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The Russian minority issue in Estonia:
host state policies and the attitudes of the population

Abstract

The article analyses the recent developments of the relationship between Russian minority in Estonia and its host state. It gives a theoretical background on the minority issue in the triangle of “kin-state/ minority/ host-state”. In Estonia, the principle of Restitution governed the emergence of the Estonian policies. By the end of the 1990s the elites realized that the course towards the integration of the non-Estonian minority should be taken. The mood in the society can be traced from the mostly exclusive citizenship and language policies towards more inclusive course on integration. The author states that after the events of 2014, the attitudes towards the Russian minority were mixed, with some signs of radicalization, but overall there were attempts to include the minority more in the life of the country.

Keywords: *Russian minority, minorities, Estonia, Russia*

In this article I will analyze the complex relationship between the Russian minority of Estonia and its host state - Estonia. This analysis will take into account the interconnection in the triangle of „kin-state – minority - host-state“, but concentrate on the host state policies and the attitudes of both minority and majority. It is clear that the state of Estonia does not exist in a vacuum, and its policies towards minorities are being largely influenced by the third factor, that of the „kin-state“ of Russia. But for the purpose of the analysis, I will not concentrate on the kin-state in this paper.

First of all, let me give some theoretical background on the issue of minority and diaspora.

The concept of national minority is traditionally understood in the European context as referring to ethnic groups living in a state, that are linked to a nation that has constituted its own state, so-called "kin-state". The term was also used for the Jewish people and more recently for other groups like the Roma and a variety of autochthonous regional ethnic communities. In a wider context, one can define national minorities in opposition with immigrant ethnic groups as historical communities occupying a given territory or homeland and sharing a distinct language and culture.¹

It must be mentioned that there is no accepted legal way to referring to a minority. It is often referred to as a „diaspora“. The terms “national minority” and “diaspora” are very close and often used interchangeably. At the same time, the term diaspora suggests a more close connection to the country of origin, the idea of common exodus country is very important. William Safran defines what a diaspora is proposing a set of criteria. These criteria include dispersal from a specific original „center“ to two or more „peripheral“ regions, retention of collective memories of the original homeland, partial alienation and insulation from the host society, a lingering desire to return to the

¹ Tanase, Ioana. 2003 Allocataire de recherche, Ecole doctorale de droit comparé, Université de Paris I Sorbonne
Seminar Series "Citizenship and National Minorities in Europe", January 2003
St. Antony's College, University of Oxford <http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/esc/esc-lectures/Tanase.htm>

homeland, a commitment to the maintenance or restoration of the „safety and prosperity“ of that homeland, and the deprivation of a communal consciousness and solidarity from that relationship.² Some scholars though argue that the catastrophic origins and forced migration are the main features of a diaspora. It is so-called classical „victim“ definition of a diaspora - „the idea of dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland, to two or more foreign destinations.“ Among other characteristics of a diaspora, it has been suggested that the existence of integration myth is important, which expresses itself in a strong pull to the homeland or striving for returning there. The idea of integration myth is the characteristic not only of classical, but also new diasporas. It suggest the idea of a „home“, ethnic homeland of the members of a diaspora, where they can return.³

Robin Cohen classifies diasporas into different types - victim (Jewish, African, Armenian), labour (indentured Indians), imperial (British), trade (Lebanese, Chinese), and deterritorialized (Caribbean peoples, Sindhis, Parsis). From the point of interest of this article, Russian diasporas are classified as imperial, as the colonial powers other than Britain fall into this category. Other synonymous expressions are “settler” or “colonial” diasporas.⁴

The specificity of the Russian diaspora in what Moscow calls “near-abroad” is that it is a divided ethnic group, dispersed in the territory of new independent states bordered with Russia. In some Russian theoretical work, it is called “an imperial diaspora that is a result of political catastrophe - the collapse of a big political-territorial formations, resulting in the fact that those migrating to imperial periphery find themselves in the new social, cultural and other living conditions”. It is also noted in the literature that the decrease of the living

² Varadarajan, Latha. 2010. *The Domestic Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations*. Oxford University Press. p. 8

³ Zatulin, K.F., Grozin, A.V., Dokuchaeva, A.V., Jegorov, V.G., Lobanov, M.A., Mihailov, V.P., Polnikova, O.V, Shibaeva, E.I., Boltovsky, S.O. 2011. *Rossiyskaya diaspora kak faktor ukrepeleniya natsionalnyh interesov Rossiji na postsovetskom prostranstve.*, Moscow. p.10. Available at: <http://materik.ru/upload/iblock/b87/b8715b81e87dc3f2996b59b5baf0627f.pdf>

⁴ Cohen, R. 2008. *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*. Second Edition. Routledge, London, p. 18

standard of these diasporas lead them to be closer to so-called proletariat diasporas.⁵

In the framework of international relations, Rogers Brubaker distinguishes so-called trio or “triangular configuration between national minorities, the newly nationalizing states in which they live, and the external national “homelands” to which they belong, or can be construed as belonging, by ethnocultural affinity, though not by legal citizenship. This relationship has been engendered, or given new urgency, by the new (or newly salient) mismatch between cultural and political boundaries. The massive nationalization of political space in Eastern Europe has left tens of millions of people outside “their own” national territory at the same time that it has brought the national, or putatively national, quality of both persons and territories into high relief.⁶

Russian minority in Estonia, according to the theoretical framework just described, can be classified as the settler community or imperial minority or a diaspora. It is important to remember the circumstances of its emergence first of all.

The information portal Estonia.eu briefly describes the background of the issue as such: „The Republic of Estonia, established in 1918, lost its independence when it was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. After the independence of the Republic of Estonia was restored in 1991 on the basis of legal continuity of statehood, Estonia was able to reinstate the right of its legitimate citizens.

In the course of the Soviet occupation, the demographic situation in Estonia had been dramatically altered as a result of the Soviet Union's sovietization policies. During the tumultuous years of 1940–1949, about 60 000 Estonians, out of the population of about 1.1 million, were either killed, deported to Siberia and other hinterlands of the Soviet Union, or imprisoned in Stalin's

⁵ Zatulin, K.F. 2011. *Op.cit.* p.69.

⁶ Brubaker, Rogers. 2005. „The 'Diaspora' Diaspora.“ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28: 1-19., p. 108

concentration camps, while at least an equal number fled to the West. At the same time a large number of Soviet citizens, including military staff from various parts of the Soviet Union, were sent to Estonia as a result of Soviet forced migration policies. In 1934, there were 992 500 ethnic Estonians living in Estonia, making up 88.1% of the country's population. By 1989, this number had dwindled to 963 281 or 61.5%, less than the pre-war level. At the same time, the number of non-ethnic Estonians living in Estonia, of which the majority were ethnic Russians, grew almost fivefold from 134 000 in 1934 to 602 000 by 1989. From 1990 to 1998, 113 000 people left Estonia, the majority of whom were born abroad.

According to population censuses, Estonian citizens constituted 97.7% of the population in 1922 and 98.8% in 1934. After the restoration of Estonia's independence, persons who held Estonian citizenship before 16 June 1940 and their descendants were automatically considered to be Estonian citizens. Thus, roughly two-thirds of the 1.5 million Estonian inhabitants restored Estonian citizenship in 1992. All other Estonian residents could obtain Estonian citizenship through the naturalization process. At the same time, all Estonian residents who had been Soviet citizens had the right to register themselves as citizens of Russia, the USSR's successor state, or to choose any other citizenship. As of 1 February 2015, 84.3% of Estonia's population held Estonian citizenship, 9.4% were citizens of other countries, and 6.3% were of undetermined citizenship.“

Thus, the main principle on which the restored Estonian republic was based was that of restitution – it is crucial to understand that in 1991 not a new state was born, but the old one was restored after the occupation. As a consequence, the political elite and ethnic Estonians in Estonia saw the Russian-speaking population first and foremost as a problem and a legacy of Soviet era with some voices even for the resettlement policies to Russia. The main aim of the policies though was not directed strictly against the minority,

but to the protection of the endangered by the long russification Estonian national identity in terms of language and culture. Mainly the instruments of exclusive citizenship policy and language policies were used in the 1990s.

The current Citizenship law considers several possibilities to be eligible for the Estonian citizenship. The main principle is that the citizenship is either acquired by birth or obtained by naturalization process. The automatic procedure is foreseen for all the children born to the parents, of whom at least one is an Estonian citizen.

The naturalization procedure is described in the law as this: the person applying for naturalization must be at least 15 years of age; must have resided in Estonia at least for five years on the basis of the permanent residence permit; must master the Estonian language according to the requirements provided in the Citizenship law (para 8); must know the Estonian Constitution and the Citizenship law according to the requirements set in the law (para 9); must own a legal permanent income; be loyal to the Estonian state, and give an oath: „Applying for Estonian citizenship, I promise to be loyal to the Estonian constitutional order“.⁷

One of the problems of the original law was that of the minors who being born in Estonia, did not receive citizenship and had to go through naturalization procedure. This was a violation of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (art. 24(3)) and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (art. 7(1)), both of which Estonia had ratified. These provisions proclaim the right of the child to acquire a nationality. This controversy triggered a heated discussion. Some politicians and lawmakers saw the danger of compromising the governing principle of nationality acquisition (*ius sanguinis*) by adding the *ius soli* principle to it.⁸

⁷ 1995. Eesti kodakondsuse seadus [Citizenship Law of Estonia], Riigi Teataja. [in Estonian] Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/KodS>

⁸ Järve, Priit. 2009. Estonian citizenship: Between Ethnic preferences and democratic obligations. In Bauböck, Rainer, Bernhard Perchinig and Wiebke Sievers. eds. 2009. *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe*. Amsterdam University Press., p.49

This situation was changed in the amendment to the law of the 21st of January 2015. According to the new rules, the child born in Estonia before the 1st of January, 2016, whose parents are not citizens of any other state (so-called aliens) will obtain Estonian citizenship automatically, unless his or her parents or a single parent would apply for the refusal of the citizenship before the 1st of January, 2017.⁹

The policy started in 1995 by the law, led to the situation where a large pool of people with „undefined citizenship“ was formed. It applied to the group of people, those migrants from former Soviet republics and their children, who did not pursue any country's citizenship after the collapse of the USSR. All former USSR citizens though qualified for the citizenship of Russian Federation. Persons of undefined citizenship are eligible for an alien's passport, commonly known as a „grey passport“, which allows for visa-free travel within Schengen treaty countries, as well as in Russian Federation.

The status of the aliens is regulated in Estonia by the Law on Foreigners, the latest edition of which came into force in 2010. It regulates among other things the conditions for issuing a long-term resident permit in case of permanent residence in Estonia, it also contains so-called „integration requirement“ (para 234), which stipulates that the person applying for the permanent resident permit must master the Estonian language on the level B1, the requirement is not valid for the persons under 15 and over 65 years of age.¹⁰

The citizenship policy of Estonia has been a subject to heated debate and different attitudes. It has been one of the main issues to divide the communities inside Estonia. The approaches of Estonians and Russian-speakers have been almost diametrically opposed to each other. The approach characteristic of Estonians draws heavily on history and underlines that the changes in the ethnic composition during the Soviet years, when the share of Estonians fell

⁹ 2015. Kodakondsuse seaduse ja riigilõivuseaduse muutmise seadus.[The Law on changing the Law of Citizenship and the Law on State Tax] Riigi Teataja.[in Estonian] Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/103022015001>

¹⁰ 2010. Välismaalaste seadus. [The Law on Foreigners] Riigiteataja, [in Estonian]. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/VMS>

from 90 per cent to almost 60 per cent between 1940 and 1989, were dangerous for the survival of the Estonian nation. Therefore, refusal to grant nationality to Soviet-era settlers by registration was regarded by many Estonians as an adequate reaction to these changes in the population. The Estonian side also argues that in comparison with the citizenship laws of other countries the Estonian requirements for nationality are quite liberal by current international standards.

The opposite approach, taken by the Russian-speaking minorities and by several international actors, maintains that history and nation should not matter as much as the Estonians think they do. Rather, one should start with the present multi-ethnic situation and think about individuals. Stateless people are considered a security risk, since their interests are not represented at the state level. The proponents of this view think that Estonia should grant citizenship more generously, simplify the conditions of naturalization and especially language requirements.¹¹

The domestic debate on the issue of nationality used to be conservative. The elite deemed that the initial non-inclusion of Soviet-era settlers into the citizenry served the interests of the survival of the Estonian ethnic nation and its culture.¹²

As time goes by, one can see the changes in the thinking of Estonian politicians. The debate was activated again, as the amendment on the automatic citizenship for minors was being discussed in the Parliament in 2014. At that time, the representative of the IRL (Union of Pro Patria and Respublica, a conservative party) Jaak Aviksoo stated that the amendment will „change the basic principle of *ius sanguinis* and allows for the obtaining of the Estonian citizenship without the expressing one's will by birth. IRL does not approve of the automatic citizenship to everyone, as the citizenship cannot be pressed on anyone. To receive the citizenship, there must be the will of a person or

¹¹ Järve 2009. *Op.cit.*, p.54

¹² *Ibid.*, p.55

his/her parents, as it used to be.”¹³ Aaviksoo also stated that this amendment does not serve Estonia’s interests. The amendment was passed on the 21st of January, 2015 with the majority of 61 versus 12, with IRL voting against.

At the same time, the opposition party Keskerakond (the Centre party), known for its pro-Russian sympathies, has voiced concerns in connection with citizenship policy being too strict. The interesting part is that they built up their argument using the security discourse. The article by Jaanus Karilaid, the president of the board of the Centrist Party in Läänemaa region, is headlined „Citizenship policy – the threat to Estonian security“. The article describes the results of the integration and argues that the number of Russian citizens is growing steadily because of too strict rules for naturalization into Estonian citizenship. „The present citizenship policy is building an internal enemy to us. Let us lose this threat“, is the last sentence of this article.¹⁴ Similar view was held by ex-minister of national affairs, SDE (Social-Democratic party) member Urve Palo, „The state could actually apply the procedure (of giving the citizenship in the simplified way – A.T.) to all so-called holders of „grey passports“, who lived in Estonia before the 26th of February, 1992 and their children. Surely, they must themselves express the wish to become an Estonian citizen“.¹⁵ Palo suggests that the state should do everything in order to prevent our own people from falling into „grey zone“, where they have no citizenship at all. In the long run, it will damage Estonian national interests as well as the interests of domestic and foreign policy, according to Palo. We can see that by 2014, the debate among the elite became more liberal with more options being acceptable.

¹³ Kukk, Kaido. 2012. „Aaviksoo: kodakondsuspoliitika aluspõhimõtetest loobumine pole Eesti huvides.“ [Aaviksoo: Renunciation of the principles of the Citizenship policy is not in Estonian interests“] [in Estonian]. Available at: <http://www.riigikogu.ee/index.php?id=181675>

¹⁴ Karilaid, Jaanus. 2014. „Jaanus Karilaid: Kodakondsuspoliitika – oht Eesti julgeolekule“ [Jaanus Karilaid: The Citizenship Policy – the Threat to Security of Estonia“] . 5.03.2014, Lääne Elu. [in Estonian]. Available at: <http://online.le.ee/2014/03/05/jaanus-karilaid-irl-oht-eesti-julgeolekule/>

¹⁵ Palo, Urve. 2014. „Urve Palo: võtkem halli passi omanikud Eesti kodanikeks“, [Urve Palo: Let us take the Owners of the Grey Passport as Estonian Citizens“] 20.02.2014, SDE home page. [in Estonian] Available at: <http://www.sotsdem.ee/urve-palo-votkem-halli-passi-omanikud-eesti-kodanikeks/>

Very closely connected to the citizenship issue, but nevertheless a separate policy, is that of the language. The current language policies in Estonia have their roots in the past, in the legacy of the Soviet era and in the legislation of the early phase of the independence process. The language policy discourse is also characterized by its connection to the security – the former president of Estonia Arnold Rüütel once said that Estonians have „a continuous feeling of danger“.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that the trend in protecting the language of titular nation against Russification started already in Soviet times, and the first Language Law was passed on 18 January 1989 by the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. The law described Estonian as the sole official language, but the main principle was that of bilingualism. The law of 1989 should be seen as a remedy to language problems at that time. The main problem had been a catastrophic growth of Russian monolingualism, reasons being demographic changes, low status of Estonian in several functional and regional areas, and non-integrative education.¹⁷

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Estonia stipulates that the official language of Estonia is Estonian. The state guarantees everyone's right to receive instruction in Estonian (para 37(4)), to address state agencies, local governments and their officials in Estonian, and to receive responses in Estonian (para 51(1)). The official language of state agencies and local governments is Estonian (para 52(1)).¹⁸ The Constitution also guarantees individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups the right to education in their native language; to establish cultural and educational institutions, and to communicate and conduct affairs using a minority language in local government institutions and localities where a majority of the residents of the

¹⁶ Kemppainen, Raija. 2000 „Language Policy in Estonia: A Review.“ *Deseret Language and Linguistics Society*. Vol. 26, pp. 51-58

¹⁷ Rannut, Mart. 2004. *Language Policy in Estonia*. *Noves SL. Revista de Sociolingüística*, Spring-summer. Available at: <http://www6.gencat.net/llengcat/noves/hm04primavera-estiu/docs/rannut.pdf>

¹⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Estonia. Available at: <http://www.president.ee/en/republic-of-estonia/the-constitution/>

region speak that language as a native tongue. These provision are detailed in the National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act of 1993.¹⁹

Further on, the legal environment for the language is closely connected to the citizenship policy. Under the citizenship law, one is expected to have Estonian language proficiency at A2 level. Before the citizenship law, the Law on the Estonian Language Requirements for Applicants for Citizenship was adopted in 1993.

The general framework for the language policy of the later times is the Language Law of 2011. The law stipulates among its objectives the development, preservation and protection of the Estonian language. The law also regards the Estonian language as the state language of Estonia.²⁰

Quite an important and well known fact is that by the same law, the status of minority languages is also stipulated in para 5. Para 9 of the law states that the minority language can be used in the municipality where at least half of the permanent residents are the representatives of the minority – in this case, the residents have the right to turn to the municipality in their minority language and receive a feed-back in the minority language. The law also stipulates the general language requirements for the public servants and limited companies, while more detailed category requirements are to be defined by separate by-laws.

Two principles appear to dominate the state's current approach to language issues. These are the principles of Restoration and Integration. These principles are clearly visible in a number of major policy documents published in recent years.

The above described policies, citizenship and language policy, show the tendencies of the first years after restitution to focus on the protection and maintenance of the Estonian ethnic identity. By 2000, it became clear that the majority of Soviet migrants are not planning to leave Estonia. The social

¹⁹ 1993. National Minorities Cultural Autonomy Act. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/Riigikogu/act/519112013004/consolide>
2011. Keeleseadus. [The Language Law]. Riigiteataja. [in Estonian]. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/118032011001>

scientists claimed that the existing model was so-called „one country- two societies“, which could be dangerous socially as well as in terms of security. This is how, the first Integration programme was born under the direction of the minister of ethnic affairs. It led to the toning down of ethnocentric debate in the society.²¹

The state programme of 2000-2007 was coming to an end, and the first conceptual discussions on the new programme took place, as the so-called Bronze soldier crisis broke out. The ethnic relationships seemed to be improving gradually, and the April protests came to many as a surprise. The government's decision to relocate the monument of the Soviet era known as „Bronze Soldier“ from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery brought out to light the deep differences between Estonians' and non-Estonians' communities. Some researchers claimed though that there was also a positive influence of the Bronze soldier crisis – that is the fact that the integration policy was brought in the focus of public debate in Estonia. Lauristin and Vihalemm said that „after the April crisis, Estonian public understood that the success of the integration policy is important not only to the Russian minority or European experts, but is a key issue for the whole development of Estonia, for Estonians' as well as non-Estonians' future.“²²

That far, I looked briefly at the relationship between the Estonian state and the Russian minority in Estonia, or „host-state“ vs „minority“ relationship. It can briefly be characterized by the dichotomy of two sets of policies – exclusive policies (e.g. citizenship policy) and inclusive policies (integration).

Now I would like to analyze the attitudes of the minority itself, the identities of its members. In Estonia, the so-called Integration Monitorings have been conducted regularly since 2000, and there have been five of them (2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011)

²¹ Kasemets and Kurvits 2005, cited in Kallas, Kristina and Ingi Mihkelsoo, Kaarin Plaan. 2012. Lõimuv Eesti 2000-2011. Integratsiooni monitooringute analüüs [The Analysis of Integration Monitoring]. [in Estonian]. Insitute of Baltic Studies, p. 8

²² Lauristin and Vihalemm 2008, cited in Kallas, Kristina and Ingi Mihkelsoo, Kaarin Plaan. 2012. Lõimuv Eesti 2000-2011. Integratsiooni monitooringute analüüs. [The Analysis of Integration Monitorings]. [in Estonian]. Insitute of Baltic Studies, p. 11

The problems of identity have been researched in 2008 and 2011 Monitorings, to a smaller extent in 2005 as well. From the point of view of this article's research question, it is interesting to note that the so-called „state identity“ has been also studied in the Monitorings. This notion emerged in the middle of the 2000s, and the first analysis was done in 2008 Monitoring. The state identity of non-Estonians is a collective „we“-feeling, characterized by positive importance of belonging to the Estonian state, sharing of Estonian state's values and symbols. To measure those factors a special index EVRI was constructed, consisting of three components: assessments of statements: 1) „Nowhere in the world do I feel as at home as in Estonia“; 2) „I feel pride seeing the Estonian flag“; 3) the answer to the question on the objectives of Estonian ethnic policy „How important is it, in your opinion, to continue to pursue in the ethnic policy the acquisition of the Estonian language by the Russian-speaking population?“. To measure the EVRI index, the scale of seven points (0-6) was used, the higher the number, the stronger the state identity. In the group of non-Estonians with weak or rather weak state identity, the percentage of Estonian citizens was below half (41%), as in the group with strong state identity, the majority (76%) were Estonian citizens. The correlation also existed in the identity versus the command of the Estonian language.

In 2011, the EVRI index was not measured, but the state identity was analyzed on the basis of the feeling of belonging. The question was asked: „The Constitution says that the power in the Estonian state belongs to people. Do you consider yourself belonging to the Estonian people in the meaning of the Constitution?“. The results showed that 13% of Estonian citizens who are ethnic Estonians do not consider themselves as belonging to the people, the other ethnic groups' citizens has the number 30% as not belonging (65% feels the belonging, 5% cannot say). It is remarkable that more than a half of the persons with unidentified citizenship (52%) and two fifths of Russian citizens (41%) feel connection to Estonian people. 44% of the persons with unidentified citizenship and 54% of Russian citizens do not feel the connection.

The Integration Monitoring 2015 measured again the index EVRI, but this time, it was compiled in a different way, which makes the comparison with the year 2008 not plausible. The EVRI was measured as the collective “we”-feeling of Estonian Russians, which characterize the importance of belonging to the Estonian nation, the positive assessment of the rights and obligations connected to it, and the adoption of the Estonian state symbols as one’s own. The researchers constructed the index, comprised of the three components – the assessments of the statements “If you think of yourself as of representative of one’s ethnic group and the representative of the Estonian nation, to which group do you feel yourself as belonging to?”, “the Estonian state protects my interests and offers public goods” and “I fell proud seeing the Estonian flag”. According to the researchers, the tests confirmed that exactly these components are the best suitable to measure the bondage of the Estonian Russians to the Estonian state and its symbols both consciously and emotionally.²³

Every response was given up to three points depending on the strength of the agreement (0-3 points), and the EVRI was measured on the scale 3 to 9 points, the more points one’s index is, the stronger is the state identity of the respondent. Further on the results were divided into the segments accordingly into the weak state identity (3-4 points), medium (5-6 points), and strong (7-9 points) state identity. The non-Estonians divided into the three groups like this: 17% had the weak identity, 47 % - medium, and 36% - strong state identity. There was some correlation depending on the citizenship (Estonian citizens tend to have stronger state identity) and the command of the Estonian language (the ones who claim their level of Estonian is good, are more likely to have a stronger state identity).²⁴

The research base also allowed to see correlations between EVRI and the threat perception. Only 6% of the respondent with the weak state identity

²³ Eesti ühiskonna lõimumismonitooring 2015. [The Integration Monitoring of Estonian society].[in Estonian]. Available at: www.kul.ee/et/eesti-uhiskonna-loimumismonitooring-2015 , p.25

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.26

considered Russia as threatening Estonian independence or the local inter-ethnic relations. About one fifth (19-20%) of the respondents with the strong state identity see Russia as threatening.²⁵

Now that I analyzed the identity of the Russian minority, I would like to summarize shortly the current attitudes of Estonian establishment towards the minority issue. I chose the year 2014 for analysis, extending it to the end of March 2015, as it was when the parliamentary elections took place in Estonia. Due to the events in Ukraine in 2014, the issue of security of Estonia and the role of its Russian minority became quite prominent on the political agenda. The reaction of Estonian authorities was to do more lobby work in the direction of NATO allies, and it resulted in more NATO deployments on the Estonian soil. The debate inside Estonia also started on whether the NATO allies can be trusted and how much Estonians should rely on their own defense capabilities.

The Parliamentary elections took place in Estonia on the 1st of March, 2015, and ended with a decisive victory of the Reform Party, which used to rule also before the elections. They received 30 seats in a 101 seats Parliament (Riigikogu) with the Centre Party coming second with 27 seats.

The phenomenon of the Centre Party is interesting from the point of view of this article, as it is not ethnically-based party either by its ideology or by the ethnicity of its leaders, but most of its voters are non-Estonians. In 2015 elections the Centre Party did well gaining one more seat than during last elections, but they hoped for more. As mentioned above, the permanent residents of Estonia has the right to vote in the municipal elections, which leads to the situation where the mayor of Tallinn is basically always from the Centrist Party, as the population of Tallinn is about 50% made up from Russian-speakers. In the national elections though, other political forces usually refuse to form a coalition with the Centre Party, and they remain in the opposition. There have been cases though when the Centre Party was part of the government after interim reshufflement (e.g. in 1995, the 32d Government,

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.29

and in 2003, the 36th Government). Other political forces sometimes give as a reason for not cooperating with the Centre Party the fact that the Centre Party has a cooperation agreement with the Russian party „Edinaya Rossiya“ („United Russia“.)

In 2015 elections, the two new parties passed into the Parliament, Vabaerakond (Free Party) and EKRE (Estonian Conservative Peoples' Party). EKRE is the first Party in the Parliament during restoration of independence, which holds far right views. They gained seven seats. EKRE's policies are directed towards supporting young Estonian families, reducing emigration of Estonians abroad, fighting immigration from outside of the EU, and they are also quite Eurosceptic. The success of this party in the parliamentary elections may show the tendency of radicalization among Estonian community. The party has been active in its stand against immigration from the Middle East and Africa, especially in the light of the EU Commission plans to allocate the immigrants to all the EU members according to calculated quotas. Though this radicalization is quite in line with overall tendencies in Europe, in Estonia it is always coloured by anti-Russian policies. The programme of EKRE states that the citizens must be active against both external and internal enemy to back the security of the nation and the state and the survival of the independent Estonian Republic and its development as a nation-state. It also states as its objectives the creation of the environment needed for the survival of the Estonian language and culture.

In the media, the topic of Estonian identity was quite popular during the described period. It manifested itself often through the notion of “Estonianness” (“*eestlus*”), which was understood differently by the opinion leaders. It was often raised in connection with emigration of ethnic Estonians abroad and the necessity to keep their language and culture. On the other hand, it was opposed to Russia and Russianness, the feeling of danger increased during events like the Bronze night, the Georgian war of 2008, and the occupation of the Crimea in 2014. There was clearly a divide, there were those who were back in older stereotypes of ethnic identity, judging that having the citizenship

of Estonia is not necessarily the same as being Estonian.²⁶ But there were also voices for the so-called „new Estonianness“, particularly by the pro-Estonian Russian minority politicians, which would base the identity on the citizenship and European values.²⁷The Centre party went even further in its statements, saying that there should be identity on the basis of a territory, „common home“. As one can see, the debate was quite colourful, and not orthodox any longer, the tendency towards trying to think how to include the minority in the society. It showed vibrant democratic attitude towards the issue of minority and towards Estonian own identity.

To conclude, I would like to say that the latest events in the region, and the elections of the Parliament of Estonia in 2015, had mixed effects on the situation of the Russian minority and the attitudes of the Estonian majority. On one hand, it is the first time after the restoration of independence when the extreme right party got into the Estonian Parliament, and it can be interpreted as a sign of radicalization. On the other hand, the support for the extreme right policies remains marginal among the population. In general, the events of 2014 - beginning of 2015 did not lead to further exclusion of the Russian minority from the Estonian society. On the contrary, the political discourse is very much concentrated now on the opportunities to include the minority and create a common „we“ feeling, notwithstanding the Russian policies coming from abroad, which I did not deal with in this article.

²⁶ Sutrop, Urmas. 2014. „Kes on eestlane on ainult Eesti riigi kodanik?“ [Is Estonian only an Estonian Citizen?]. *Eesti Päevaleht*, [in Estonian], December, 21

²⁷ Metlev, Sergei and Jevgeni Kristafovits. 2015. „Me oleme kõik eestlased“ [„We are all Estonians“]. *Postimees*, [in Estonian], January, 16

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