

INTEGRATION OF ESTONIAN SOCIETY: MONITORING 2008

Summary

1. General trends

Compared to previous monitoring (2000, 2002, 2005), the indicators showing the structural integration of Estonian society have been gradually improving – this is true regarding Estonian language skills, the proportion of Estonian citizens in the population and several socio-economic indicators. At the same time, several indicators characterising attitudes have worsened, e.g. the trust of the Russian-speaking population in the Estonian state and its institutions has decreased, the number of Russian-speaking people who feel that they are a part of Estonian people has decreased, etc. Estonians have maintained their reticent attitude towards the participation of the Russian-speaking population in the public sphere.

A trend analysis reveals that integration-related attitudes were becoming generally more positive up to 2005, followed by a steep decline. This may be explained by politicising of relations between ethnic nationalities in recent years that has amplified conflicting attitudes towards integration, i.e. rather than seeing integration as the development of society as a whole, both sides see it through demands and expectations presented to the other side. This monitoring confirms that language requirements and citizenship are the priorities for Estonians, whereas social objectives and a mutual dialogue are mainly relevant for the Russian-speaking population. This in turn gives birth to different understanding of equal treatment, mutual tolerance, assessment of motives and objectives of the other side, etc. This polarisation of various ethnic nationalities shows that the state's opportunities to have an actual influence on integration are diminishing.

2. Financial situation and satisfaction with the lives of the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking population

Over time, the income differences between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking population have somewhat decreased. The main reason for the existing income differences is that there is a significantly smaller ratio of Russian-speaking people with higher education in the highest income group, which indicates their limited access to the best remunerated positions.

The scores of Estonian citizens regarding their personal financial opportunities are almost the same regardless of ethnic nationality, but significantly different from the scores given by the people who do not have Estonian citizenship. At the same time, the scores for the opportunities of Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking population are different by ethnic nationalities that show in-group ethnic solidarity.

3. Education

The transition to Estonian language higher education has largely made Russian language general education an educational dead-end because graduates of Russian-language gymnasiums or secondary schools have limited future choices. This is mostly true in regard to those Russian-speaking young people whose Estonian language skills are not sufficient to continue their education in Estonian language higher education institutions.

The Russian-speaking population feel that transition to partial Estonian language subject education presents several major risks (assimilation, worsening of examination results of pupils of Russian schools and therefore unequal opportunities for further education compared to pupils of Estonian schools, emigration of Russian young people) aside from its advantages. At the same time, it is understood that transition to partial Estonian language education should take place much earlier than currently (preferably in kindergarten or primary school at the latest). A definite preference is given to those Estonian language kindergartens where all the children are together and where there are assistant kindergarten teachers who speak the language of the children of other ethnic nationalities. It is not that the Russian-speaking population hold a negative attitude towards education in the Estonian language. Poorly prepared transition to partial Estonian language education has fuelled their fears and feelings of alarm.

4. Language skills

The Estonian language skills of the Russian-speaking population have gradually been improving over the past 20 years and have become functionally diverse, because their self-expression, writing and reading skills have improved.

In this regard, there are prevalent two tendencies. Firstly, the integrative purpose of Estonian language learning was at its highest in 2005 but has now significantly reduced, i.e. learning Estonian is not considered sufficient enough to achieve mutual trust and an equal position with Estonians (respectively 38% and 23% of the respondents agree that it increases trust and helps to achieve an equal position). Secondly, the utilitarian purpose of Estonian language learning has been maintained and it has strengthened, i.e. people feel that they need Estonian language to get or retain a (good) job.

Consequently, the instrumental values (better employment and education opportunities) of learning the Estonian language should be emphasised in the integration policy and a greater emphasis should be put on political and socio-economic integration in the integration process as a whole.

5. Communication between ethnic nationalities and attitudes

Contacts between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking population are relatively limited: a third of Estonians have more frequent occasional contacts with the Russian-speaking population compared to almost half of Russian-speaking population that have everyday communication experience with Estonians. People from different ethnic nationalities mostly communicate in job settings, while social networks outside work environment are in their ethnic nationality group.

The Estonians hold a significantly more reticent attitude towards another ethnic nationality, which is measured as a readiness to share personal space with people from other ethnic nationality. Among the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking population, a reticent attitude is more characteristic in a younger age group, and also with people from Tallinn. There exists a relationship between the frequency of personal contacts and attitudes: people that have more frequent contact with another ethnic nationality, especially among the Estonians, have a much more positive attitude.

Different ethnic nationality groups discern relations between ethnic nationalities differently: only 1/3 of Estonians believe that Russian-speaking people are loyal to the Estonian state and support its development, whereas most of the Russian-speaking respondents (80%) believe that their group is loyal to the Estonian state. While most

Russian-speaking residents still hold the view that integration in Estonian society also requires readiness and effort on the part of Estonians, the number of Estonians who have the same viewpoint has decreased almost 20% (from 80% to 61%) in the past eight years. In the opinion of Estonians, the difference in the lifestyle of Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking people has diminished (61% considered it different in 2000, 49% in 2008), while in the view of Russian-speaking respondents it has increased (42% – 57%).

The analysis of attitudes regarding relations between ethnic nationalities confirms that the most important target groups of integration policy should be young Russian-speaking people with undetermined citizenship and residents of Tallinn. As for Estonians, more emphasis should be given to increased awareness of the needs and opportunities in active participation in the integration process.

6. Access to information and media use

The poor level of knowledge about what is happening locally, in Estonia, and worldwide are mainly highlighted by less educated and lower status Russian-speaking respondents, of whom far more do not follow Estonian language media and access to information cannot solely be catered for with the printed word. A Russian-language television channel would be a good solution. A Russian-language television channel would be very important from the point of greater accessibility to practical information necessary for everyday life. More than 70% of the Russian-speaking population says that there is a great necessity for such a solution and most Estonians understand this need.

7. Citizenship

Between 2000 and 2008, major changes have occurred in regard to preferences in choosing citizenship. While there was a noticeable growth trend in preference for Estonian citizenship from 2000 to its highest point in 2005 (74%), only half of people that were not citizens (51%) wanted to have Estonian citizenship in 2008. While 16% of people who did not have citizenship did not want to have any citizenship in 2000, with their percentage dropping to 7% by 2005, the percentage once again increased to 16% in 2008. 5% of the respondents with undetermined citizenship wanted to have Russian citizenship in 2000 and 11% in 2005, but their ratio has grown to 19% in 2008.

Estonians' attitude towards increasing the number of citizens under the simplified procedure has changed over time. While 18% of Estonians did not agree in giving citizenship to any potential target group the under simplified procedure in 2000, the portion of respondents had dropped to 8% in 2008. 46% of Estonians agree to giving citizenship under the simplified procedure to people born in Estonia.

The analysis shows that the division of the Russian-speaking population as Estonian citizens, persons with undetermined citizenship and Russian (and other countries) citizens primarily reflects their different ability to adapt and strategies to manage their life in Estonian society. Those who are more active and able to adapt have obtained Estonian citizenship. Consequently, the Estonian Citizenship Act is a kind of amplifier of natural choice, providing more opportunities to those more capable and causing people with less motivation to lose their opportunities.

The strengthening position of educated Russian-speaking people who are Estonian citizens in the labour market and their high self-image increases their justified expectations to have more say in Estonian society. Failure to satisfying this expectation

strengthens distrust and protest identity, which is spreading among the whole Russian-speaking community. Subsequently, a much stronger inclusion of naturalised citizens is a very important integration policy objective.

8. *The feeling of we-ness and state identity*

Building the feeling of we-ness to link Estonians and the Russian-speaking population based on local identity holds great potential. To start building state identity based on local identity also offers considerable potential. The state identity of the Russian-speaking population is largely influenced by their ethnic identity and historical links to Russia or other parts of the former Soviet Union. The analysis confirms that building a strong state identity in national minorities requires avoiding the suppressing of their ethnic identity and including them in shaping a strong common state identity.

Translation:

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