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# Integration Policy and Outcomes for the Russian-Speaking Minority in Estonia

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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# Integration Policy and Outcomes for the Russian-Speaking Minority in Estonia

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## **ABSTRACT**

Estonia's integration policy vis-à-vis its Russian-speaking residents was developed and reformed several times since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. While comparative data from the international community certainly indicates that Estonia has progressed in the realm of social, political and societal integration, the 'success' for each individual policy is now increasingly measured—and contested—within broader considerations of geopolitical security and minority rights. The authors converge interview-based data compiled from various representatives and scholars of nongovernmental organizations, government agencies, and think tanks with secondary research on the topic of Russian minority integration in Estonia. The report will seek to address the ways in which various representatives in both mainstream and bottom-up organizations score and assess Estonia's development in citizenship, education, and language policy domains for the Russian-speaking minority.

## **KEYWORDS**

ethnicity, citizenship policy, education policy, language policy, geopolitics

## **INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

Estonia, alongside its Baltic neighbours, has been described as one of Europe's most geopolitically significant countries. Their relatively successful transition into Western European institutions, the region's proximity to Russia, and most pressing and debated, the socioeconomic integration of the Baltic's large Russian-speaking minorities<sup>1</sup> has gathered international debate and discourse (Duina & Miani, 2015, p. 535). The ways in which integration policy is implemented, reformed, and reviewed has informed both international and national discussions, often with debates centering domestic policies and foreign affairs. The discourses surrounding integration and minority policies are especially important as they are the center of contestation between the majority and minority populations (Kymlicka, 1996, p. 2). While Estonia has progressed rapidly to include more favorable policies towards its minorities, there is still debate regarding those with undetermined citizenship, the accessibility of the naturalization process, the socioeconomic position of minorities, the mechanisms of Russian state influence, and the protection of the titular language status. For instance, the potential for Russia to utilize the minority as diplomatic leverage has become a key debate surrounding integration and the larger stability of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). At the same time, concern over language planning and language acquisition policy, alongside citizenship policies that have constructed the undetermined citizenship identity<sup>2</sup> have been a continuing concern for the Russian-speaking minorities and the organizations that advocate on their behalf.

For the purposes of conducting primary research, the authors met with various representatives known to work with Russian speakers or who have knowledge on the contemporary issues related to integration related policy outputs. These include scholars within academic institutions, Estonian government institutional branches, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>3</sup> The qualitative interviews focused on how these organizations deal with aspects of integration, citizenship, and education; including perspectives on integration resources and security research. This report will therefore converge topics related to integration and security to produce a more nuanced analysis of what integration looks like for the Russian-speaking minority. Similarly, this report will also touch upon the broader security concerns affecting Estonia's stability and how integration plays an important role in defense planning. It is noted, however, that the authors did not conduct personal interviews with individual subjects with undetermined citizenship because

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1 This paper makes specific reference to the Russian-speaking minority, comprised of former Soviet citizens who settled in the Baltic territories between 1945 and 1991. This predominately includes ethnic Russians but also other groups including Ukrainians, Belarusians, etc. While the various ethnic groups continue to have distinct histories and relations to the Estonian majority, they represented a larger group that historically has had closer linguistic and cultural connections to Russia (Agarin, 2010, p. 10).

2 In Estonia, the term 'a person with undetermined citizenship' references "a person who has been left without previous citizenship due to the disintegration of their state of citizenship". This is different than the term 'stateless,' which refers to "a person who doesn't have a citizenship of any state and who does not have a possibility to receive it by their free will". Since Russian-speaking minorities are able to receive Russian citizenship, they are not termed stateless. While this definition is not codified in law - under national law 'alien' is still used to define anyone who is not an Estonian citizen' (UNHCR, 2016, p. 19-20).

3 Reference Author's Notes on pages 118-119.

the vocalization of traumatic memories can produce further traumatization.<sup>4</sup> Instead, the authors refer to secondary data when basing their analysis on the firsthand opinions of those with undetermined citizenship. The authors also use opinions and information provided in primary interviews that were conducted with representatives of organizations that serve these populations as advocates and service providers.

The authors position various perspectives on the success of policy outcomes according to theme so that the reader is able to identify the ways in which policies yield different, but equally substantive, understandings of integration. The report is split into two overlapping sections based on larger themes: Geopolitics and Integration. In the first section, the authors reveal nuance in opinion formation regarding integration as related to current geopolitics and security vis-à-vis the Russian geopolitical “threat.” In the second section, the authors reveal nuance in opinion formation regarding the effects of citizenship, language, and education policy, emphasizing a minority-centric perspective. While the various perspectives formulate opinions that prioritize either security or minority rights, neither purposely discounts or disregards the opinion of the other. Additionally, this paper is meant to demonstrate the points of convergence and divergence of opinion and not to deem one as more crucial or necessary.

#### **A BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF INTEGRATION POLICY IN ESTONIA**

Understanding the context in which integration policy has developed since Estonia’s independence necessitates breakdown of recent history. Particularly important are the demographic legacies that the Soviet occupation of Estonia between 1940 and 1991 has left. While there were small numbers of Russian-speaking minorities present in Estonia prior to Soviet occupation, by the late 1980s they constituted 30.3 percent of the total population (Agarin, 2012, p. 8). This huge influx of Russian speakers, through Soviet re-distribution and migration policies, worried those who believed that the Estonian language was endangered (Cilevics, 2007, p. 168). This fear towards Russian imposition was considerable at the time as Russian was compulsory in schools and maintained the status of the *lingua franca* across the Soviet Union. While the Estonian language was offered in public schooling alongside Russian and, in fact, was financed to some extent by the Soviet government, a strict *diglossia* formed where bilingualism became far from equal (Cilevics, 2007, p. 167).<sup>5</sup>

Upon independence in 1991, the titular language, with the goal of inscribing its superiority, formulated specific language and citizenship policies that explicitly addressed

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4 In UNHCR studies from 2016 only 15 out of 150 persons of undetermined citizenship agreed to discuss their social, economic and political situation, out of general apprehension towards participation (“Mapping Estonia,” p. 36).

5 Mediums that were Russian dominated included areas of state, transportation, the military, most large-scale industries, and the security sector (Cilevics, 2007, p. 167). Only the Russian language was permitted for official use in Estonia (Cilevics, 2007, p. 167). This meant that while the titular population was bilingual in both their language and Russian, Russian-speakers were by large monolingual.

the territory's languages and the access of citizenship for the non-titular population.<sup>6</sup> This was also followed by the prioritization of the *jus sanguinis* citizenship principle, which essentially restricted citizenship from those who did not permanently live in the country prior to Soviet occupation. This was a way of reaffirming the importance of Estonian nation-building through the codifying of monolingualism and strict citizenship policy (Cilevics, 2007, p. 170). Essentially language and citizenship policies were now used to inscribe who belonged to the nation and who was 'alien.' Ideological fears propelled these policies to undo Estonia's history of uncertainty under the Soviet Union and to build a nation-state prioritizing the advancement of the ethnonational population.

Showing clear desires of joining the European Union (EU) from the onset of their independence, Estonia soon began to adapt new revisions to their citizenship and language policy in order to conform to accession requirements and to stabilize geopolitical affairs. Opening up to Europe, meant reopening history, security, and the market to Europeanizing institutions that were once isolated from the country (Galbreath, 2007, p. 234). For Europe and the West, moderating Estonia through: the recommendations made by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE), Europarty political stances, EU accession requirements, and NATO security goals became crucial as geopolitical security was now seen as a continental investment (Galbreath, 2007, p. 243; Bennich-Bjorkmana & Johansson, 2012, p. 595). As Estonia's citizenship and language policies matured, the process of naturalization became more progressive so as to allow for Russian speakers to integrate into Estonian society. This was sustained vis-à-vis continued pressures and recommendations from external bodies. More recently as European tensions with Russia have increased, critics have questioned whether the Russian-speaking minorities have successfully integrated in Estonian society or if cleavages exist that might pose a security risk for the wider region.

The authors' interviews with various representatives in Estonia bring into light the debates surrounding integration policy outcomes. The opinions of each respective interviewee fall in line with broader perspectives that identify integration policies as being positive or negative. The following section will outline the dominant geopolitical perspectives and how integration often interjects larger discussions surrounding the security of Estonia. The subsequent section will touch upon the Russian-speaking population in more detail, outlining how the integration debate affects the everyday lives of Russian speakers.

## **1.0 GEOPOLITICS**

### **1.1 Hybrid Warfare**

The geopolitical perspective centralizes security concerns of the Estonian government, regional states, and transnational bodies and the methods they use in deterring potential threats against Estonia's sovereignty. A particularly salient facet of security studies in Estonia's contemporary discourse is the subject of hybrid threats. Hybrid threats, similar to 'hybrid warfare', describes a developing method of conflict that is produced as an extension

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6 With the Perestroika movement throughout the 1980s, the Soviet Union allowed for more regional autonomy in the Baltics. During this time, the parliament of Estonia began adopting declarations that assigned the titular language at the state level and in state planning (Cilevics, 2007, p. 169). This was followed by the 1989 Estonian SSR Language Law (Cilevics, 2007, p. 169).

of conventional deterrence and insurgent campaigns, with the purpose of achieving political and military motives (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 176; Kalinina, 2016, p. 148). Specifically, hybrid threats are used to undermine the opponent's territorial legitimacy and to cause internal disruption and distrust (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 176). Hybrid threats, which rely on soft power, are at the core of Baltic geopolitical discourses as a defining framework for the Kremlin's actions towards its Western borders.

Estonia, having spent two percent of its GDP in 2016 on its military (The World Bank, 2016) and currently hosting NATO troop deployments at its eastern front, must maintain military safeguards against the possibility of conventional warfare. However, the scope of interstate conflict has developed to include more nuanced mediums such as economic, cultural, and technological platforms (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). As these new threats are less visible and more interconnected, Estonia's role in boosting its security and defense strategies has become integral to its sovereignty and protection against Russian aggression (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017).

### ***1.2 The Targets of Kremlin Aggression***

Deterring the Kremlin's methods of hybrid warfare has become a unique task for the Baltic States and NATO alike. Broken international agreements, historical cleavages between CEE and Russia, and the use of a combination of hard and soft power have worried members of the international community that another conflict in Eastern Europe could resurface (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). Fear that the Kremlin will extend its influence through military intervention in the Baltics, as has been the case of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, has rapidly dominated much of international reporting on the region. Yet, the pressing fear is not conventional warfare with Estonia and other members of NATO in the upcoming months, but rather Russia's ability to mobilize its goals through the primary use of soft power (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017).

One particular threat that has made hybrid defense a central discussion related to policy has been the dissemination of 'disinformation' from Russia. The invasion of Crimea has been characterized by Russia's ability to instigate pro-Russian demonstrations, foment favourable opinions of Russian annexation, and propagate distrust and false claims about the Ukrainian government with the purpose of legitimizing its own military actions (Lanoszka, 2016, p. 175; Kalinina, 2016, p. 148). In a show of Russian disinformation, official media and social media in Eastern Ukraine portrayed Ukrainians as cold-blooded murderers, molesters, and crucifiers of women and children (Veebel, 2015, Russian Propaganda, Disinformation, and Estonia's Experience; Kalinina, 2016, p.151). These attacks have particular effects on countries with ethnic cleavages in that it exacerbates ethnic tension and division.

For instance, the watershed removal of a Soviet memorial statue from central Tallinn, coined the '2007 Bronze Statue Conflict,' has had far reaching ethnopolitical implications. Large-scale demonstrations by Russian-speakers in both Estonia and Russia, were further exacerbated by Russian media outlets who framed the removal of the statue as an attack on Russian nationhood. The demonstrations were furthermore deemed by Russian news reports as a 'failure of Estonian [Russian-speaking] integration and the re-

emergence of fascism in the country' (Bruggemann & Kasekamp, 2008, p. 436). Such cases of disinformation alarmed Estonian policymakers, as Russian-speaking minorities increasingly became visible targets and consumers of anti-Estonian propaganda.

### **1.3 Mediums of Warfare “Disinformation” and Media in Estonia**

The manipulation of media has become a heated policy discussion in Estonia. In fact, the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) has released multiple recommendations on the ways in which Estonia can defend itself from disinformation (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 2). Roughly 72 percent of Russian speakers claim that Russian language television channels are an important source of news information for them (Open Estonia Foundation & Saar Poll, 2014, p. 7). The threat of disinformation resurfaced once again in 2016, when the Russian media station, Vesti-Rossiya 24 TV, broadcasted a false report on Victory Day demonstration in Sillamäe, Estonia (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 21). CEPA asserts that the purpose of this claim is to vilify Estonia and display the dissatisfaction of the local population with the state (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 21). The long-term aim of such reporting, according to CEPA, is to: “create a situation in which future aggression against a Baltic ally like Estonia might be accepted as warranted by the Russian public; justified to the international community; and received with resignation by local governments and their populations” (Lucas & Pomeranzev, 2016, p. 21).

With the implementation of the 2007 Estonian Public Broadcasting Act, Estonia Public Broadcasting (ERR) became responsible for meeting the information needs of all populations in Estonia (Joesaar, 2015, p. 46). Under this Act, ERR established ETV+ as an alternative Russian language channel to all external Russian broadcasting (Joesaar, 2015, p. 48). The success of ETV+ has been consistently analyzed based on its goal of deterring Russian disinformation.

Representatives of various organizations have identified three contrasting perspectives on ETV+ and its ability to assist with the integration of Russian speakers within the Estonian information sphere. In regards to the security perspective, there has been dissatisfaction on the content being broadcasted by the ETV+. Specifically, some fear that Estonia continues to be left vulnerable to Russian disinformation because there is no process for determining the validity of material being shown (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). The network's open and unregulated invitations to Russian spokespeople, representatives, and sponsors imply little media accountability related to security concerns (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). Deregulation of media inaccurately reflects the exact potential of Russian disinformation and fails to fully equip the Russian speakers with the needed protection against propaganda.

The second perspective surrounds the political nature of the content being shown. The Estonian Ministry of Interior (M. Tulit, personal interview, February 2017) emphasized the need to broadcast cultural and entertainment programming rather than political-based programming due to the overtly political nature surrounding minority integration. This has become a particularly significant debate since Russian speakers have become generally less trusting of political news from *both* sides (M. Makarova, MISA, personal



interview, February 2017).<sup>7</sup>

The final perspective concerns the scope and marketing potential of ETV+. Rather than focusing solely on convincing Russian speakers to watch ETV+, MISA suggested that it is important to consider how ETV+ can be marketed as a bridging tool between the ethnic communities existing in the country. Since ETV+ broadcasts Russian movies and entertainment programming, it has the potential of being used as a cultural exchange and language-learning medium for ethnic Estonians (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017).<sup>8</sup> This perspective presents ETV+ as a unifying and mutually benefitting medium. MISA furthermore advocated for ERR to utilize this potential by increasing marketing and making programs more accessible to Estonian audiences through, for instance, closed captioning.

Opinions on outcomes and best practices reveal how broader perspectives influence policy. The success of television programming bridging the population under one medium has the potential of mitigating risks associated with Russian disinformation. On the other hand, the appeal of such a channel must be considered with the target audience—the Russian-speaking minority—in mind. Ultimately, ETV+ must meet both the needs and interests of the target audience without infringing on their media autonomy.

## 2.0 INTEGRATION

### 2.1 Ethnic Division

As noted in “Contextualizing Integration Policy in Estonia,” Estonia has made strides in reforming its naturalization and language policies. This, however, does not mean that the gap between the two ethnolinguistic groups has closed. Dissatisfaction and lower socioeconomic opportunities persist for Russian speakers. Similarly, a lack of interaction between the two groups continues. According to the *Integrating Estonia 2020* report published by the Ministry of Culture, 45 percent of Estonians do not interact with representatives of other nationalities and 27 percent claim that there are no other nationalities in their circle of closest acquaintances (Ministry of Culture, 2014, p. 7). Moreover, almost one third of Russian speakers with permanent residency do not feel as if they are a part of the Estonian national community (Ministry of Culture, 2014, p. 7).<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, the integration of both groups within one inclusive state continues to be an ongoing challenge.

Multiple interviewees shared the perspective that political rhetoric and policy

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7 MISA asserts the need to include debates and discussions in ETV+ in order to convey differences in perspectives and to allow for opinion formation. However, it appears that the selection of content is in fact quite limiting. The media market, about 300,000 viewers, is rather small compared to Estonian language broadcasting channels. Competition and unwillingness by advertisers to finance ETV+ decreases the availability of content (Joesaar, 2015, p. 50).

8 This is especially salient as the younger Estonian-speaking generations might benefit from learning Russian in bilingual capacities. At the same time, older Estonians already fluent in Russian can watch ETV+ for entertainment purposes (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017).

9 According to the UNHCR through interviews with Russian speakers with undetermined citizenship or foreign citizenship (Russian), 93 percent were pessimistic on accessing the labour market and a further 83 percent were pessimistic on having the right of free movement and diplomatic protection (UNHCR, 2016, p. 40). However, 84 percent had responded with a strong interest in participating more fully in Estonian society (UNHCR, 2016, p. 43).

have a direct effect on the lives of the Russian minorities (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017; A. Semjonov, LICHR, personal interview, February 2017; D. Suhoroslov, Russian School, personal interview, February 2017). In particular, MISA stated that it was imperative for the Russian-speaking minorities to enjoy the same rights as ethnic Estonians because social exclusion and dissatisfaction leads to more isolation and more animosity towards the dominant group. This in turn makes them more susceptible to external influence. LICHR revealed deep concern that the Estonian public analysis consistently frames the Russian minority vis-à-vis the external Russian aggression. The organization advocates for Estonian politicians, border security, and policemen to reconsider the damaging preconceived biases when dealing with members of the Russian-speaking community. An interviewee from the Russian School further stated that harsh integration policies in Estonia lack respect for the historical and ethnic dignity of the Russians since it perpetuates assimilationist ideals, rather than ideals of *laissez-faire* and allowing Russians to govern their societal affairs.

While these interviewees' perspectives do not always overlap, representatives of Russian-speaking minorities often emphasize that the rhetoric produced by geopolitical discourse often has a negative effect on the security and societal 'belonging' of the minority. Indeed, increasingly progressive language, citizenship, and education policies are at the forefront of political discourse surrounding minority rights and integration policy. Still, integration as a means of increasing trust and societal cohesion through the respect of minority rights should rightly be considered within such discourses.

## **2.2 The Spatial Factor**

Since Soviet times, Russian speakers have tended to concentrate in segregated communities, specifically in the city of Narva and the local level such as in the Mustamäe neighborhood in Tallinn (Trimbach, 2016, p. 88). By 2011, ethnic minorities formed 46 percent of the population in Tallinn and 86 percent of the population of the northeastern cities. Soviet labour and housing policies, such as immigration-based industrialization and central housing allocation, exacerbated and strengthened ethnic spatial separation in Estonia (Tammaru & Kontuly, 2011, p. 677). After the demise of the Soviet Union, out-migration resulted in Estonians being more likely to leave ethnic areas than minorities, thus indirectly increasing ethnic concentration in various regions (Tammaru & Kontuly, 2011, p. 685).

One particular assumption is that because Narva is so immediate to Ivangorod (and only 160 kilometers from St. Petersburg) the Russian-speaking minorities are more inclined to feel sympathy towards the Russian state and therefore more likely to advocate for irredentist interests. This, however, is not likely the case. Citizens of Narva perceive Ivangorod as "different, Russian-like, unstable, and chaotic" (Berg, 2000, p. 88). Narvans are aware about late salary payments, low wages, and stand-still enterprises in Russia and therefore are more likely to be content with articulating a more localized identity (Berg, 2000, p. 88). In fact, there is a positive net-migration of Russians from Ivangorod into Estonia due to the higher standard of living and familial ties to the Russian speakers in Estonia (K. Kallas, Narva College, personal interview, February 2017). This is telling given the rich discourse in international media as identifying the northeastern region, and particularly Narva, as a vigilantly pro-Russian and potentially separatist region ranked with the likes of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. The authors' research found that outside of a small

minority of radicalized Russian speakers, most identify geopolitically with Estonia (M. Hellam & M. Roonemaa, Open Estonia Foundation, personal interview, February 2017).

In socioeconomic terms, Estonians certainly gained more from the transition process (Tammaru & Kontuly, 2011, p. 685). While major towns in the north (Tallinn), the southeast (Tartu) and the south-west (Pärnu) grew during the immediate post-Soviet period; northeastern Estonia declined due to out-migration to Russia, the European Union, or other parts of Estonia. Industrial towns in previously urban northeast locations suffered from deep economic and political restructuring during the 1990s (Jauhiainen, 2006, p. 275). In terms of employment, the massive downturn reflected in the loss of 21 percent of jobs in sites of heavy manufacturing. Since the population in the northeast was mostly Russian-speaking, the disproportionality in unemployment and industries became linked with an ethno-geographic divide.

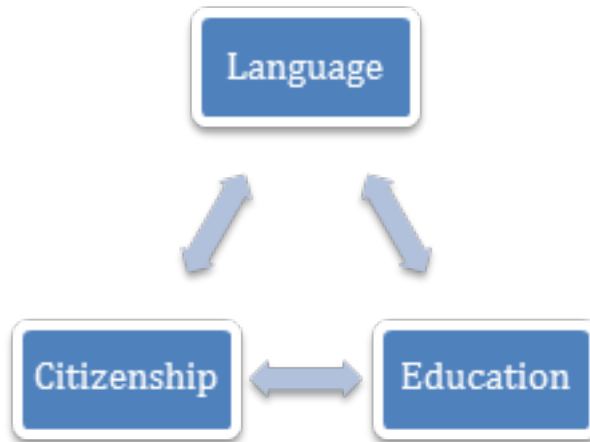
In present day, Ida-Viru County and Narva suffer from high rates of unemployment, outmigration, and economic decline. These issues fuel the “othering” of the region in relation to the Estonian state, formation and political processes, spaces, and relations (Trimbach, 2016, p. 98). According to figures from the UNHCR, Russian speakers with undetermined citizenship remain at the peak of socioeconomic inequality (“Mapping Statelessness,” 2016).<sup>10</sup> Ida-Viru’s divergent trajectory is problematic since the region depends on regional integration and financial investment in order to stabilize (Trimbach, 2016, p. 102). This “one state, two societies” system continues to thwart socioeconomic integration of the northeastern Russian-speaking community (Trimbach, 2016, p. 95).

One frequently proposed solution to the spatial factor is the movement of state institutions and programs into the northeastern region of Estonia. Moving state agencies to Narva may have some integrationist influences on the region. However, equalizing opportunities in quality jobs and providing incentives to engage the Russian youth—who are, indeed, increasingly westward facing—is paramount (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017). The Ministry of Culture (A. Aidarov, personal interview, February 2017), Ministry of Interior (M. Tullit, personal interview, February 2017) and Open Estonia Foundation (M. Hellam & M. Roonemaa, Open Estonia Foundation, personal interview, February 2017) agree that the government must facilitate and support intercultural events, empower local initiatives and forums relating to innovation and education. The spatial factor must therefore carefully be considered while adjusting integration programs and policies. This factor, as it relates to language and education policy in the next section, ultimately increases the difficulty in which funding, programming, and policy operates.

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<sup>10</sup> According to data collection by the UNHCR, it is suggested that unemployment for those with undetermined citizenship is 14.5 percent compared to 6.5 percent for Estonian citizens; 11 percent of persons with undetermined citizenship have completed higher education, compared to 26-30 percent of Estonian citizenships; 24.1 percent of those with undetermined citizenship are at risk of poverty compared to 14.5 of general Estonian population; and those with undetermined citizenship make 30 percent of prison population while only accounting for roughly 6 percent of the population (UNHCR, 2016, p. 30-p.35).

### 2.3 The Integration Triangle: Citizenship, Language and Education



*Figure 1.* The Integration Triangle. This figure illustrates the three-way connectivity and overlapping expressions of language, citizenship, and education policy. Language, as the central method of communication between the titular and minority groups, becomes prevalent in all three policy dimensions.

Policy outputs in Estonia are reflective of ideological underpinnings affecting both the drive towards security and stabilization, and the conscious reflection of the Soviet past. Nation-building, rapidly developing throughout the 1990s, was an ideological force dependent on de-Sovietization and re-Europeanization (Duina & Miani, 2016, p. 536). This was carried out by both right and left wing parties who either saw nation-building as either exclusively ethnic based or fully inclusive of the polyethnic realities (Kallas, 2016, p. 9). Citizenship and language planning policy was particularly vital in formulating nation-building, ethnic containment, and managing linguistic threats (Jarve, 2002, p. 78). These simultaneous processes informed present-day legacies of undetermined citizenship identity, socioeconomic disparities, a lack of social unity, and conflicting language policies.

The following sections analyze various perspectives on policy outcomes related to citizenship, education, and language. It is noted that language is overlapping in both education and citizenship policies. Language, itself, has been the primary method of preserving Estonian as the sole official language in the country. Similarly, language ability has become the formal assessment of the individual's naturalization within Estonian society. Language acquisition, language exams and language inspections are the fundamental processes in which the government ensures that integration formally develops in respects to the titular standard.

### **2.3.1 Language and Citizenship**

In 1991, Estonia's independence brought a restoration of the Citizenship Law that had operated prior to 1940. The modified law, which entered into force in 1992, was defined by its restorative nature; roughly 32 percent of the Estonian population was left with undetermined citizenship (UNHCR, 2016, p. 15). With the establishment of the Alien Act and further provisions to the 1995 Citizenship Act, in adherence to international pressures, Estonia began providing similar rights to all individuals that had legally resided in Estonia for a minimum of 5 years.<sup>11</sup> From 1992 to 2015 there was a total reduction of 48 percent of those with undetermined citizenship (UNHCR, 2016, p. 16). More recent provisions have made the process even quicker for children. As of January 2016, a child born to parents with undetermined citizenship who have been residing in Estonia for 5 years could acquire Estonian citizenship automatically (also retroactively entitled for those who were under 15 years of age when the policy was imposed) (UNHCR, 2016, p. 77). Yet, despite progressions towards a reduction of undetermined citizens there is still much debate about the success of policy outcomes related to citizenship in Estonia.

Estonian nation-building processes continue to guarantee the specific protection of its national minority (Duina & Miani, 2016, p. 536). As such, there has been resistance amongst the general population to policies that would allow for the granting of full citizenship to all individuals residing in the territory. Debates continuously define the lack of integration as a cleavage-producing factor that can erupt at any moment. At the same time, internal discussion has also challenged the effectiveness of Estonia's naturalization policy. One specific concern is the overemphasis on the naturalization of youth, who are already able to receive citizenship automatically with the completion of secondary school. In contrast, the older generation who require external assistance in achieving language proficiency, continue to face strict language assessments in order to naturalize (A. Semjonov, LICHR, personal interview, February 2017). This point is especially relevant since the vast majority of those who are without citizenship are above 30 years of age ("Mapping Statelessness," p. 29).

The amount of time and money required to complete Estonian language classes poses a challenge for some (M. Hellam & M. Roonemaa, Open Estonia Foundation, personal interview, February 2017). Some interviewees indicated that the Russian speakers require stronger socioeconomic incentives to complete language classes (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). The Ministry of Interior pointed out that free language classes have been limited in long-term funding, which poses difficulty for those in the lower socioeconomic bracket (M. Tulit, personal interview, February 2017). With an absence of free language classes, Russian speakers are required to financial support their

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<sup>11</sup> Estonia is a signatory country to the Convention for the Rights of Children, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination but not to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Conventions that Estonia has signed have contributed to a compliance to international standards on the rights to dignity and the wellbeing of the undetermined population. However, Estonia has argued, in response to the UNHCR's recommendations on the signing of the 1954 and 1961 Conventions that ratifying the Conventions would obstruct the ability of the undetermined citizenship population to choose their choice of citizenship - be it Russia or another country (UNHCR, 2016 p. 17).

own means of acquiring Estonian fluency.

Intersecting citizenship, language and the spatial divide, MISA highlighted that informal language education can be useful in regions where Russian residents may lack opportunities to immerse themselves in the Estonian language, such as those living in Narva. MISA suggests that allocating funds into, for instance, language cafes might be particularly useful in helping those who are not only required to pass language exams but require it for employment purposes (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017). Vitatiim Narva Youth Organization confirmed the popularity of language cafes and informal learning amongst the youth, albeit Estonian remains one of the more unpopular languages to learn<sup>12</sup> (personal interview, February 2017). The geopolitical and minority rights perspective converge on many points related to language and citizenship rights. In particular, it appears that there is a push, on all sides, for a facilitation of a faster and more realistic process for Russian speakers to naturalize.

Various interviewees articulated that incentives to preserve the ‘grey passport’<sup>13</sup> hinder the success of the naturalization process. Specifically, practical benefits related to having the undetermined status, such as travelling cost free across the EU and Russia, have been cited by Russian speakers as reasons that dissuade them from wanting Estonian citizenship (A. Aidarov, Ministry of Culture, personal interview, February 2017). Despite concerns on the overall strategies of naturalization, there was a large consensus amongst interviewees about the importance of integration through citizenship. Having access to political participation at the national level was cited as a method in which individuals could participate democratically and voice their grievances (A. Kasekemp, Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, personal interview, February 2017). While interviewees expressed concern that Russia could use undetermined citizens as a visible leverage for diplomatic goals, undetermined citizens in general were not seen to pose a direct threat to the safety of the country (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017, M. Hellam & M. Roonemaa, Open Estonia Foundation, personal interview, February 2017). Ultimately, all interviewees see the reduction in undetermined citizenship as a progressive step towards minority integration in Estonia.

### **2.3.2 Language and Education**

One of the most drastic changes in Estonian language policies post-independence is the change in the language of instruction in previously Russian-medium schools. In Estonia, the minority group is allowed, albeit somewhat restricted, the right to choose the primary language of instruction for schooling. Many Russian students, particularly those living in the northeastern county of Ida-Viru, attend Russian-speaking schools. While some have switched into Estonian schools or immersion programs, 19 percent of all students in the country are solely enrolled in Russian education (UNHCR, 2016, p. 31). Tensions have emerged as policy makers have swayed between allowing Russians to regulate their

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12 Based on our interview with Vitatiim, English has become the most popular choice of language for Russian speakers as it provides future opportunities and incentives to work abroad.

13 Grey passports are synonymous with the undetermined citizenship status. Those with undetermined citizenship carry a passport that is identifiable by its grey colour. Carrying this passport guarantees individuals certain rights and freedoms in travel – although they are subjected to time-dependent visa regulations within the Schengen Area.

own language acquisition, having an immersion program for both Estonian and Russian students, and/or assimilating Russian pupils into the Estonian language. Shifts in regulations by the Estonian government have occurred in response to the perceived divergence of Russian-language schools in two dimensions: the quality of education, and the implications of Russian curricula.

The curriculum formulated post-independence was seen as an instrument for building a democratic, information-based society that is turning towards Europe, and supporting the establishment of a market economy after decades of communist rule (“Estonia’s basic education,” 2015). In accordance to Estonia’s integration plans, the government committed to guaranteeing equal education opportunities regardless of students’ ethnic origin. Specifically, the government allowed for the operation of Russian-language schools insofar as upper secondary schools taught 60 percentage of subjects in Estonian during grades 10–12 so as to facilitate integration of Russian-speakers into Estonian society and economy. Funding sources were also established to promote quality in instruction and professional development of bilingual teachers (“Estonia’s basic education,” 2015).

Yet, our interviewees maintain that Russian-language schools lag behind in educational standards due to subpar delivery of quality and lack of effective institutional support. A PISA assessment in 2006 showed that the average science, reading and mathematics scores of 15-year old students in Russian-language schools were significantly lower than those 15-year old students in Estonian-language schools (“Estonia’s basic education,” 2015). MISA pointed out that the switch to Estonian education in Russian-language schools has been problematic because relatively weaker Russian-language students in primary school have their difficulties exacerbated with the 60/40 bilingual split in secondary school (M. Makarova, personal interview, February 2017). Russian-speaking representatives in LICHR (A. Semjonov, personal interview, February 2017) and the Russian School (D. Suhoroslov, personal interview, February 2017) reflect these sentiments.

Understaffing and incompetent bilingual teaching abilities of teachers contribute to weak teacher–student communication. As a result, Russian students are unable to receive quality education in key areas of growth. Additionally, University of Tartu’s Narva College, primarily a teacher training college, has noticed that their bilingual graduates tend to pursue higher-paid careers outside of education instead of the intended goal of staffing schools with bilingual instructors (K. Kallas, personal interview, February 2017). This is due to the fact that teaching in general is not an attractive profession in Estonia (“Estonia’s basic education,” 2015). Various interviewees maintain that increased funding for teaching centres in universities such as Narva College and higher wages for bilingual staff in schools, especially for Russian-speaking schools, is imperative for successful integration outcomes (A. Aidarov, Ministry of Culture, personal interview, February 2017).

In another vein, some interviewees raised concern regarding the content of the Russian curriculum taught in Russian schools. ICDS, for example, suggested that it is vital that the history and social sciences taught in Russian schools maintain a standard compatible with all schools in Estonia (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). In particular, contestation arose regarding the highly politicized history of Russian–Estonian relations. Skeptics view the teaching of Russian history and Soviet occupation as a possible venue for the spreading of disinformation (T. Jermalavičius, ICDS, personal interview, February 2017). On the other hand, some interviewees have stated that the teaching of



history in Russian schools should be reflective of the Russian historical understanding of events (A. Semjonov, LICHR, personal interview, 2017). Decisions on the delivery of curriculum are often left to the discretion of the respective teacher and schooling institution.

Integrative measures within the aforementioned context of lagging Russian-speaking schools have certainly created a backlash amongst some Russian-speakers in Estonia. Integrative measures by way of promoting bilingualism and injecting Estonian-centric curricula have prompted some Russian-representing NGOs to articulate fears of cultural assimilation. The Russian School, for instance, gathered over 35,000 signatures petitioning the Estonian government to allow Russian-speaking communities to deliver upper-year education exclusively in Russian, so as not to linguistically disadvantage youth in their learning. The petition's rejection by the Estonian government reinforced attitudes amongst Russian representatives that Estonians see Russian-language schools as an 'existential threat' to the nation-state (D. Suhoroslov, Russian School, personal interview, February 2017). This is not to say that Estonian is not valued amongst those Russian speaking parents. Instead, in interviews they prioritized informal methods of language attainment such as afterschool classes, conversation groups, summer camps, etc rather than the institutionalization of Estonian as the primary language (D. Suhoroslov, Russian School, personal interview, February 2017).

Despite the nuance and sensitivity surrounding education policies, both Russian-speaking and mainstream Estonian interviewees acknowledged that certain integrationist approaches must be considered for nation-building and a cohesive society. First and foremost, consultations between the Estonian government and Russian-speaking communities regarding education policy must be improved in order to address shortfalls in bilingual criteria and understaffing (D. Suhoroslov, Russian School, personal interview, February 2017). Additionally, interviewees addressed the importance of alternative avenues of language learning, such as informal learning and practical immersion programs between mainstream Estonian schools and Russian-language schools (M. Makarova, MISA, personal interview, February 2017; A. Semjonov, LICHR, personal interview, 2017).

## **CONCLUSION: MEASURING SUCCESS**

Although Estonia has progressed rapidly to include more favorable policies towards its Russian-speaking minority, there is still much debate surrounding the success criteria of each individual policy. In particular, questions surrounding the potential for Russia to utilize extraterritorial Russians as diplomatic leverage have become a key debate in geopolitics. At the same time, language planning and language acquisition policy, alongside citizenship policies, have consistently become a concern for the Russian-speaking minorities and the organizations that advocate on their behalf. In the qualitative interviews, the authors addressed the broader role of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in considering aspects of integration, citizenship, and education; and the particularities of civil society groups that have a personal connection to the Russian localities and lived experiences. The report then converged these scopes and produced a more nuanced analysis of what integration looks like and means for the Russian-speaking minority vis-à-vis Estonian state policy. By positioning the various perspectives on the (un)success of policy outcomes, the authors identified the ways in which policies yield different, but equally substantive, understandings of integration.



During a period of continued strain between Estonia and Russia, the Estonian government is compelled to adopt policies aimed at protecting its ethnic citizens and territorial boundaries from potential instability. For some the guise of integration is used as a securitization technique to minimize the potential eruption of conflict, rather than serving as genuine progression towards the inclusivity of the Russian-speaking minority. This is not to say that the threat of Russian hybrid attacks and second-generation warfare, especially those involving disinformation and propaganda, is to be dismissed; rather, the Estonian government should continue actively working with powerful multilateral organizations such as NATO to combat hostile interference. Under the terms of Article 5 of NATO, if one member-state is invaded all the other members are collectively obliged to come to their aid (Mortimer, 2017). The annexation of Crimea in Ukraine by Russian President Vladimir Putin began a process of bolstering defense in the Baltic region: at this time, hundreds of United Kingdom, French, and Danish forces have landed in Estonia as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Battalion in one of the largest deployments since the end of the Cold War (Mortimer, 2017).

Indeed, Estonia is an active member-state and one of the only members that meets its required defense contribution (Baker, 2017). Importantly, however, the 2016 election of United States President Donald J. Trump and his disenchantment with NATO revealed a disconcerting reality that Estonia can no longer exclusively and unquestionably rely on the patronage of Western troops—for NATO is crippled without American diplomatic and financial backing. The authors of this report maintain that the Estonian government will combat the Russian threat most effectively by addressing and resolving, in both, a top-down and grassroots manner the disparities in education, citizenship, and language outcomes for the Russian-speaking population. In the following list, the authors summarize some general recommendations regarding the Russian-speaking minority, converging opinions from the qualitative interviews and supporting secondary research.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS: GEOPOLITICS**

- 1) Hybrid threats are continuing to pose a security risk for the Baltic countries. Cyberwarfare and disinformation must continue to be present on the government's security agenda in order to ensure that information spheres are secure for all residence living in Estonia.
- 2) Russian language television channels in Estonia must provide a variety of broadcasting that is both informative and entertaining. At the same time, the broadcasting companies must meet regulatory standards on the information that is broadcasted to deter false reports and disinformation for Russian speakers.
- 3) Organizations and civil society groups in Estonia must include a diverse array of Russian-speaking perspectives when discussing Estonia's role towards, and diplomatic relation with, Russia.
- 4) Since Russian speakers are particularly vulnerable and central to discussions surrounding conflict and threats, caution must be taken to separate the framing of the Russian government and the Russian people as singular entities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS: INTEGRATION**

- 1) Spatial considerations must be prioritized so that areas consisting of large Russian-speaking minorities resume positive migratory flows. While this would involve complex analysis on economic restructuring of the region, interviewees have emphasized the importance of stable and secure jobs in minimizing migration and dissatisfaction.
- 2) Informal exchange opportunities can contribute to intercultural relations between youth from Russian-speaking parts of Estonia and those from Estonian-speaking areas.
- 3) While naturalization has become easier for youth, more accommodation is needed for Russian-speaking adults with undetermined citizenship. Accommodation through free language classes and informal practice opportunities is needed. Similarly, there is a call for lenience or the full abolishing of the language inspectors who fine individuals unable to communicate in Estonian at their workplace.
- 4) Involve those with undetermined citizenship in more governmental consultations. Since those with undetermined citizenship are not granted the right to vote in national elections, alternative avenues must be established for voicing concerns.
- 5) The government should look into full-immersion programs and informal language learning classes as mechanisms of integration for Russian-speakers.
- 6) The Estonian government must funnel more funds into equitably allocating teaching resources between Estonian and Russian schools and adequately training Estonian and Russian teachers so that neither language-speaking student is disadvantaged in primary and secondary education.

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