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The Role of Media in the  
Integration of Estonians  
and Russian-Speakers in Estonia:  
Towards an Inclusive Public  
Sphere

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# The Role of Media in the Integration of Estonians and Russian-Speakers in Estonia: Towards an Inclusive Public Sphere

## Policy Report

The following policy recommendations are based on an approach to **integration** which emphasises **active participation** of members of minority ethnic groups in all social, political and economic institutions as a key to enhancing **democracy** and promoting **human development**. Estonia has very limited **human resources** and actualising the **potential** of these resources requires a higher degree of **inclusiveness** than has been achieved in the present.

In addition to other key factors to human development, such as **education, economic growth** and having **political rights, compatibility** in the world of globalising economics increasingly depends on **access to information**.

### 1. Mass Media, Public Sphere and Societal Integration

Media are neither passively reflecting upon reality nor an all-mighty tools for propaganda, but rather a part of a societal culture which provide a forum for a subjective interpretation of reality. What is on the agenda of this forum, as well as what is not, and who are participating as interpreters, as well as who are not –contributes to the perception of relations and roles of different groups in the society, as well as to the re-producing of the reality according to these perceptions.

In respect to politics, the mass media have gradually become: <sup>i</sup>

- ?? An essential element in the process of **democratic politics** by providing a channel for wide debate, and for distributing diverse information and opinion;
- ?? The primary arena for public events and discussions, both on the national and international level

In respect to culture, the mass media:

- ?? Constitute a primary **source of definitions** and **images of social reality** and the most visible expression of shared identity;
- ?? Are the largest focus of leisure time interest, providing the **shared cultural environment** for most people and more than any other institution;
- ?? the provider of public version of normality - empirically and evaluatively - and deviance, by defining these categories through contrasts and comparisons made in the public.

Most contemporary conceptualisation of democratisation rests on the belief that the existence of strong civil society and civic participation are essential for maintaining the democratic character of the affairs between the state and its citizens. Civil society, in turn, not only expresses itself, but actualises and constantly contests its aims and interests in the public sphere, which increasingly means in the space provided by the mass media.

This space, and the conditions for gaining access to it, is in a modern impersonal society essential to and as well as an indicator for democracy. One could say that an inclusive and **functioning public sphere is the fulfilment of the communicational requirements of a viable democracy.**

Increasingly so, as ‘the most fundamental questions of society - those concerning the distribution and exercise of power, the management of problems and the processes of integration and change - all turn on communication, especially the messages carried out by the public means of communication, whether in the form of information, stories or entertainment.’<sup>ii</sup> Hence, the importance of the equality of opportunities in accessing the mainstream media all individuals regardless of their group belonging.

## **2. Estonia: Access to Information and Participation of non-Estonians in the Media Industry**

Estonian Government has been critical of its own efforts to enhance national integration by and in the media sphere. In its report on implementation of the Programme in 2000, the Government observed that “the potential of the Russian-language media in the area of integration non-Estonians remains largely unused, due to the low viewership of programmes. The reason for this is the lack of financing for Russian-language television and isolation from its viewership.”<sup>iii</sup>

Yet, the integration policies seem to assume that anyone willing to integrate, be informed and participate in the public sphere (and there is one public sphere, the Estonian-language one) should at first learn Estonian language, not vice versa. Yet, despite of an extensive governmental language learning programme, the majority of non-Estonians have difficulties in mastering the language on the level that would allow them to receive sufficient information about the Estonian society and state. The situation is particularly problematic in Ida-Virumaa and among the elderly. In these cases the choice is indeed either that the state support the provision of information to these permanent residents or them relying on the information obtained from the media of the Russian Federation and through informal sources, as brought out by numerous studies over the past years.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the processes of language learning and the accessibility of mainstream media should rather complement each other and be simultaneous.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources:

1. Kruusvall, Jüri, *The Attitudes Hindering Integration and Alternatives for Inter-Ethnic Relations*, Integration Monitoring, 2002, [www.meis.ee](http://www.meis.ee);
2. Iljina, Jelena; Jakobson, Valeria, *The Reflection of the Process of Integration in the Russian-language Press and Using the Press as an Instrument of Integration*, Integration Monitoring, 2002, [www.meis.ee/eng/monitoring/valeeria.rtf](http://www.meis.ee/eng/monitoring/valeeria.rtf)
3. Rikmann, Erle; Lagerspetz, Mikko; Pernik, Piret; Tuisk, Tarmo, *Poliitilise osaluse dilemmad Eesti poliitilises kultuuris: kuuluvus ja kodanikuidentiteet* (“The Dilemmas of Political Participation in the Political Culture in Estonia: Belonging and Civic Identity”), Tallinn, 2002, [http://riigikogu.ee/msi\\_arhiiv/uurimused/ER.html](http://riigikogu.ee/msi_arhiiv/uurimused/ER.html)
4. Saar Poll, *Eesti riik ja rahvus 2000 aastakevadel. Sotsioloogilise uuringu aruanne* (Estonian State and Nation in the Spring of 2000. Report of Sociological Research). Presentation at the Estonian Parliament on 12.06.2000.

Such a conclusion is based on data which suggests that among Russian-speakers there is recognition of lacking sufficient information about the Estonian society and state institutions. On the other hand, there is also expressed willingness to be better informed by Estonian information sources. Although the Russian-speakers in their daily life watch more extensively Russian Federation television channels and are generally much more exposed to Russian-language media, their trust in its objectivity is low. Rather, they express a much higher level of trust towards the Estonian sources of information, including the media. One of such trusted media channels being the Estonian public television (ETV). Hence, the willingness to be more exposed than to national information sources seems to be present even though the media consumption habits suggest otherwise and cannot be expected to change abruptly.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on research presented in the report which is available at [www.policy.hu/keedus/research.paper.pdf](http://www.policy.hu/keedus/research.paper.pdf)

The level of access of the minority can be evaluated referring to four criteria:

1. the possibilities for a minority group to have **access into the mainstream** (national) mass media to speak directly to the wider society, in its own terms;
2. the possibility for the group to be itself effectively **reached** by the communications media of the wider society;
3. the possibilities for a minority group to **communicate internally** and thus to become conscious of shared interests and identity and to organise for its own needs, or on its own behalf;
4. the **quality of representation** of the minority and its members individually in the mainstream media.<sup>iv</sup>

The main focus of the recommendations are initiatives regarding Estonian Public Television (ETV) and Estonian Public Radio (ER), since these are institutions funded

from public resources and therefore subject to public scrutiny. However, certain recommendations may also have an impact to media industry in general.

### 3.1 Legislation

In the Broadcasting Act, there are no special provisions ensuring the availability of Russian-language print or broadcast media. On the contrary, the Language Act restricts television broadcasting in foreign languages, including Russian: "The volume of foreign language news programs and live foreign language programs without translations into Estonian /.../ shall not exceed ten per cent of the volume of weekly original production."<sup>v</sup>

However, the Broadcasting Act obliges ETV and ER to 'satisfy the informational needs of all nationalities, including minorities.' There is no specification what this means and what are the particular obligations arising from this point. The latter provision is too vague to guarantee the meeting of informational needs of ethnic minorities, and has shown above, they cannot be said to have been met.

Estonia signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1993 and ratified it in 1997. The Framework Convention commits the parties to 'create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.'<sup>vi</sup> The Framework Convention obliges the governments to guarantee that members of minorities enjoy the right to freedom of expression and information:

The Parties undertake to recognize that the right to freedom of expression of every person belonging to a national minority includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language, without interference by public authorities and regardless of frontiers. The Parties shall ensure, within the framework of their legal systems that persons belonging to a national minority are not discriminated against in their access to the media.<sup>vii</sup>

The Framework Convention does not only prescribe that the state shall not hinder the creation and use of printed media by members of national minorities, but shall ensure, in the legal framework of sound radio and television broadcasting, that they are granted the possibility of creating and using their own media:

In the framework of their legal systems, the Parties shall adopt adequate measures in order to facilitate access to the media for persons belonging to national minorities and in order to promote tolerance and permit cultural pluralism.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Recommendations for the Parliament:**

- ?? To include in the Broadcasting Act the minimum television and radio broadcasting proportion guaranteed for minorities to specify the provision which obliges ETV and ER to ‘satisfy the informational needs of all nationalities, including minorities.’ The proportion of programming taking into account the interests of non-Estonians in Estonia should be determined in co-operation with the members of the Broadcasting Board, Presidential Roundtable for Issues Concerning Ethnic Minorities and representatives of minority organisations.
- ?? According to the Broadcasting Act the functions of ER and ETV include the duty to ‘advance and promote Estonian national culture, and record, preserve and introduce its greatest achievements.’ The Act should also include the function of the recording, preservation and introduction of the achievements of ethnic minority cultures of Estonia.

### 3.2 The Broadcasting Council

#### **Recommendation for the Parliament:**

- ?? To appoint among the nine members of the Broadcasting Council, at least two persons with a non-Estonian ethnic background and familiar with the problems and expectations of non-Estonians.



## **Recommendations for the Broadcasting Council:**

- ?? The Broadcasting Council, as one of its obligations is to monitor the implementation of all regulations regarding public broadcasting, should keep on the agenda the access of ethnic minorities to information. The fulfilment of the above 4 criteria should be regularly assessed.
- ?? In co-operation with the boards of ETV and ER, to draft an annual action plan for increasing the number of ETV and ER audience among ethnic minorities. The plan could include such activities as hiring more producers and editors among Russian-speakers, advocating for the broadcasting of more programmes for and by non-Estonians.
- ?? To promote in their public statements the understanding of Estonian society as a multiethnic one, and to be aware of this fact in every decision that the Council takes.
- ?? The issue of access of minorities to the public service broadcasting institution should be put on a professional basis where it is based not on personal good will of some employers, but on commitment and institutional obligation.
- ?? To promote the providing of annual financial support to local non-profit radio broadcasting in minority languages since local broadcasters are a link between social communities and an important intermediary step for training, professional experience and access of media professionals to the national industry. This means that they have an important role to play in providing training and professional access for members of ethnic minorities to the broadcasting industry.

### 3.3 ETV and ER

#### 3.3.1 Employment

It is a responsibility of public service broadcasters to serve all social groups of Estonian society and to ensure that there is fair reflection of its diversity also on screen. This might

also be a key to increased popularity of their programming among ethnic minority audience.

**Recommendations for the Boards of ETV and ER:**

- ?? In ideal, public service broadcasters should commit themselves to reach the employment proportion of ethnic minorities so that it reflects their real representation in the society.
- ?? In order to achieve this, an annual action plan is recommended, demonstrating measurable goals and concrete measures.
- ?? To continuously evaluate measures undertaken and feedback from employees as well as audience.
- ?? To introduce anti-discrimination measures in employment and promotion practices.
- ?? To evaluate intercultural competence as a positive selection criteria when employing.
- ?? To strengthen contacts with ethnic minority schools, colleges and organisations in order to seek for people who could contribute.

3.3.2 Programming of ETV

The current provision and scheduling of programmes that may attract a wider audience among ethnic minorities is still not satisfactory. Programmes are broadcasted irregularly, late or otherwise at inconvenient times.

**Recommendations for the Boards of ETV and ER:**

- ?? To pay more attention to the specific media needs of non-Estonians and adapting the content of such programmes to the audience.
- ?? To increase the amount of broadcast time for minorities.
- ?? To broadcast the programmes on a regular basis and at more convenient times.
- ?? To place more editors with minority background on screen.

- ?? Specifically increasing the amount of broadcast time for news and informative programmes in Russian.
- ?? To improve marketing activities for these programmes.

**Recommendation for editors and producers:**

- ?? To use persons with non-Estonian ethnic background in other roles than representatives of minority groups, that is also as citizens, experts, commentators, business leaders, etc, regardless of whether the programmes is in Estonian or Russian language or a bilingual one.
- ?? To involve more non-Estonian students as interns when possible.

**Recommendation for the Broadcasting Council:**

- ?? To require representatives among ethnic minority members of the personnel on ETV and ER Management Board as well as Programming Board.

*3.4 Education and Training of Journalists*

**Recommendation for Institutions of Higher Education and Ministry of Education:**

- ?? To strive towards proportional enrolment of ethnic non-Estonians among the students in journalism, and television and radio production studies departments in state funded universities.
- ?? This requires certain positive measures in the beginning as Russian-speakers, especially the young from Ida-Virumaa cannot be expected to have as perfect Estonian language skills as Estonian high-school graduates.
- ?? Among these measures there can be a set minimum for annual enrolment of minority students, as well as some stipends provided for journalism students in programmes which have a tuition fee.

### 3.5 The Bureau of the Minister of Population Affairs

#### **Recommendations for the Minister:**

- ?? To stimulate acceptance and public debate on the topic of the multiethnic character of Estonian society.
- ?? To advocate for increasing the funding of public service broadcasters in order to also improve the serving of the informational needs of non-Estonians.
- ?? To prioritise the importance of shared communicational sphere when drafting the plans for activities of the Integration Programme.
- ?? To establish a position for a media monitoring expert who would regularly address positive and negative coverage of ethnic minorities and integration processes, and regularly publish replies in the media.
- ?? To ensure the presence of proportional representation of also non-Estonians in all boards and steering committees related to the implementation of Integration Programme and distribution of funds.
- ?? To re-evaluate the distribution of funding between activities with the aim of facilitating integration processes.

### 3.6 The Integration Foundation

Although the activities administrated by the Integration Foundation are overwhelmingly targeted at non-Estonians, the representation of non-Estonians among the full-time staff as well as other experts in the institution is low.

#### **Recommendations for The Integration Foundation:**

- ?? To ensure sufficient presence of employees with minority background in its staff.
- ?? To ensure sufficient presence of external experts with minority background evaluating project proposals and in the steering committees.

Several important and successive initiatives have been supported by the Integration Foundation over the past years. It is of great importance to continue supporting the following activities and to increase the amounts of funding:

- ?? trainings for minority journalists
- ?? a yearly monitoring report of how the media reflects upon issues of inter-ethnic relations. The press monitoring should be complemented by television programmes monitoring
- ?? support for local media
- ?? developing co-operation projects between Estonian and Russian language newspapers
- ?? the broadcasting of radio programmes in minority languages;
- ?? co-financing of Estonian and Russian language and bilingual seasonal television programmes

Activities which have been reported to have relatively little success considering the extent of funding that has been used:

- ?? toleration and language learning promoting campaigns

In addition to the above:

- ?? To encourage publishing identical articles in both, the Estonian and the Russian language press at the same time to promote debates which would interest and motivate both groups to participate in the public sphere.

### 3.8 Other Recommendations:

- ?? To proceed without delay adopting anti-discrimination legislation (also mentioned in the EC Progress Report 2003);
- ?? To work out also other new policies to increasing the annual number of naturalised persons (for example, facilitating language exam requirements, improving Estonian-language teaching at schools, refunding all the expenses

related to language-learning for those adults who succeed in passing the examination and receive citizenship)

?? To establish a specialized body with the specific responsibility to address xenophobia, racism and intolerance in Estonian society.

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References:

<sup>i</sup> McQuail, Denis. *Introduction to Theories of Mass Media*, 2000, p. 65-70.

<sup>ii</sup> McQuail, Denis, *Introduction to Theories of Mass Media*, 2000, p. 90.

<sup>iii</sup> Government Report 2000, p. 69, available at <http://www.riik.ee/saks/ikomisjon/word/report.doc>

<sup>iv</sup> McQuail, Denis, *Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, London: Newsbury Parl, 1992, p. 264.

<sup>v</sup> Law on Language, Art. 25, Section 4.

<sup>vi</sup> The Council of Europe's 1994 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Art 15

<sup>vii</sup> The Council of Europe's 1994 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Art 15

<sup>viii</sup> The Framework Convention, Art 9