of Estonian are rather good. This may be resulting of their parents and wider family range, whom are more distanced from the Estonian society and cultural sphere, rooting skepticism to their descendants. Prior to the implementation of the *The Strategy of*

Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020, with 2011 statistics of the registry of population, 5% of young people at the age of 15 to 24, had undefined citizenship and 3,5% had Russian citizenship. This target group receives special attention during this on-going integration strategy and the effectiveness of it will be perceivable in the year 2020, after the strategy has been implemented in its whole capacity, with new statistics from the registry of population.

The reasons behind people having difficulties when acquiring the Estonian citizenship have stayed remotely the same during the years after the re-independence – having difficulties improving their Estonian language skills and also lacking the motivation to do it, as they can reside in the country without having Estonian citizenship. They have the same rights as citizens – the right to vote in the local governmental elections, and by doing this they can actually influence local societal and political decisions. However, as revealed in the IM 2011, foreigners have low levels of trust towards the Estonian State institutions. Cultural background conditioned large trust related differences are perceivable in the topics related to the government, Parliament and the President, but remain less perceivable towards the police, the Army and the local governments. An important aspect of the success of an integration process or program is the development of common values and attitude within the society, moreover, the efficiency of citizen education and State identity development. However, the statistics and integration rates show different results in different regions of Estonia, for example in the East of Estonia (especially in East-Virumaa), the integration rates in every aspect are respectively lower than in West-Estonia or in North-Estonia. Social cohesion in these aspects is an important target to reach within *The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020*.

4. FOREIGNERS LIVING IN THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA – POPULATION ANALYSIS

According to the Statistics Estonia, as of 2016 statistics, 15 % of the Estonian population is regarded as foreigners, belonging to different minorities (Statistics Estonia 2017). These minorities are Russian, Ukrainian, Belarussian, Finnish, Tartar, Jewish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, German and Armenian (Population Register). According to the data collected by the Ministry of culture, there are representatives of around 190 nationalities living in Estonia. Out of the total population, 69% are Estonians by nationality, 25% are Russians, 2% Ukrainians, 1% Belarusians, 0.8% Finns and many other smaller groups. According to the 2011 census, Estonian citizens combine 85% of the total inhabitants of the State, however, one sixth of the inhabitants do not have the Estonian citizenship. (See Figure 1)

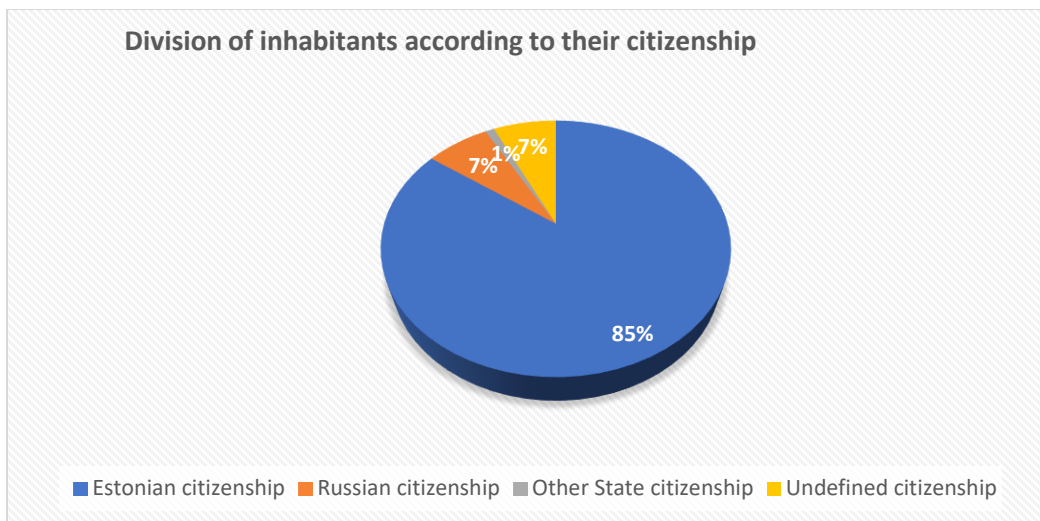


Figure 1. Division of inhabitants according to their citizenship

Source: 2011 Census; composed by the author.

Since 1990s, in the times where Estonia started to develop integration strategies and programs, the goal has been to increase the number of the Estonian citizens through the process of naturalization – non-citizens becoming Estonian citizens. Through this process, the number of inhabitants with undefined citizenship has largely decreased, but still remains to be a problematic aspect of successful integration of foreigners. Today, the different nationality composition is still largely in three categories – Estonians, Russians and other smaller minorities as stated above. See Figure 2.

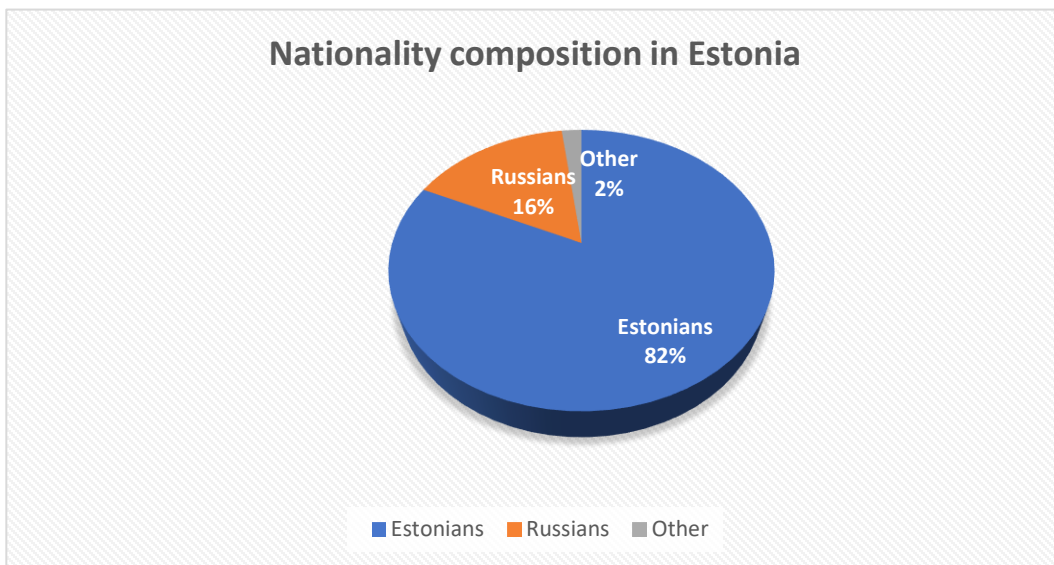


Figure 2. Nationality composition in Estonia

Source: 2011 Census, composed by the author.

During recent years, the naturalization process has largely slowed down, when comparing it to the beginning and mid of 2000's. According to the Integration Monitoring 2015, naturalization process has largely decreased and remained now, after the year 2009, on an annual intermediate level of 1450 people, receiving citizenship through the naturalization process, in a year. In the year 2004, received 2899 people the Estonian citizenship via naturalization, whereas in the year 2014 only 1608 people received Estonian citizenship as a result of the naturalization process, 500 of which were children under the age of 15, who received citizenship via simplified conditions, i.e.

naturalized with their parents. Different researches have been conducted in order to find out the reason to this diminishing number and largely the explanation is similar – people find it difficult to adapt into our society, whilst learning the Estonian language and passing the language tests required in the naturalization process. The annual Integration Monitoring’s have reflected that the Estonian citizenship policies have created a status quo, where people with higher skills to learn and adapt are in a superior stance, where people with lower skills and adaptation rates are more likely to not be successfully integrated. This reflects upon different levels of adaptation, as well as different strategies on norms and standards dominating in the Estonian society (Integration Monitoring 2008:5). People with higher educational levels, younger at age and better skills of coping in today’s society are more prone to adapt in our society. According to the Integration Monitoring 2015, the incapability to acquire linguistic skills of the Estonian language continue to be the major difficulty for foreigners, still being unable to pass the linguistic requirements for the naturalization process (See Figure 3).

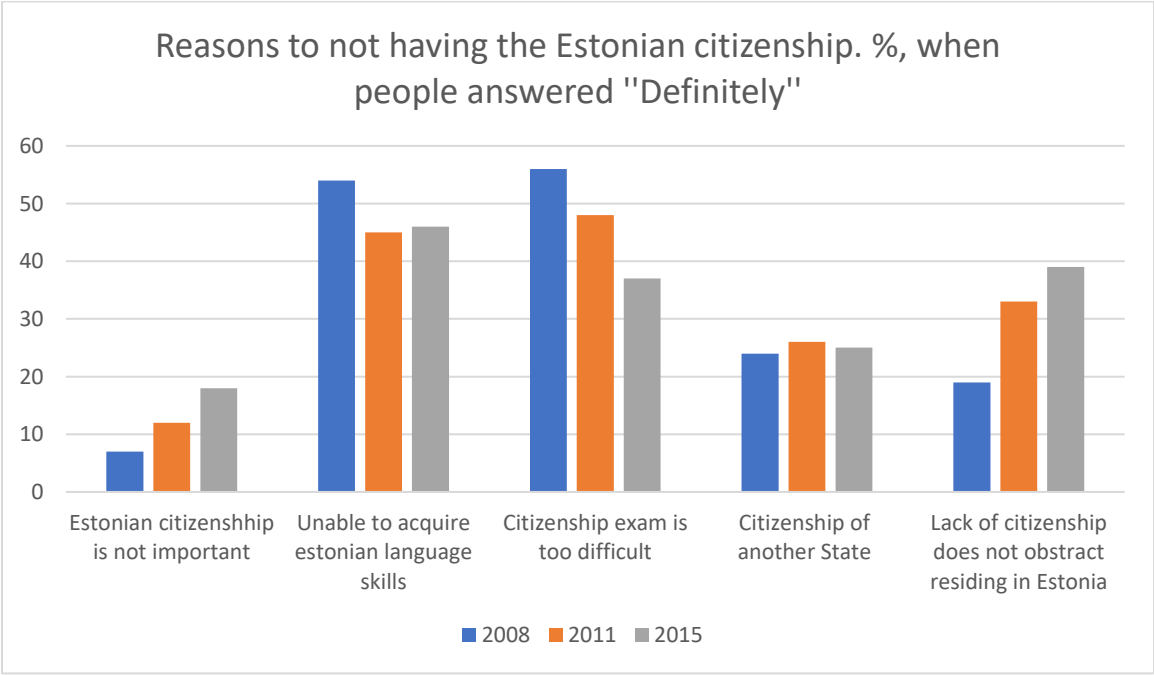


Figure 3. The reasons behind not having the Estonian citizenship, % (answered: 'Definitely')

Source: Integration monitoring 2008,2011,2015. Composed by the author.

The results displayed in the figure above, show how the foreigners perceive, that the reason behind not applying for the Estonian citizenship, is not connected with the citizenship exam and language test being too difficult to comprehend, but rather that having or not having an Estonian citizenship, does not influence their lives in the Republic of Estonia. In addition, over the years, the perception that the Estonian citizenship is not important, has risen more than a 100 %. Therefore, one may say, that the Estonian society is flexible enough, offering goods and services, both in the public and private sector, in foreign language (i.e. Russian) to the extent where the foreigners are unmotivated to acquire Estonian language linguistic skills, because simply, it is unnecessary. Moreover, since there are two educational school networks, both in Estonian and Russian based language, there is the possibility to “get by” without the Estonian linguistic skills starting from young age, but as an adult it is more difficult to acquire new language skills, without any prior necessity of it. This builds a gap for foreigners between Estonian language skills and required linguistic skills for the labor market at a very young age, to only slow down the integration rates in the future. Moreover, according to the Integration Monitoring 2015, there are different comprehensions between Estonians and foreigners, about the motives of having the Estonian citizenship – foreigners, irrespective of their nationality, see citizenship as an important tool for finding an identity connection with the Republic of Estonia; Estonians perceive it as an important tool for pragmatic motives, such as finding a job or improved self-development. Surprisingly, foreigners with Estonian citizenship see the political motivator tool, as an aspect of citizenship, to be less important in having an Estonian citizenship, than others.

Within the Integration Monitoring 2011, the Russophone minority was divided into various clusters or groups, accordingly to their level of integration, based on conducted research. An analysis of the respondent’s attitudes, linguistic skills and their level of integration was conducted and based on the results, the respondents were divided into five different clusters, as following:

1. Successfully integrated (level A) – respondent has good Estonian language skills and feels societally integrated. 21% of respondents;
2. Russian speaking Estonian patriots (level B) – poor skills of Estonian language, societally integrated to some extent, have strong citizen identity. 16% of respondents;
3. Critically minded Estonian speakers (level C) – adequate skills of Estonian language, societally integrated to some extent, weak citizen identity. 13 % of respondents;

4. Modestly integrated inhabitants (level D) – inadequate skills of Estonian language, societally integrated to some extent, weak citizen identity. 28% of the respondents;
5. Non-integrated inhabitants (level E) – inadequate skills of Estonian language, not societally integrated, non-existent Estonian citizen identity. 22% of respondents. (Integration Monitoring 2011a: 11).

Correspondently, the biggest integrational issues are connected with cluster groups D and E, however, the Integration Monitoring 2011 report also stated, that special attention must be granted for groups B and C as well, as being more integrated, but are in need of continuous support, in order to maintain a growingly positive outlook on the future perspectives (Integration Monitoring 2011a: 11). The support should be both direct and indirect – as the people in the problematic clusters have weak, or even non-existent levels of citizen identity, it is important to motivate them to be involved in the Estonian cultural sphere, as well as the societal perspectives. The State's role should be to act as a motivator, conducting different possibilities of studying the Estonian language or motivating people from the cluster to attend societal gatherings, in order to interact with other citizens and find new connections. In the case of successful interaction, the minorities feel more comfortable within the society and perhaps find new perspectives regarding educational choices or professional skills, and work. This would create a wider close circuit and would establish the grounds for social bonding between different societal groups.

5. CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS AT THE VISIT TO VAO REFUGEE CENTER- KEY INFORMANTS: RESIDENTS, CENTER MANAGER AND SOCIAL WORKER

In April 2017, the author visited The Refugee center in Vao, West-Viru County, Estonia. During the visitation, the author conducted interviews with 6 of the refugee center accommodates, as well as the manager of the center and a social worker of the region. The purpose of the interviews was to find out the ethnicity and citizenship of the accommodates, the reason why these people applied for asylum in the Republic of Estonia, how was their journey and whether they had any perceptions about the State of Estonia, or about the local people, prior to their arrival.

The visitation was organized for Monday, 10 April 2017. Vao village is a respectively small village located in the northeastern Estonia. According to Jana Selesneva, the manager of the refugee center, there is not much to do around there and seemed as a ‘safe’ place to establish the refugee center. The nearest city to Vao village is Rakvere, to which locals and the accommodates usually go to run errands or to buy groceries and other necessary every-day items. Firstly, when arriving to the center, the author had the chance to speak to the manager Jana Selesneva and the social worker Jaana Nester. The topics, that were handled, were about the accommodates everyday activities and tasks in the refugee center, the current status of the asylum application of the accommodates and topics including legalities. According to Jaana, the social worker of the refugee center, the locals have quite well ‘taken in’ the fact that the refugee center is there and that there are accommodates with very different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, in fact, she told that for the past year, the locals have started to show more interest and empathy towards the refugees, as in contrast in the year 2015 there were mysterious attempts to start fire for the refugee center. Jaana stated, that there has been a great change in the mindset of locals and that the refugees themselves feel vulnerable, but in fact seek for interaction with the locals. Some refugees of the accommodation center actually do seasonal work for the local farmers, to increase their chance to study the Estonian language, interact with the locals and in addition, get small extra pay for the work that needs to be done.

Unfortunately for research purposes, currently there are only forty (40) people in the refugee center with twelve (12) of them being children, whereas in the peak times of the years 2015 and 2016, the highest number of accommodates was one hundred and twenty-two. Out of these forty people, only six were agreed to be interviewed and did not hesitate to share their story and experiences, however three of them wished to stay anonymous and did not want to publish their names. Out of these six people, there were two Albanians, one Iranian, one Ukrainian and two Russians – everyone but one Russian Federation citizen had been staying in the center for less than six months and were still waiting for their positive or negative status for the asylum application (See Table 1). The first timeframe, after the asylum application is six months – within this time the applicant must receive a positive or negative reply and take further action if necessary, in the case of a negative answer, they have the right to further appeal in the district court. As for the informants, 5 of the people interviewed were of adult age, one Albanian boy, Daniel, was only 14 years of age and had stayed here for only five months, however he had enough Estonian language skills, that the interview was conducted in Estonian language.

Table 1.

Key informants – Vao refugee center accommodates – respondents for the interviews

Respondent	Name/Nationality	Status for the Asylum Application	Whether they want to stay in Estonia or move further?
1	Khuros/Iranian	Waiting	Stay
2	Andri /Albanian	1-st negative, waiting for second reply	Stay
3	Daniel/Albanian	Waiting	Stay
4	Anonymous/Russian	Waiting	Stay
5	Anonymous/Russian	Positive (8 months)	Stay
6	Anonymous/Ukranian	Waiting	Stay

However, one person from the Russian Federation had already been granted with the positive answer and was staying there for his eighth month, whilst looking for a job and a place to permanently live, however he said that he needs to take language courses in order to be competitive

in the labor market. Interestingly, although each and every one of these people had different reasons why they did not feel safe in their home country and seek shelter and protection from Estonia, they had common interest in re-building their lives in the Republic of Estonia and considering it as their destination country. This is in fact a surprising outcome, as the public opinion on the refugee topic in Estonia, is that these people do not wish to stay here, as the Estonian social system does not provide as much as natural benefits financial wise, as do many other northern countries like Finland, Sweden or Norway. However, throughout the interviews reflected the image of Estonia, as a well-developed country with clear societal norms and understandings, where the informants would like to live permanently. The informants had very different reasons to why they were forced to leave their home country – Russian citizens were politically harassed within their society and felt that there is no way out; the Albanians were largely influenced by the high levels of corruption in their State, where they could not live their lives freely and felt pressured by the government; the Ukrainian citizen had their home destroyed by the on-going war and did not feel safe there; the Iranian citizen was converted of religion – switching from the dominating religion in the State, Islam, to Christianity and the penalty for this action is execution, which makes his Home State unsafe for him to reside. The biggest concern for the informants was in the first place the adaptation to the Estonian society, however, after being here for a while and receiving support from the center and other instances, they do not feel as afraid or uncertain. They were hoping for their positive result for the asylum application, so that they could start re-building their lives here in The Republic of Estonia.

Moreover, the interviews were very eye-opening and gave a different perspective on the topic of Estonia and refugees, in essence they were intriguing as these people come from different cultures for different reasons, why they decided to apply for asylum in Estonia, but all have a common interest to stay here and hope for their positive answer for the application (only one had been granted with a positive answer at the time of the interviews). For the question “ What forced you to leave your home country and what did you have to do in order to leave?” the respondents answered in the following way:

Respondent	What forced you to leave your home country and what did you have to do in order to leave?
1	<p>“As Islam is the dominating religion of Iran, I felt disappointed and even disgusted of it in the light of recent events and decided to convert my religion – converted to Christianity. One day, I was in Germany for business and my brother called and said that people are looking for me, dissipating my home and threatening my parents. Why? Because the penalty for converting religion is execution – they want to kill me. I sat down in the airport and knew, that I cannot go home. I didn’t want to stay in Germany, I came to Estonia. Applied for asylum the first thing. I like Estonia, there is a lot of potential.”</p>
2	<p>“Albania is the most corrupted State; all governmental funding comes from drugs, prostitution and selling guns. I was a business man, I had a food store and one day this guy from local government came and told me that I have to start selling drugs. I said – no –. They tried to kill me, I was shot 5 times. I was afraid. I received first-aid from the hospital, ran from there, got on a plain to France and tried to think what to do. I asked around and found out that there are no Albanians in Estonia, I had no chance and I came here. It was cold, but I received help from the border guards the first second and I knew that I could be safe here. Applied for asylum and I am waiting for the positive answer now. I hope!”</p>
3	<p>“I do not like Albania, everything is bad. I am only 14 years old, but I can drive a car in Albania, if the police stops me, I just have to pay him money and I can drive along. In Estonia, I cannot drive a car, I have to be at least 18. I don’t know exactly, why my mother decided to leave, we have not talked about it, she thinks I am too young, but I think that she felt scared of the police, they can do everything without punishment. We came here through Russia and now I am going to Väike-Maarja school, I wanted to start from the 5th grade, so that I can learn Estonian language before I have to learn school things. I like Estonia, I want to live in Rakvere in the future. ‘</p>
4	<p>“ In Russia, you do not have privacy. Government is harassing people and you cannot really do anything without being watched. Also, my sister was killed, murdered, but the police did not try to solve the case. They forgot all about it and when I started to do research and find out why, they arrested me for odd reasons. I cannot stay there, I cannot trust anyone. I came through Narva, by foot.”</p>
5	<p>“ I left Russia, because I was politically influenced and harassed. I conducted a research for my school studies, about the local government funding’s and ever since I received anonymous threats and orders from obviously governmental instances. I came through the Estonian Southeastern Border and I applied for asylum right on the border. I have received a positive answer and I have now been here in Vao for eighth months. ‘</p>
6	<p>“The war destroyed my home in Novosvitlivka, Luhansk oblast in Ukraine. My mother and my wife were killed in the combat and I had nowhere to go. Estonia is neutral and I have family in here, I wish to stay.</p>

These stories are all intriguing in their different reasons for applying for asylum in Estonia, but share a genuine exaltation about Estonia and its possibilities for them, as vulnerable new-immigrants. A majority of the respondents did not have any perception of Estonia, prior to their arrival, for them it was rather an accidental choice, however the two Russians revealed that they knew, that it is probably easier for them to adapt and integrate into the Estonian society and among Estonia, Latvia and Finland, they purposely chose The Republic of Estonia. For the Russians, it is not much of a ‘‘culture shock’’ to reside in Estonia, rather a positive future perspective in a more Western country than their Home State, the Russian Federation, is. But as for the Albanians and the Iranian, the first ‘‘shock’’ as they said with humor, was the weather – cold, humid and cold, as they emphasized. Within the interview, there was a question on the interaction levels with the locals and the most interesting response received was from Andri, the Albanian man who had received an attendant from the local government, he noted that

[a]fter passing the border guards and applying for asylum and coming here to Vao, the faces of the local people seem confused, disappointed maybe. But when you stare into their eyes and see that there is not much to do here in Vao, you understand that it is actually interest and empathy in their eyes. But as I understand, Estonians are more introverts and afraid of the unknown, they are too afraid to take the first step. Once you interact with them, ask random questions, they open up to you and you can see the generosity and hurt in their eyes, as many Estonians have been in contact with the repression of the Soviet Union, they share your feelings on sadness, when you cannot live your life freely in your Home country. But of course, with the younger people, they are not familiar to the Soviet Union and its downside, with them you just have to start with a joke, if you can, to diminish the tension.

The interviews conducted in Vao, gave a different perspective of Estonia as a possibility for making a change nowadays society and world, in a way of helping other people. It displays that the people, who are really in need of shelter and help from another State, whom are refugees for genuine reasons, do not care for the overly beneficial social system to increase their income without any individual effort, on the opposite, they want to re-build their lives and contribute to the society. Each and every respondent claimed, that they wish to acquire Estonian language skills, some wanted to continue their studies and master a profession, so that they could live and work in

Estonia as citizens in a cohesive society, wishing to be fully integrated. In a way, this shows how the Estonian immigration policies have succeeded in their conservativeness and strict requirements, in this way there is a higher possibility to receive immigrants who want to contribute to our society in educational, professional and cultural matters. However, the visitation to the Vao refugee center also gave the initiative, that the local media should consider publishing more positive, or eye-opening stories, as the visitation to the Vao refugee center was, about the refugees and asylum seekers trying to find shelter from The Republic of Estonia. As media acts as an important tool in forming the public opinion and attitude towards societal, global and national levels. This would help to increase the levels of knowledge and awareness of the Estonian citizens, minimizing the chance of evolving false understanding and developing prejudices on the topics of immigration and refugees. Or in the case of already formed bias opinion on the topic, this would help to change the current status quo. Discussions about immigration and related topics on the State level, have been remotely modest, if not ineffable. The topic of immigration is, of course, important in the center of the State's immigration program development, since there are multiple integrational issues waiting to be resolved, but the handling of new-immigrants has only just recently risen in to the top.

6. A FUTURE PERSPECTIVE FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL COHESION AND HIGHER INTEGRATION RATES

As there is an integration program, *The Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 2020*, currently being implemented in The Republic of Estonia, the results will fully be perceivable only in the year 2020, when it is time to draw conclusions. However, based on former integration programs and their fairly slow progress on achieving social cohesion and equality within the Estonian society, there are multiple aspects in our legal framework of immigration and the integration processes to be more efficiently developed. In the whole process of developing and implementing policies, conducting societal researches as in Integration Monitoring has an immense value for keeping track of any societal changes towards societal cohesion and respect among different cultures.

Firstly, based on a research, conducted within the Integration Monitoring 2011, the Estonian Russian minorities were divided into five categories, distinguished on the inhabitant's linguistic skills, levels of integration and citizen identity. The research defined two groups – levels D and E, which had both inadequate language skills of Estonian and weak or non-existent Estonian citizen identity, these two groups represent the somewhat failure of the previous Estonian integration programs and visualize the necessity of developing further in order to minimize, or eliminate, the size of these minority groups in the future. Moreover, as the issue with poor levels of integration and inadequate linguistic skills is very different in their magnitude between different State regions, it shows that there is a gap between the instances working on the topic and that the program should be distributed more widely. For example, the fact that there exists a parallel Russian language school network next to the Estonian language school network, shows how the State has in itself impelled the current situation to be as it is. Having the Russian language school network makes it easier for inhabitants to reside in the State without actually being ‘‘forced’’ to study the Estonian language. However, in recent years, there have been reforms conducted in order to decrease the level of providing education in Russian language. Moreover, since higher education in Estonia is also provided in Russian language and in addition, English, the skill of Estonian

language seems unimportant for the people in the clusters D and E, taking into account that they are already in a vulnerable position regarding social and citizen identity. The State's role should be as a motivator for the Russian minority and other poorly integrated minority groups – to study the Estonian language, because good levels of command in Estonian language offer the inhabitants with the possibility to be active in the society, follow the Estonian media and the political landscape, but most importantly, help them to be competitive in the labor market, which gives an opportunity to increase their income and this is also, at the same time, beneficial to the State's economy. Well integrated citizens contribute more back to the State and the relationship between the citizen and the State becomes more interactive, increasing the levels of social cohesion and communion. Contribution to the society and the State also helps for the development of the State, for example if highly skilled (educated) foreigners would continuously develop themselves in Estonia, while working in their field, it would also be beneficial for multiple aspects of the State's higher and faster development.

Secondly, another possible reason to the failure of the former integration programs and the issue with poor levels of integration within the different minorities, is the fact that the Ministries responsible for the different aspects of immigration and integration, as well as organizations dealing with the topic, do very little cooperative work. In addition, in the recent years, the non-governmental organizations have strongly criticized the acts of the State's attitude towards the development of the refugee policies and integrational programs. The responsibilities of each legal or political instance has been defined, but the poor level of cooperation keeps the institutions from making adjudicative conclusions of the outcome. For example, since the time of the re-independence of The Republic of Estonia, there have been conducted multiple changes within the laws regulating immigration, but the basic concept of the laws has stayed the same for the past 26 years. However, the asylum policies are strongly correlating with international agreements and people's rights, which means that the State has certain obligations on how to act in this field and this may largely differentiate from the local migration policies.

CONCLUSION

This Bachelor's Thesis provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Estonian integration policies and legal aspects, analyzing their short-comings and degree of their effectiveness through societal perspective. The analysis is based on analytical research of the legal framework and the development of the Estonian integration strategies and programs. In the course of the research, an empirical study in the form of face-to-face, semi-structural interviews, had been conducted in the Vao refugee center, located in Lääne-Virumaa County (Estonia), with conducting interviews with the refugees, the center's manager and a local social worker. The main aim of the thesis is to highlight the shortcomings of the Estonian immigration policies and integration programs, resulting from too little cooperation between ministries responsible of the development of the strategies, legal instances and the non-governmental organizations, all involved in this field. Moreover, in the final part of the paper, recommendations for further development of the Estonian integration programs, based on the research and observation, were provided.

The research draws conclusions based on the analysis of the legal framework of immigration and whether it has displayed success in the integration programs conducted within the society in the past decade. However, the results show, that the progress is respectively slow and involves different set-backs in the process – presenting unexpected changes in the bi-annual Integration Monitoring reports. It is perceivable, that the Estonian society is not well-prepared for the integration on new-immigrants, as the problematic societal group – the Russian minority – remains to be very actual issue for integration purposes. Despite, the interviews conducted in Vao refugee center with most recent asylum seekers, currently waiting for their status, was an eye-opening aspect of the research, presenting unexpected outcome.

Based on the main results, one may argue that as the Republic of Estonia is a respectively young State in the global context, re-gaining its independence only very recently, in 1991, its integration policies and immigration laws are in accordance. More precisely, the Estonian integration and immigration policies are still taking “baby-steps” in the further future development wise, but have the potential to improve and show higher levels of social cohesion. Resulting from its historical background of repression and violation of rights, the Estonians in the average are rather conservative and perhaps even constrained towards immigrants. The fact that

the Russian foreigners whom have inhabited in Estonia for decades, without considerable integration into the Estonian society, and their descendants with similar perspectives, has created a gap between the Estonian society's Russian and Estonian (citizens). Moreover, the situation differs largely between different regions of Estonia – for example, it is very difficult to succeed in any aspect of life in Narva (East-Estonia), without the language skill of Russian, whereas it is easy to do it without the Estonian language skill. The Integration Monitoring report of 2011 divided the Russian citizens into five clusters, regarding their integrational level, Estonian language skill and citizen identity levels, which presented 2 clusters as most problematic in the sense of social cohesion. These are people, who have very poor or inadequate Estonian language skills and very low or non-existent sense of cultural identity. This is partially connected to the State's role, acting as a motivator for the foreigners. Currently, in The Republic of Estonia it is possible to live one's every-day life without the linguistic skill of Estonian language, as from a very young age. The State has developed a parallel school system with Russian language as the basis, decreasing the necessity of the Estonian language usage for the Russian inhabitants. Moreover, there is the Estonian Russian media active and publishing widely in Estonia, in addition to the Russian Federation media, which the Russophone minority follows intensively, increasing their distance from the Estonian cultural sphere.. Media acts as an important tool for increasing public awareness and influencing the public opinion, however, Integration Monitoring reports have shown that the prevailing majority of the Russian inhabitants consume the Russian media more often, than the Estonian. Unfortunately, this in fact only distances the societal gap between these social groups even more, having the Russian foreigners distanced from the Estonian cultural space.

Immigration has become a topic of growing importance in the global context, whereas the immigration crisis peaked in the years 2015 and 2016, but still remains inevitable in the means of sustainability and future development in the world. The wider immigration crisis also affected Estonia in its increase of asylum applicants and refugees, constraining Estonian immigration policies, accommodation facilities and lack of experience regarding high numbers, on the subject. Within the empirical study of the research a visitation to Vao refugee center was conducted, with the purpose of acquiring close interaction with the key informants. The results of the interviews were surprising – as opposed to public opinion, about refugees only seeing Estonia as a 'gate' to the further developed countries, all of the asylum applicants interviewed shared a common hope of eventually becoming the citizens of The Republic of Estonia, re-building their lives in the State.

This shows, in contrast, the effectiveness of the Republic of Estonia's strict and conservative integration policies, as it is creating a real division of people, whom want to benefit from the destination State's social system and the people, whom really are in desperate need of shelter and see Estonia as a promising developed Country and society to reside in. Marginal was one example – where a asylum seeker had acquired appropriate skills in order for the interview to be conducted in Estonian language, after only a 5-month period of residing in Estonia. This shows, that the new-immigrants are respectively more influential for the Estonian integration programs, as the Russophone minority. This opens an opportunity for further research to be conducted of integrational processes and the achievement of social cohesion, based on the new-immigrants and asylum seekers, entering Estonia after the year 2015.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1. Empirical research – questionnaire

Interview questionnaire

The purpose of the interview is to find out the nationality of the refugee center accommodants, their socio-cultural background and the journey through which they arrived to Estonia. In addition, their expectations (if any) prior to arrival to Estonia and the reality, as well as, their plans for the future. Furthermore, it would be interesting to know whether Estonia was their destination country, or rather an coincidental stop on their journey.

1. What is your nationality, where are you from?
2. For how long have you already stayed here in Vao center?
3. What forced you to leave your home country and what did you have to do in order to leave?
4. How did you end up in Estonia, what was the journey?
5. Prior to your arrival to Estonia, did you have any expectations on Estonia as a State or its society? Has the reality been different in any way?
6. What are your feelings and contentment here in Estonia and staying here in the Vao refugee center?
7. What has been the most difficult in this process?
8. If, and to what extent, have you been in contact with the local people and community, has it rather been a positive experience or do you feel insecure when interacting with the locals?
9. What is your outlook on the future, would you like to build your life here in Estonia?
10. If you would like to move along from Estonia then to where, and why?

In addition, would you allow me to use your name and nationality data within writing the Bachelor's Thesis or would you rather stay anonymous?

Thank you very much for your cooperation and wish you all the best for the future!

Appendix 2.

Table 2.

Integration Monitoring 2015. The trustworthiness of different media channels as perceived from the Estonian and foreigner perspective. %. (Compiled by the author)

Foreigners – The Russophone minority

To what extent do you trust the information on different media channels about the Ukrainian crisis?			
Media channel	Trust totally	Hesitate sometimes/Do not trust at all	Do not follow the media
Russian TV channels	51	28	13
PBK	45	30	14
Russian news portals	32	22	35
Radio 4	28	23	40
Estonian russian TV shows	25	34	31
Estonian news portals	11	19	58
Estonian TV channels	14	29	51
Vikerradio	6	14	69

Table 3.

Integration Monitoring 2015. The trustworthy of different media channels as perceived of the estonians and foreigners perspective. %. (Compiled by the author)

Estonians

To what extent do you trust the information on different media channels about the Ukranian crisis?			
Media channel	Trust totally	Hesitate sometimes/ Do not trust at all	Do not follow the media
Russian TV channels	6	22	66
PBK	4	17	71
Russian news portals	4	17	73
Radio 4	7	6	81
Estonian russian TV shows	7	11	76
Estonian news portals	59	10	25
Estonian TV channels	81	10	5
Vikerradio	50	6	37