

Integrating Estonia's Russian-Speaking Population: Findings of National Defense Opinion Surveys

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Foreword

By Tomas Jermalavicius

Almost a quarter of a century has already passed since Estonia restored its independence in 1991. Throughout the entire period, integrating Estonia's sizeable ethnic Russian-speaking minorities into the framework of a rebuilt state and nation has been a political, social, economic, and national security imperative. As the continuous monitoring and research presented here shows, so far the outcome has been mixed; given the present-day international context, this should be cause for concern. Despite all the progress visible in such metrics as the increasing number of ethnic non-Estonians holding Estonian citizenship, Estonia remains home to two quite separate societies living side by side but with only superficial connections between them. They reside in separate information spaces and hold divergent perceptions and perspectives not just about each other, but also about the Estonian state and its history, its threat environment, and its national security policies. Since these two Estonias do not fully trust one another, when security developments put pressure on the country they tend to drift to opposing poles—especially if the factor of Russia is involved.

Even more worrying is that many Estonian policymakers have not realized until now that language proficiency and citizenship status are poor indicators of how well ethnic non-Estonians have been integrated within the state. On the one hand, there are those who do not hold Estonian passports or speak fluent Estonian, but are nonetheless ready to protect the country as their home. On the other hand, a cohort has emerged of ostensibly integrated young ethnic non-Estonians with good Estonian language skills who feel alienated, excluded, and at best distrusted if not tacitly discriminated against. There also too many ethnic non-Estonians who think they are being coerced into passively accepting various policies aimed at facilitating integration—a concept that for them means assimilation and complete erasure of their ethnic identity.

In essence, the state of Estonia and ethnic Estonians are struggling to “win the hearts and minds” of Russian-speaking minorities. This would be a matter of serious concern even if the international situation were peaceful and stable, given the importance of cohesion and viability of a society to the long-term prospects and resilience of a state. However, in light of Russia's neo-imperial resurgence and instrumental use of Russian-speaking minorities in its multifaceted aggression against neighbouring states, it is almost an existential issue. The attitudes and loyalties of the ethnic non-Estonians have become a centre of gravity in the battle for Estonia's future as an independent and sovereign nation, integrated into Western space of institutions and values, and remaining with its current borders and democratic political order intact. Ethnic integration policies that might have served Estonia well in the 1990s, while putting the country on the completely irreversible track towards integration into NATO and the EU, are now becoming a strategic vulnerability. Alas, in the midst of Russia's war against Ukraine, Estonia's officials adopted a denialist line that maintains that “all is well with our Russians”.

The present state of affairs offers plentiful opportunities for the regime in the Kremlin to deepen and exploit ethnic divisions and integration failures to its own

benefit. Russia's formidable propaganda machine aims to shape, in overt and covert ways, the perceptions of ethnic non-Estonians—a task at which it largely succeeds. While it finds a readily receptive audience among the older generation, it is also increasingly targeting young people born and educated in independent Estonia but still profoundly influenced by the views of their parents or teachers born during the Soviet era. The Kremlin seeks to radicalize and direct these young people against the strategic interests of Estonia – and against their own prosperous and peaceful future.

In 2007, in the aftermath of the Bronze Soldier Night, Estonia's policymakers got a wake-up call about the need to change something in their overall policy approach to integrating ethnic minorities. They duly included societal cohesion among national security priorities, declaring the need for a greater state presence and visibility in the country's northeast—and then promptly hit the snooze button. Unfortunately, as it turned out, it is not enough to draft elegant strategies, expend state funds through artificial integration projects, or snub the Kremlin by declaring that these are “our Russians, not yours”. Winning over hearts and minds goes far deeper than this; it requires making a genuine, meaningful, and sustained effort by a majority to reach out to a minority in order to understand it, sympathize with it, and address its needs, aspirations, grievances, anxieties, and concerns. Continuously ignoring it or paying lip service to it, in the hope that time will eventually settle the problem, is no longer a strategic option. Yet, it is still a default mode in which Estonia's government and many ethnic Estonians operate with regards to the country's Russian-speaking minorities.

Fortunately, over the last 14 years, Estonia has accumulated a wealth of knowledge about security perceptions and attitudes towards national defense and state institutions held by ethnic Estonians and non-Estonians. In this paper, Juhan Kivirähk, a former ICDS senior research fellow of ICDS and a leading figure in Estonian sociology, utilizes his detailed experience in carrying out the surveys themselves to identify key lessons learned from this body of work. He presents a decade-long overview of the similarities, differences, and changes in those perceptions and attitudes, while also offering some valuable insights about their drivers. His findings and conclusions echo the concerns expressed in this foreword—but also offer a glimmer of hope.

For one, a vast majority of male citizens of both ethnic Estonian and non-Estonian origin, and even majority of non-citizens, are prepared and willing to actively take part in defending Estonia in the event of an armed attack by a foreign power. Despite all the differences and mutual grievances, they all share the same home called Estonia and are ready to protect it, if worst comes to worst. This forms a good basis for a whole-of-society approach to national defense in the short term as well as a resilient state and society in the long term, but the strength, depth and credibility of this resolve are bound to be tested in the coming years by the forces that wish nothing good upon this country. Unless Estonia rises to meet the challenge of ethnic integration properly, those forces will have a greater chance of succeeding than we would like to admit to ourselves.

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INTRODUCTION

Non-Estonians and non-citizens in Estonia

Five months before Estonia regained independence in February 1991, practically 100% of ethnic Estonians expressed support for the complete restoration of independence. By contrast, only one-third of the Russian-speaking population shared this view, while more than one-half indicated they preferred to see Estonia continue as a part of the Soviet Union, albeit with somewhat greater autonomy.¹

It is thus understandable that after independence was restored, the Russian-speaking community was viewed with wariness. Given the continued presence of the Russian Armed Forces in Estonia and the significant support that anti-independence forces enjoyed in Estonia (groups like Interfront, the United Council of Workers' Collectives, and the Soviet Communist Party were banned, but their supporters of course remained), it could have proven disastrous for the country's future had Estonia adopted the *carte blanche* citizenship law option (automatic citizenship for all permanent residents as of inhabitants). (Incidentally, many of the leaders of today's "Russian compatriots" organizations (Lebedev, Ilyashevich, Zarenkov and others) emerged from the early organizations that opposed Estonian sovereignty.)

Instead of giving all inhabitants automatic citizenship, Estonia allowed those who registered as supporters of Estonian independence to become naturalized under a simplified procedure. In the period from 1992 to 1996, some 90,000 non-citizens became naturalized Estonian citizens in this manner (see figure 1).

The remaining non-citizens were given the option of deciding whether to apply to become naturalized citizens, opt for the citizenship of their country of origin, remain living in Estonia with unspecified citizenship, or repatriate to their country of origin. From 1992-1995, the Estonian population decreased by over 100,000² precisely due to the latter type of voluntary emigrants (many were Soviet Army servicemen and their families who left in 1994).

The architects of 1990s citizenship policy no doubt presumed that the question of citizenship would be rapidly resolved on these terms. In this period, it wasn't the actual integration of the Russian-speaking community that was seen as the main problem but rather, the manner in which the Citizenship Act, Aliens Act and Language Act would govern the community's legal status and social position.

As it turned out, it was not possible to solve the problem of statelessness in this way – Estonia still has a noteworthy number of people with unspecified citizenship (over 90,000 or 6.7% of the population) and it also has the greatest number of Russian citizens of the three Baltic countries (over 100,000, precise figures not disclosed by the Russian Embassy).

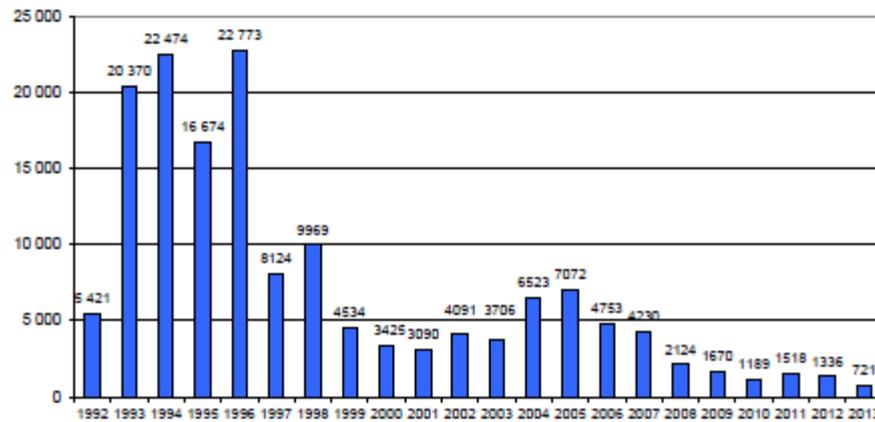
¹ Juhan Kivirähk, „From the singing revolution to the referendum of independence“ – *Emor Reports* Vol 1/No 1 (July-September 1991), p. 14

² Statistics Estonia database, www.stat.ee

The rate of naturalization has fallen significantly. In 2013, only 1,390 people adopted Estonian citizenship (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1—naturalization from 1992-2013³

Number of persons naturalized as Estonian citizens from 1992 through the first half of 2013 (N=155,787)



The figure shows the result for the first half of 2013, while the naturalization total for the entire year amounted to 1,309 people

Integration of Soviet-era immigrants into Estonian society began to be discussed in earnest in the latter half of the 1990s, largely at the behest of European institutions. At first, the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities guided the discussion, while by the end of the decade, integration related activities were influenced more by Estonia's course toward EU accession. A positive aspect of this process was the realization that systematic policy and consistent efforts were needed for integration; unlike prosperity in a liberal market economy, integration isn't spread by an invisible hand.

Yet integration efforts in this period remained spotty and one-off affairs, aimed at rote compliance with EU requirements. On one hand, this spurred a more active approach to certain aspects of the integration problem (reducing the number of stateless people, bringing language requirements into line with EU standards), but left many real problems up in the air, such as social cohesiveness, civics education, and intercultural dialogue, among others. Indeed, the Praxis/Emor/Tartu University report *Integration Monitoring 2011* labels this period "formalism."⁴

The state (represented by the Ministry of Population and Ethnic Affairs) was the key player in this "formalist" integration policy; integration processes were managed on a project basis. The initiator, evaluator, and oversight body for the projects was the Non-Estonians Integration Foundation, in which the state had a stake and which was steered by the government. As this policy left the "integreees" in a passive role, no inclusive civil society partner emerged within the minority community itself. As a result, groups and institutions appeared that amplified a mood of protest against integration policy as such.

³ Police and Border Guard Board website; <http://www.politsei.ee/dotAsset/61217.pdf>

⁴ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, pp. 24-25; available at: http://www.kul.ee/webeditor/files/integratsioon/Integratsiooni_monitooring_2011_ENG_lyhiversioon.pdf

In 2001, 26 prominent sociologists wrote an open letter titled “Two Estonias”⁵, drawing attention to points where society’s cohesiveness was fraying. Cohesiveness, it should be said, is not just an empty political slogan; in the social sciences, it is a thoroughly developed concept. The increasing level of individualization in society and people’s atomization into weakly or completely disconnected groups weakens society as a whole and diminishes its sustainability. A cohesive society is more effective. A society bound by common values and mores, and which has an identity as a unified country, is more resilient⁶ and less vulnerable.

One weak point in Estonian society is the rift between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities. Estonia is divided into two linguistic communities, two different information spaces, and— in spite of the immense resources poured into integration programs – no working dialogue, common values, or shared perception of the state have been established. Moreover, not only have politicians not dealt with the problem, but the rift has at times been deliberately used by political parties to mobilize supporters.

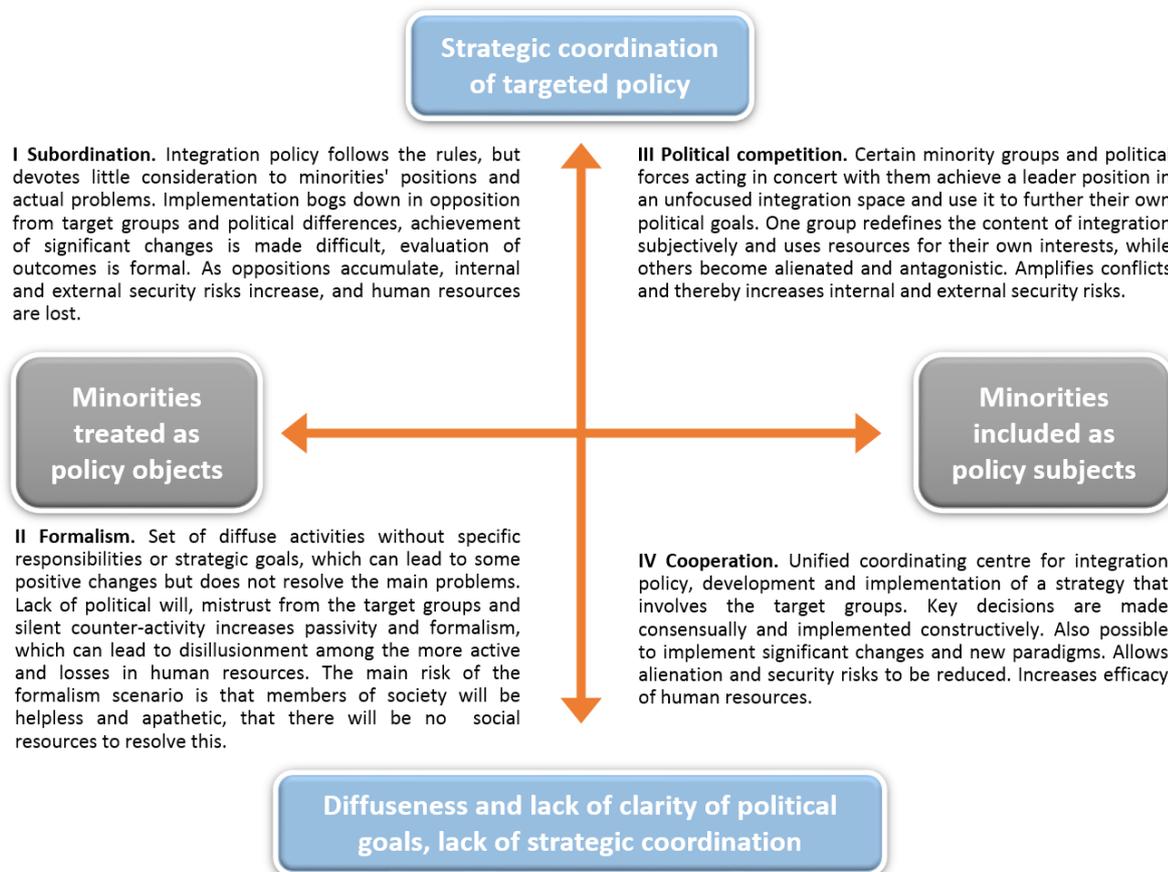
Today a large part of the more linguistically proficient, affluent, and active Russian-speaking community has become successful citizens. However, the less affluent or less active are becoming an excluded and alienated group of stateless people, with the rift between the groups having, if anything, grown deeper. It is easy to convert naturalized citizens’ ambitions on the one hand, and protest and disillusionment among the excluded segments on the other, into political capital. This tendency is characterized in Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011 as a “competition” scenario, the most vivid examples being the political processes in Tallinn and in Ida-Viru County (northeastern Estonia) (see figure 2).

⁵ Kaks Eestit“ -Sotsiaalteadlaste pöördumine, [Two Estonias—An Appeal by Social Scientists] *Postimees*, 23 April 2001

⁶ See Tomas Jermalavičius and Merle Parmak Defense, *Towards a Resilient Society, or Why Estonia Does Not Need ‘Psychological Defense’*, ICDS Occasional Paper (Tallinn: International Centre for Defense Studies, 2012), available at

http://icds.ee/fileadmin/failid/Tomas%20Jermalavicius%20and%20Merle%20Parmak_Towards%20a%20Resilient%20Society.pdf

FIGURE 2 – Integration policy scenarios outlined in Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011⁷



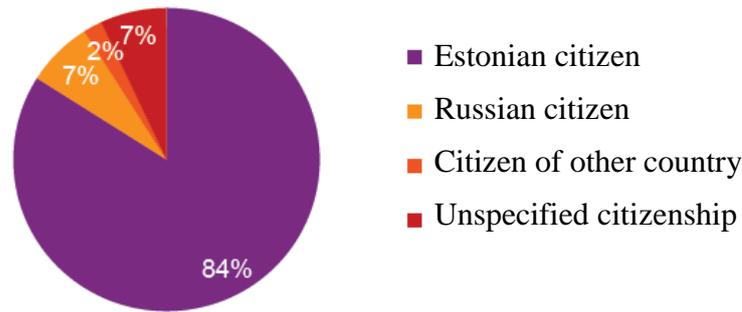
An inconsistent integration policy creates distrust among non-ethnic Estonians with regard to other actions taken by the state, leading to low levels of trust in government authority and in government institutions as a whole. It also leads to non-Estonians holding different views on national defense issues, among other effects.

Current status of integration.

Today people with unspecified citizenship (stateless persons) account for less than 7% of the population. According to the Population Register, the Estonian population has the following structure by citizenship:

⁷ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, p. 25

FIGURE 3—Estonian population structure by citizenship⁸



Although holding Estonian citizenship should be a precondition for greater integration with Estonian society, in actuality there is no neat one-to-one relationship here. For this reason, Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011 included indices that gauged linguistic, political, and social integration, with the values for each combined using cluster analysis to generate integrated clusters that describe five different integration patterns. A 3-D visualization of the relative position of each cluster and along the three axes of integration is shown in figure 4.⁹

Cluster A – “successfully integrated” – describes a consistently strong level of integration in all three dimensions; 21% of respondents are in this category

In **Cluster B**, a strong civic relationship is central, which means that integration is strong along the legal/political dimension yet weaker with regard to language. Sixteen percent of respondents fell into this cluster. The analysis terms this group “Russian-speaking Estonian patriot.”

Cluster C represents people with good linguistic proficiency but weaker civic identity and 13% of respondents are placed in this group. As cluster C respondents are typified by a critical view of both Estonian and Russian policy and a more active than average alternative political participation (public meetings, demonstrations, discussions, online petition drives, etc.), this group was termed “Estonian-speaking and critical-minded.” This group includes, for instance, young people who graduated from school in Estonia and gained language proficiency and citizenship, but who have experienced problems realizing their high expectations or who have encountered exclusionary and mistrustful attitudes on the job market, from officialdom, in statements from politicians, or in the Estonian language media. We need only look at the “Bronze Night” experience - the April 2007 riots in Tallinn – to see how these attitudes and feelings can be exploited.

Cluster D is the “relatively unintegrated,” and describes predominantly people with unspecified citizenship who have weak language proficiency and who display a greater level of activity only in local affairs. This group included 28% of respondents.

Cluster E, the “unintegrated,” is made up largely of people with Russian citizenship, of whom the predominant share are older respondents (22% of all respondents)

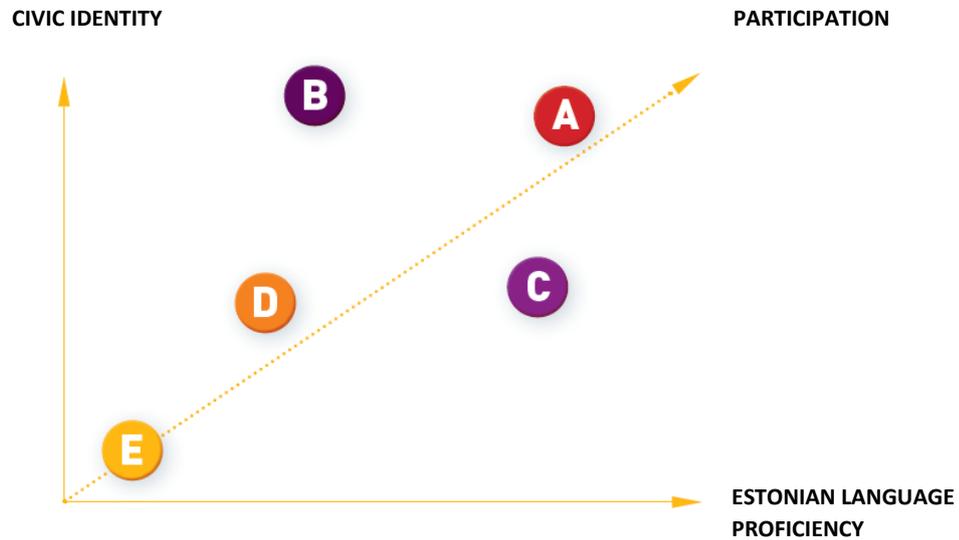
⁸ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, p. 10 -

http://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/kum_integratsiooni_monitooring_2011.pdf

⁹ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, pp. 9-10.

Thus the percentages of the relatively and completely unintegrated (clusters D and E) add up to fully one-half of the Russian-speaking population.

FIGURE 4 – Distribution of Russian-speaking population into integrated clusters¹⁰



The degree of integration is a key factor in shaping socio-political attitudes. There is reason to believe that the respondent's (objective and subjective) relationship with the state plays an important role in shaping attitudes toward national defense. Whereas Estonian-speaking respondents are predominantly Estonian citizens, the Russian-speaking respondents can be either Estonian citizens, foreign nationals (principally of the Russian Federation), and stateless persons.

Public opinion on general issues that do not affect people's daily lives is predominantly influenced by the mass media. And thus the main factor that determines divergent views on national defense issues is often not directly correlated with respondents' citizenship or degree of integration but with their main language of interaction – and the accompanying media environment in that language that shapes respondents' views and attitudes. The kind of information received and accepted by respondents in the media sphere is to a significant extent determined by individuals' preconceived notions – which information outlets they consider trustworthy or untrustworthy.

¹⁰ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, pp. 9-10.

FINDINGS OF SURVEYS ON PUBLIC OPINION AND NATIONAL DEFENSE

Since 2000, a total of 35 surveys have been conducted in the Public Opinion and National Defense series: three each year for the first 5 years, and then twice per year thereafter.¹¹

The questionnaire consists of the following logically interconnected groups of characteristics:

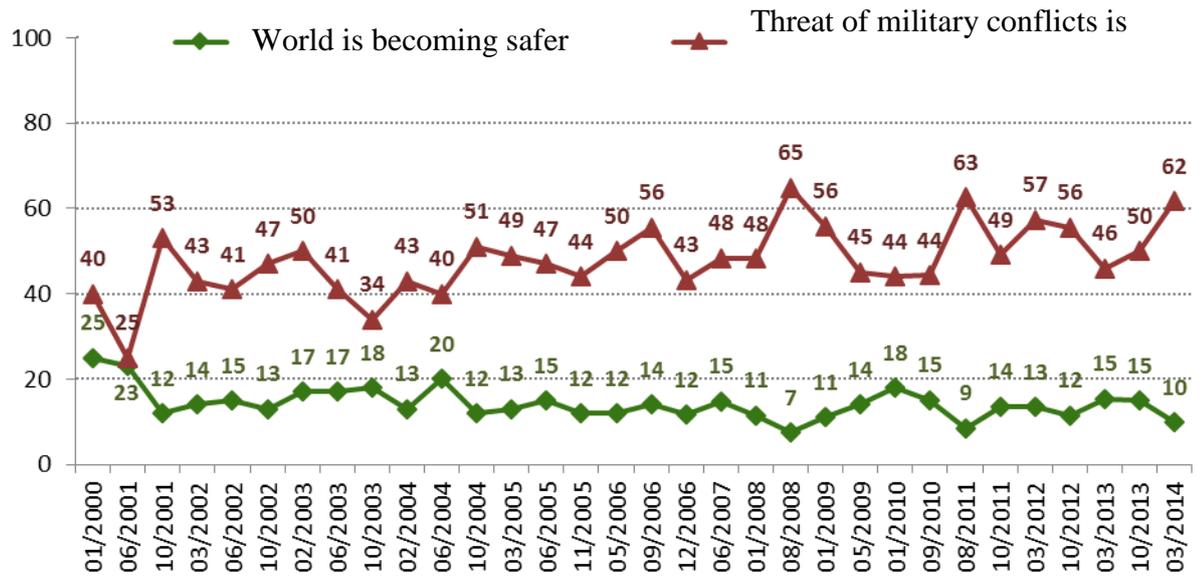
- Opinions on the current state of security in the world and in Estonia, as well as on the primary factors jeopardizing Estonian security. It can be assumed that national defense issues are more important for people who are concerned about Estonian and international security.
- Estonia's primary security guarantees: the study attempts to determine how much stock is placed in collective defense as the solution for ensuring Estonia's security, to what extent development of the national defense forces is prioritized, and how important development of relations with other countries is considered.
- Attitudes toward NATO membership and, opinions regarding the likelihood of NATO intervention if Estonia is attacked.
- Confidence in Estonian state institutions, including the Defense Forces and the voluntary Defense League (Kaitseliit).
- Passive and active will to defend Estonia.
- Attitude toward the Estonian national defense system (financing, missions abroad, women's military service, national defense instruction in schools, etc.)

World situation and threats confronting Estonia.

The international security situation has been predominantly seen as negative since the events of September 2011 by both Estonians and Russian-speaking respondents. Still, Estonians' concern about international security has been somewhat greater. Spring 2014 was no exception: Estonian-speaking respondents were more pessimistic than Russian-speakers regarding the international situation. Two-thirds (67%) of the Estonian-speaking community believed that the risk of military conflicts around the world was increasing, while the corresponding figure for Russian-speakers was 49%.

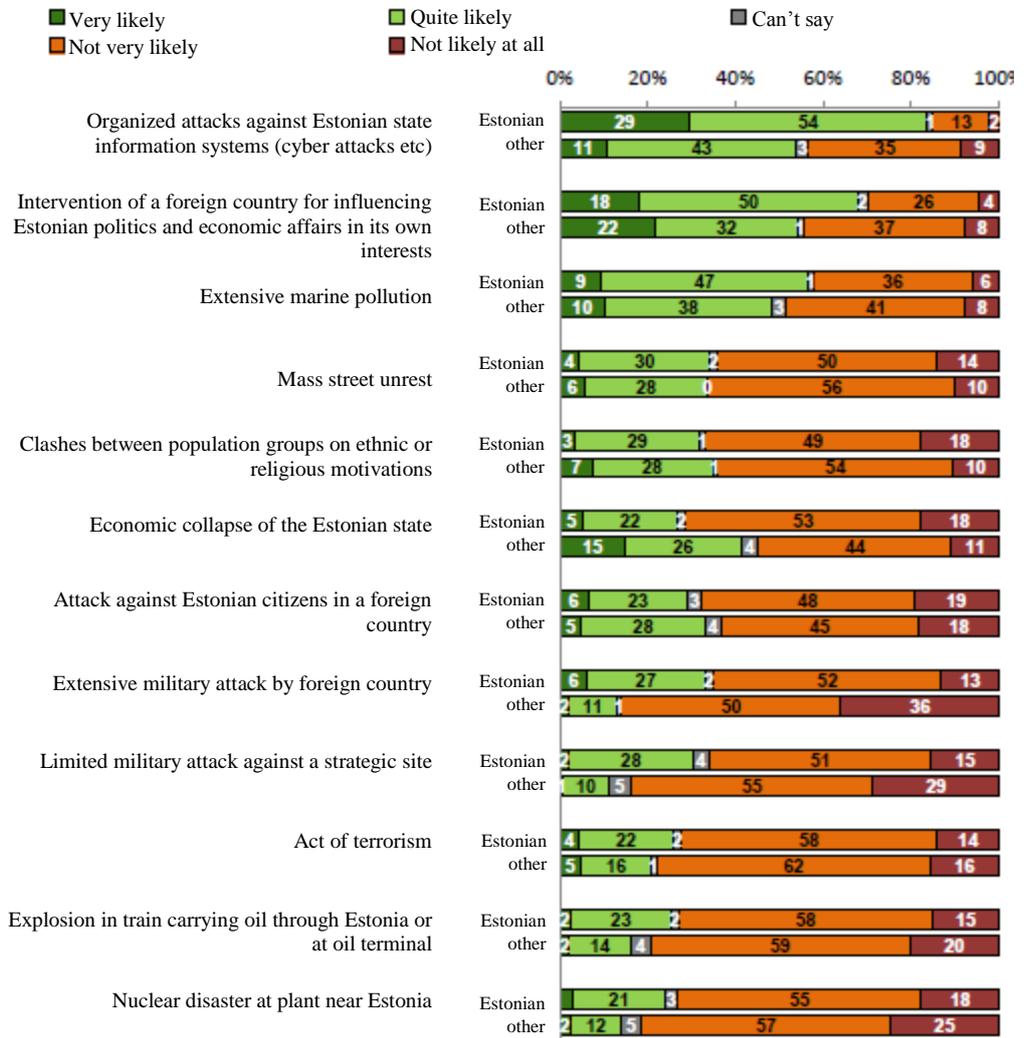
FIGURE 5—World situation in the decade ahead; comparison of 2000-2014 (all respondents)

¹¹ Summaries of these public opinion surveys can be found on the Ministry of Defense website at <http://www.kmin.ee/et/avalik-arvamus>



Compared to Russian-speakers, Estonian-speakers also see the country's own security risks as being greater. This holds true especially for opinions regarding the probability of a foreign invasion, which Russian-speaking respondents consider much less likely; they also see most of the other risks as less significant as well.

FIGURE 6—Perceived likelihood of risks that pose a threat to Estonia in the near future (spring 2014)



The biggest differences in Estonian-speakers' opinions with respect to those of Russian-speakers lie in perceptions of cyber attacks, military attacks, and economic collapse. Estonian speakers consider the first two more likely, while Russian-speaking respondents say the latter are more likely.

Considering that good relations with Russia are paramount for Russian-speaking respondents (see next section of this report), this also explains why they consider a potential military attack unlikely. Russia-perpetrated aggression against Estonia is not considered likely by Russian-speaking respondents, who see media discussion about it as pointless hysteria (which in turn reduces their confidence in Estonian media and the Estonian state).

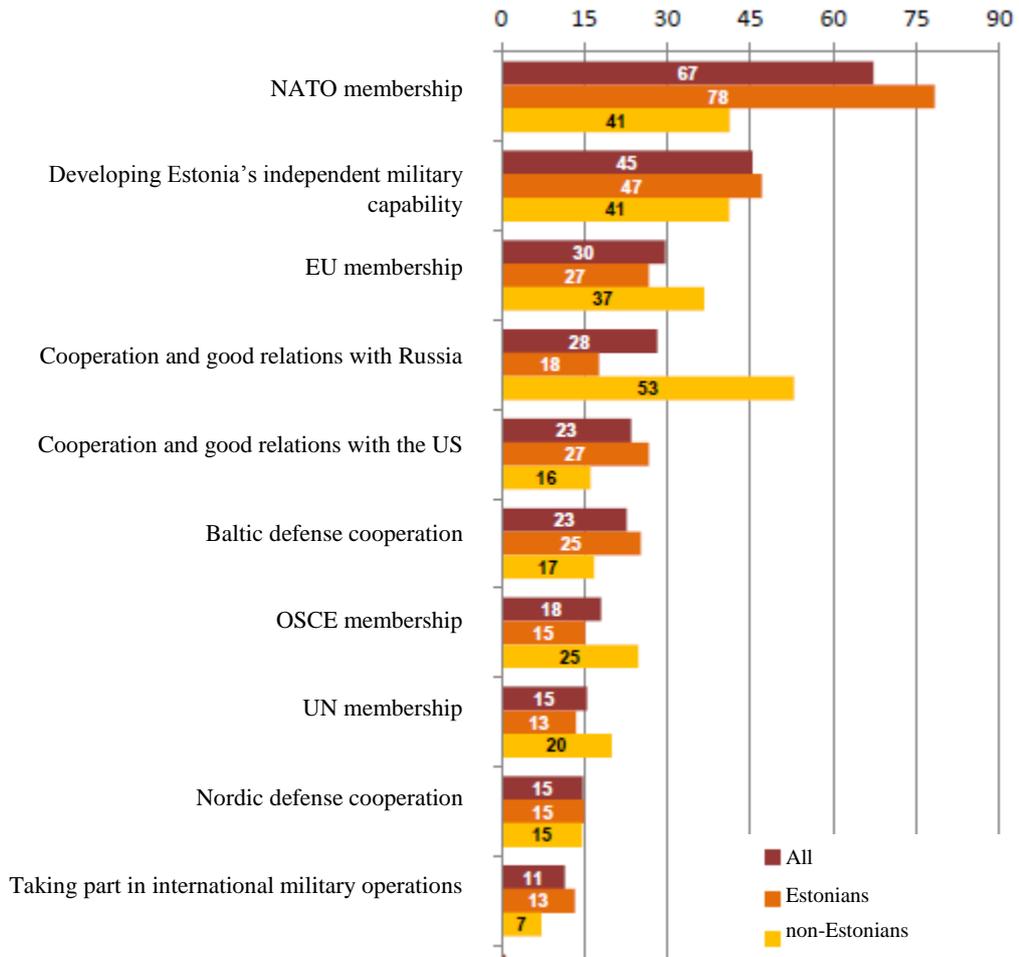
Estonia's primary security guarantees.

As to Estonian security guarantees, Estonian and Russian speakers' opinions clearly diverge. For Estonian-speaking respondents, NATO membership is seen as the most important factor: 78% mention it as one of three important security guarantees, compared to only 41% of non-Estonian-speaking inhabitants. A majority of the latter (53%) views cooperation and good relations with Russia as the main security guarantee, versus 18% for Estonian-speaking respondents.

The second most important security guarantee for Estonian speakers is the development of Estonia's independent defensive capability (47%); this is not much different from the figure for Russian-speakers, of whom 41% consider it important. Russian-speaking respondents consider development of Estonia's independent defensive capacity equally as important as NATO membership – these factors thus rank second and third, after good relations with Russia, for this group.

Compared to Estonians, speakers of languages other than Estonian see membership in non-military international organizations as more important for the purposes of guaranteeing security: the European Union (37% vs 27%), the OSCE (25% vs 15%), and the UN (20% vs 13%). Estonian speakers, on the other hand, put more stock in cooperation and good relations with the United States of America (27% vs 16%) and defense-related cooperation with other Baltic states (25% vs 17%). Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking residents each ascribe the same level of importance to defense related cooperation with the Nordic countries (both 15%).

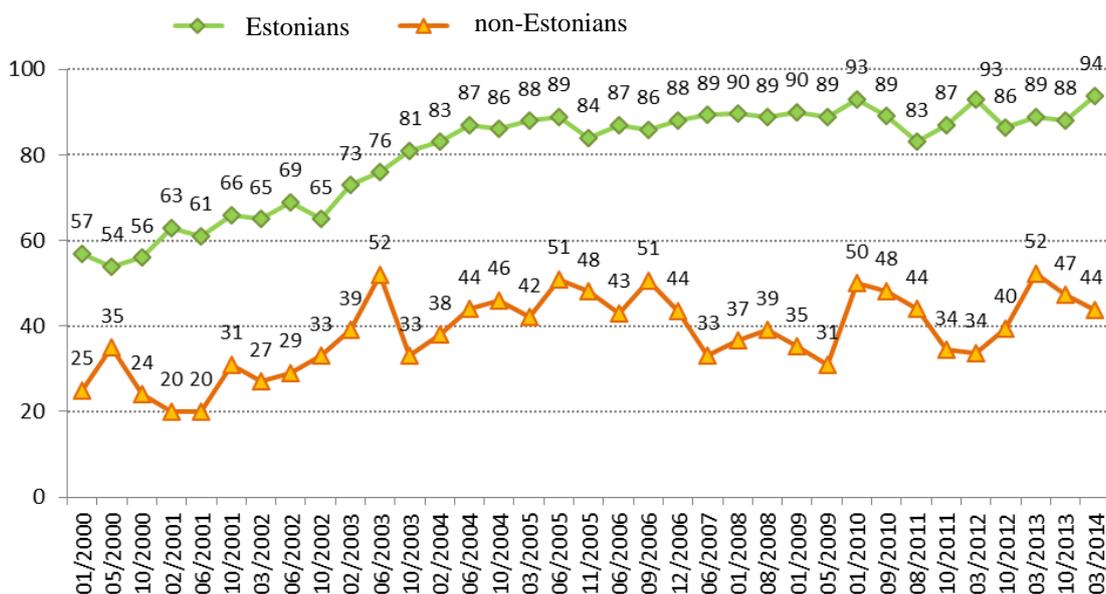
FIGURE 7 – Estonian security guarantees (up to 3 most important could be chosen) in spring 2014



Attitude toward NATO membership.

The primary reason for initiating the opinion monitoring survey was to study the population's attitude toward NATO accession. After membership in the alliance became a reality, surveys included the question of whether the respondent supported NATO membership. Interestingly, the responses to this question have best reflected changes in Russian-speakers' mindsets and attitudes toward national defense matters throughout the entire period under study.

FIGURE 7 – Share of supporters of NATO accession / membership (“definitely “+ “somewhat” support 2000-2014



Up to June 2001, the share of respondents in the general population who supported NATO accession was under 50%; the figure was especially low among Russian-speaking respondents (20%). After September 2001, the international security situation in the world has changed significantly, with a certain rapprochement seen in Russian-NATO relations as well. Since that time, a consistent increase in the trend of support for NATO accession has been seen, which in spite of some decline in support among Russian-speaking respondents, has had a positive direction in Estonian society as a whole.

To determine why the attitude of Russian-speaking respondents toward NATO is volatile, we should look at how the Russian-language media have covered the events that have taken place in domestic policy as well as in international affairs (especially regarding the Alliance).

The sudden drop in support for NATO accession in autumn 2003 compared to the 52% support among the Russian-language population can be linked to the EU accession referendum held in autumn 2003 and the anti-Russia rhetoric that arose in the campaign that preceded it. Even though support for the European Union was even higher among Russian-speaking respondents than it was among Estonians, the calls for greater opposition to Russia heard in media coverage after EU and NATO accession further reduced support among the Russian-speaking population of membership in both organizations. Again, this shows that Russian-speaking respondents view developments in Estonian national defense in terms of effect on relations with Russia. As one stateless person with Estonian citizen children, Narva resident Pavel Valzifer, said in an interview in *Maaleht* newspaper, he and other ethnic Russians living in Estonia do not like to hear only bad news about Russia. "Russia is our mother. What son would bear hearing only ill spoken about his mother?" (*Maaleht*, 17 April 2014)

The worsening in the domestic political environment could also explain the sudden drop in support for NATO in 2007 after the Bronze Night riots, as a result of which the Russian-speaking population's support for all Estonian state institutions fell. The

drops in support in 2008 and 2011, however, are tied to foreign policy factors: the Russia-Georgia war in August 2008; NATO's role in the post-Arab-Spring events in Libya, and NATO and Russia claiming opposite sides in the Syrian civil war.

It is hard to say whether the declining trend in spring 2014 will continue. Russian propaganda on Ukraine-related issues has undoubtedly fostered a fairly frightening image of NATO for less sophisticated TV viewers. Yet the Russian-speaking community is far from being a unified bloc on Ukraine-related issues—indeed, in May of this year, a Tallinn conference of the Russian “Compatriots’ Coordination Council” saw the emergence of a rift on this issue.¹² The organization’s board, led by Sergei Jürgens, withheld support for a declaration submitted by Mstislav Russakov and Aleksandr Kornilov in support of the occupation of Crimea and proposed a vote of no confidence in Russakov and Kornilov. Russian Embassy adviser Vassili Popov interceded to prevent the vote from going ahead; however, in order to push a pro-Kremlin declaration through, Russakov and Kornilov needed the help of an alternative coalition of Russian organizations, made up of such organizations as Nochnoi Dozor (Night Watch), the Russian School in Estonia, the Baltiya information portal, Molodaya Estoniya [Young Estonia], and the Estonian Non-Citizens’ Association, among others).¹³

If we look at how non-Estonians of different age groups view NATO, we see that support for membership is prevalent among younger groups, while opposition to NATO is more solidly rooted among those 40 and up. For instance, in spring 2014 72% of under-20 Russian-speaking respondents were in favor of NATO membership, along with 57% of 20-29-year-olds, 48% of 30-39 year-olds, 44% of 40-49-year-olds (50% were opposed), and under 40% of those 50 and over.

The 40-50 year old age group is also more critical than the average on other issues related to the Estonian state and national defense. These are people who were educated in the Soviet era (and in the Russian language) and reached adulthood in the 1980s; due to the Aliens Act and language and citizenship policy, they faced diminished career options and future outlooks after independence was regained—contrast to their Estonian-speaking contemporaries, popularly known as the “winners’ generation.” These Russian-speaking residents take a fairly distrustful and critical view of the Estonian state and integration policy. It should not be forgotten that the generation makes up a significant share of the parents and teachers of the current school-age youth, and thus has a fairly decisive role in the socialization of the younger generation.

As support for NATO membership in the Estonian-speaking population is much higher than in the non-Estonian linguistic community, Estonians also are more likely to believe that NATO would render direct military assistance if the country faced a military threat (52%; 23% of non-Estonians) or be able to stave off a military conflict (25%; 20% among non-Estonians). Non-Estonians, however are more likely to believe that NATO would stop at political and diplomatic support (26%; 15% of Estonians) or

¹² See <http://www.baltija.eu/news/read/38593> - КС росоотечественников в Эстонии решили згнать из своих рядов сторонниковРоссии; <http://rma.ee/2014/05/regionalnaya-konferentsiya-rossijskih-sootechestvennikov/>

¹³ See <http://baltija.eu/news/read/36972> - В Эстонии учреждён Русский альянс общественных объединений

would not render any assistance to Estonia in the event of military threat (27%, 4% of Estonians).

Trust in state institutions, including Defense Forces and Defense League.

Estonians have a somewhat higher number of contacts with state defense structures than non-Estonian-speaking inhabitants: on the basis of the findings of the spring study, 23% of Estonian speakers have personal contact – as opposed to 9% of Russian-speakers – and 73%/55% have indirect contact (through friends and relatives). Thus Estonian views of national defense are largely predicated on immediate experience than in the case of non-Estonians, whose views are determined more by the media or by arguments advanced in their own social circles.

The population's confidence in the Defense Forces and Defense League has consistently risen during the period under study; Russian-speaking respondents' confidence in these institutions is aligned quite consistently with their attitudes toward NATO. This confirms the hypothesis that opinions expressed with regard to NATO and Estonian defense structures express Russian speakers' general attitude toward the Estonian state and stem from their level of satisfaction with their position in society.

In March 2014, 83% of Estonian inhabitants expressed confidence in the Defense Forces (figure 8). Confidence among Estonian-speaking inhabitants remains much higher than among Russian-speakers – 92% of Estonians and 62% of non-Estonians. The greatest convergence between the levels of confidence expressed by the Estonian and Russian-speaking population in the Defense Forces occurred in 2006, when the difference was 12%. Spring 2007 however saw a general crisis of confidence in the attitude of the Russian-speaking population toward all Estonian state institutions, including the Defense Forces and Defense League (we also saw support for NATO diminish at that point, as noted above).

FIGURE 8 – Confidence in the Defense Forces (completely + somewhat trusts) 2000-2014

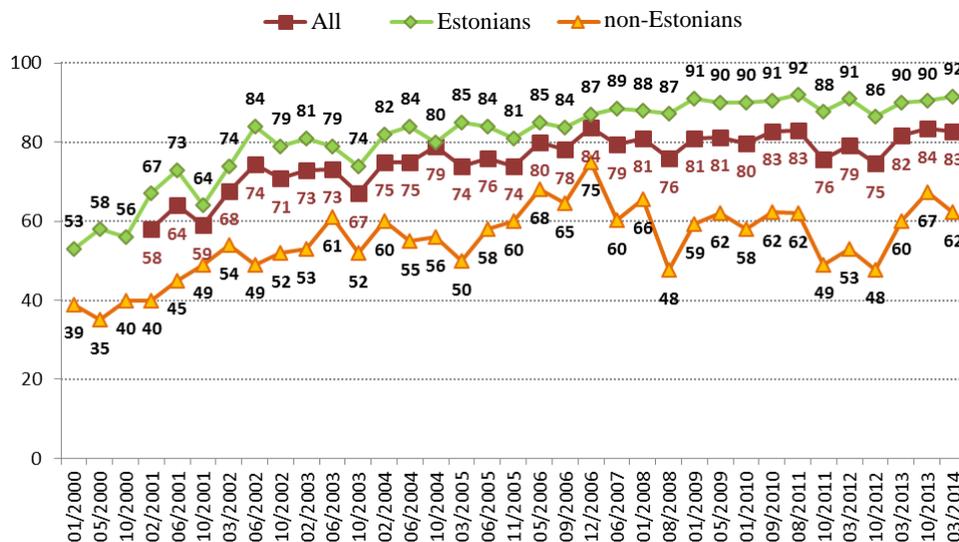
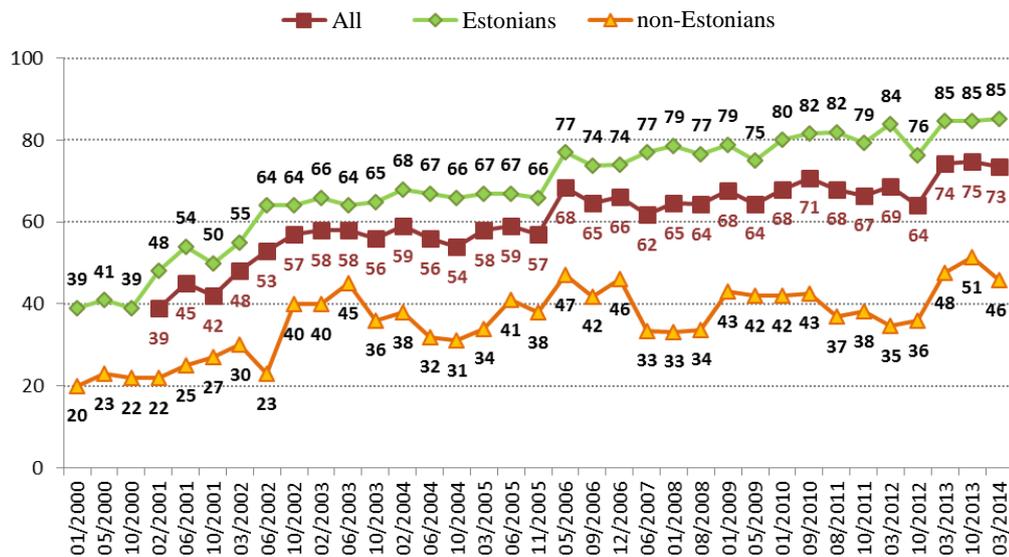


FIGURE 9 – Confidence in Defense League (completely + somewhat trusts) 2000-2014



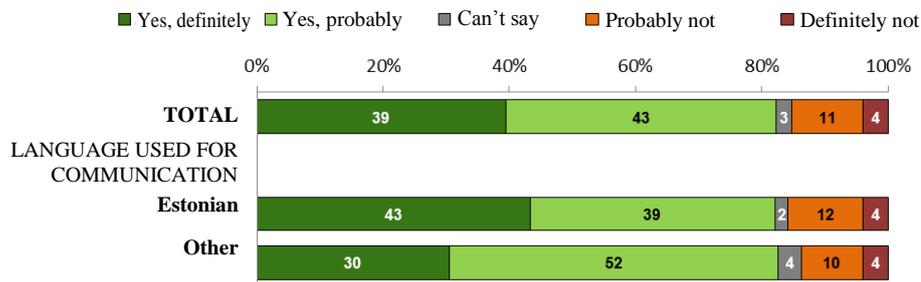
The reversal that took place in 2007 in how the Russian-speaking population saw the Estonian state (which was undoubtedly in turn caused by the attitude of the Estonian state toward the Russian-speaking community) can be seen in the following figures. As late as December 2006, confidence in Parliament was expressed by 62% of the Russian-speaking population (7% more than among Estonians!) and 58% had trust in the Cabinet (64% of Estonians). But as a consequence of the Bronze Night in April 2007, non-Estonians' confidence in the Estonian state's political power fell dramatically – to 38% (Parliament) and 37% (Cabinet).

Will to defend the country

The attitude of the population to defense activities is mapped using two different questions, of which one expresses a so-called “passive” will to defend (“If Estonia should be attacked by another country, should we put up armed resistance in all cases, no matter who the attacker?”) while the other question gauged the active readiness of the respondent to take part in national defense (“If Estonia were attacked, would you be prepared to take part in defense activity according to your abilities and skills?”).

Looking at the trend for the entire study period, we can see that the share of people believing that armed resistance is necessary has risen gradually but consistently. The results of the 2014 study show that people who view armed resistance as a necessity make up a higher percentage among both Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10 – Need to put up armed resistance if Estonia were attacked by another country (spring 2014)

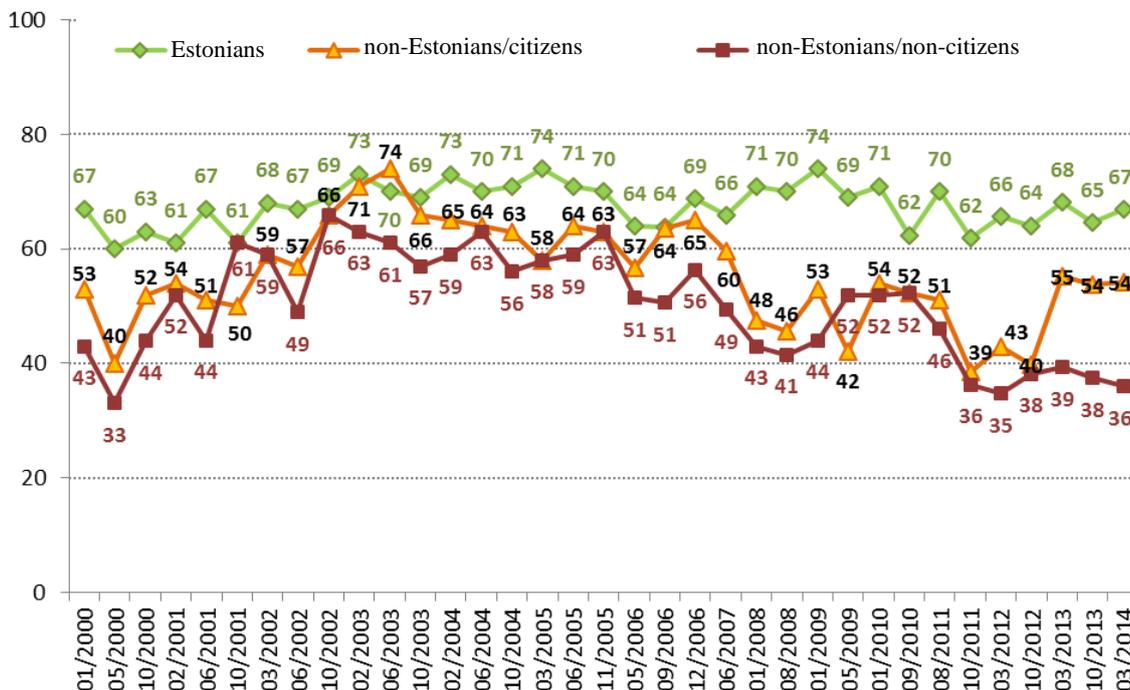


In light of the opinions regarding Estonia's main security risks described above (Russian-speaking respondents did not consider it very likely that Estonia would face a military attack), Estonian- and Russian-speaking respondents have very different understandings of what a foreign invasion would be. The latter group sees it as an abstract and hypothetical risk, while for Estonian-speakers, the potential aggressor would be quite identifiable.

The active will to defend the country among the population is, for understandable reasons, lower than the passive position that there is a need to defend the country. While on the national level, 82% said this spring that armed resistance was necessary, 61% of inhabitants (24% "definitely" and 37% "probably") said they would be prepared to participate themselves. Readiness for active national defense is lower among women and older people who do not envision themselves as playing an active role in military activities; the comprehensive model of national defense is still too new and unfamiliar to the public. As expected, readiness is also lower among non-citizens, who have no obligation to complete compulsory military service.

Looking at how the will to participate in defense has changed over time by ethnicity and citizenship (Figure 11), it is evident that in 2006, non-Estonians' will to defend Estonia was at a level comparable to that of Estonians, but after the Bronze Night events of 2007, the defensive readiness of non-Estonian-speakers – both those with Estonian citizenship and stateless persons – fell significantly. The recent changes are characterized most by the fact that in early 2013, a major improvement was noted in the readiness of non-Estonian citizens to defend Estonia, with the figure returning to the 2010 level. This indicator was just as high in the last two waves of study.

FIGURE 11 – Share of inhabitants prepared to take part in defense activity in the event of an attack



If we look at only males' readiness to take part in defense actions, we obtain numbers that correspond better to the current logic behind taking part in national defense. We see no difference in active will to defend Estonia among male Estonian citizens under the age of 40, regardless of linguistic background.

FIGURE 12 – Share of males prepared to take part in defense actions in the event of an attack, spring 2014

AGE	Estonians, citizens	Citizens, other native language	Non-citizens
15-19	72%	74%	-
20-29	77%	74%	57%
30-39	84%	81%	51%
40-49	87%	71%	63%
50-59	84%	47%	51%
60-74	65%	45%	27%

Other national defense related issues.

1. Defense spending

Close to one-half of the population (47%) in spring 2014 believed that Estonian defense spending should be kept at the current level. 31% backed an increase, while 16% said it should be lower.

Among Estonian-speakers, more respondents favor raising defense spending, while more Russian-speakers favor cuts. In March 2014, 40% of Estonian-speakers and 11% of Russian-speakers said that the volume of defense spending should be raised, while 9% of Estonian and 31% of Russian-speaking respondents were in favor of spending cuts. The share of Estonians who favored cuts stayed at a stable 9-12% in the 2009-2011 period, rose to 15% in 2012 and is now back down to 9%, with a corresponding increase in those who answered that spending should be kept at the current level (45%). The share of people who are in favor of defense spending cuts has decreased among Russian-speakers in recent studies, with the percentage supporting no change in current spending levels has increased (51%).

2. Conscription vs professional defense forces

In March 2014, 83% of the population supported maintaining the current system of professional Defense Forces and a reserve army made up of those who have completed conscription.

Among Russian-speaking respondents, there were relatively more in favor of abandoning conscription and changing to an exclusively professional military (19% and 11%, respectively) but over half a year, support among non-Estonians for a professional military dropped 11 percentage points. By age, we see that younger respondents tend to favor transition to a professional military, with about one in five (19%) of those aged 15-29 supporting this option.

3. Women in military service

Opinions regarding women in the military differ significantly according to linguistic background. In the March 2014 study, 77% of Estonians said that women should be able to volunteer for military service. 48% thought, they should complete military service under a separate program, with 28% holding that they should serve on the same conditions as young men. Among the Russian-speaking respondents—who tend to favor more traditional gender roles—the predominant position was that women should not take part at all in military service (51%, with only 21% of Estonians sharing this opinion).

4. Participation on missions

Compared to non-Estonians, Estonians expressed more support for participation of defense forces members on international missions (64% of Estonians, 50% of non-Estonians).

5. National defense instruction in schools

Eighty-four percent of the Estonian-speaking population believed that national defense should be taught in schools, compared to 74% of non-Estonians. Among Estonians, support has remained at the same level since 2008, while non-Estonians' views have been quite changeable. Whereas in early 2008, 80% of Russian-speaking inhabitants felt that schools should "definitely" or "probably" offer national defense instruction, by August of the same year, support had fallen by 20 percentage points. In 2009, support rose to 77-78%, and then fell again over the next few years. In the last two years, support has once again been on the rise among non-Estonians.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted above, the Public Opinion and National Defense opinion monitoring series has consisted of 35 surveys carried out since 2000. All of the surveys conducted have revealed significant differences in the views held by Estonian- and Russian-speakers regarding national defense.

Whereas both groups consider the international security situation to be tense, Estonians see the risk of invasion by an external enemy as being higher than do non-Estonians. With regard to Estonian security guarantees as well, Estonian- and non-Estonian-speakers' opinions clearly diverge. For Estonians, NATO membership is the main guarantee of security, while Russian-speaking respondents say the key is to foster good relations with Russia.

Indeed, the Russian Federation factor is the linchpin shaping the national defense views of Estonia's Russian-speaking population: opinions regarding NATO membership and Estonian national defense as a whole are significantly impacted by the current state of Russia-NATO relations and how the Russian mass media covers these relations.

Yet it should be noted that the Russian-speaking community's often negative-tinged attitudes toward NATO do not explicitly show up as a diminished will to defend their country. Like Estonians, Russian-speaking respondents believe that the country must be defended against a hypothetical invasion and younger male Russian-speaking citizens are prepared to participate in national defense, on par with Estonians.

Public opinion surveys are a subset of communication research. The population arrives at its views on a large share of issues pertaining to political processes in social life, including on the issue of national defense, not based on their personal experience but from transferred experience, based on information from trusted information sources and spokespersons. Thus public opinion is considered situational, depending to a significant degree on the current status of discussions taking place in society as well as on events that have actually taken place. The differing attitudes among the Estonian and Russian-speaking community regarding national defense topics reflect not just their different perceptions as to whether they feel that they are a part of the Estonian state but also to a large extent by the different levels of information that they are privy to.

Besides situational factors, a sociological study always attempts to pinpoint how views and behaviors correlate with factors stemming from the social status of the respondents). In the case of Estonian respondents, it is possible to seek and find reasons for different opinions and changes in them – the attitudes are influenced by the respondent's gender, age, education, social status, income level, political worldview, etc.

The attitudes of Russian-speaking respondents have been more volatile, defying structural factors; the background data that describe the respondents' status do not always explain the differences in opinions and the changes therein. For instance, a higher educational level does not have a unidirectional influence on respondents' opinions on NATO membership: in fact we see that the share of both pro- and anti-NATO respondents increases. Yet the respondents' age is one of the parameters that can be more clearly correlated with opinions. Stereotypical Soviet-era views of

NATO's role and the threat the alliance is said to pose do persist among older Russians. Younger ethnic Russians in Estonia are more likely to have similar views to those of Estonians. But here, too – especially after the Bronze Night riots in April 2007 – we see that an opposite shift has taken place and we can trace the emergence of a group critical toward Estonia.

Still, it would be simplistic to stop at the conclusion that public opinion among the Russophone population depends on the message being broadcast by TV programming from Russia. While the reportedly pro-Kremlin Russian-language First Baltic Channel (*Первый Балтийский Канал*) *Pervyi Baltiiski Kanal* is staple television fare for practically all Russian-speakers in Estonia, not everyone digests the views aired there uncritically.

To understand the attitudes of the Russian-speaking population toward social life, it would be beneficial to design an indicator to describe the level of integration into Estonian society. The findings of Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011 help us to do just this: it sets out the different types of integration within the Russian-speaking community and issues recommendations for taking the particularities of these types into account in integration policy.

Integration is a process that lasts several generations, where the forced implementation of political will by an indigenous majority with regard to a minority can lead only to negative consequences. In the doctoral dissertation *Identificational Integration: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation on the Example of Second Generation Russians in Estonia*, Tallinn University researcher Gerli Nimmerfeldt lists the main reasons that non-Estonians are skeptical regarding government integration policy: the Russian-speaking population perceives integration as assimilation pressure and fears the loss of their national identity.¹⁴ If we want all Estonian citizens to form a uniform political nation, we should take these fears into consideration in integration policy. Otherwise we run the risk of pushing Russian speakers into the embrace of Russian compatriots' policy, the goals of which run clearly counter to Estonian interests.

Recommendations:

Both better integration and shaping of views of national defense would be served by providing a functioning Russian-language yet pro-Estonian media sphere to counterbalance the overt propaganda that reaches Estonia from Russia. In creating additional channels for this media sphere, care should be taken to avoid them becoming mere propaganda vehicles themselves. The socialization aspect should be a priority. One important function of such a network should be to facilitate the emergence of trusted opinion leaders from the Russian-language community, people who could maintain a dialogue with counterparts on the Estonian-language side.

Of course, it will not be possible to achieve the desired results solely with better communication (and in any case, the existing government-funded Russian-language station Raadio 4 does have a large listenership). It would be necessary to get Estonian- and Russian-language communities to interact more at a social level, and this is the goal of changes being carried out in the education system, with the

¹⁴Gerli Nimmerfeldt – *Identificational Integration: Conceptualization and Operationalization on the Example of Second Generation Russians in Estonia* - Tallinn University Dissertations on Social Sciences 51: 2011

support of more and more NGOs are working toward as well (implementing national defense subjects more extensively in Russian-language schools, funding programs oriented at cooperation between Estonian-language and Russian-language NGOs, etc.).

It is high time for Estonian citizenship policy to rid itself of its image of being oriented to ethnic exclusion and being unfriendly to outsiders. To do this, various proposals made repeatedly in the past should be weighed: to ease the conditions for obtaining Estonian citizenship by simplifying language requirements for older people, giving children born in Estonia citizenship automatically, and so forth. The guarantee of Estonian security does not lie in conservative citizenship policy, but rather a cohesive state in which people sense a shared identity and solidarity.

Twenty years after the Republic of Estonia was established, in 1938, our country considered itself strong enough to waive the language requirement for naturalization of people who had lived in Estonia for over 10 years. Why couldn't today's Estonia offer citizenship to all 47,000 non-citizens who were born in Estonia? The official language is acquired most successfully when it is a vital need, not when it is an obligation with punitive measures in place if the obligation is not fulfilled.

When the new integration plan is approved by the government, greater emphasis should be laid on involvement and cooperation (see integration policy scenario IV – Cooperation, above). Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011 states the following on the preconditions for implementing this policy:

“First of all, Estonians' support for greater inclusion of the Russian-speaking community in the leadership of Estonian society and economy has become stronger and better-rooted. Second, more than one-third of the Russian-speaking population are [sic] successful, active people with a strong civic identity who can no longer meet the description of an integration policy target group. Yet they still do not feel like they are sufficiently the partners of the Estonian state when it comes to planning and implementing this policy. Third, we should point out that one-fifth of the electorate in general elections is people of non-Estonian ethnicity. They deserve to be offered worthy opportunities by parties to take part in Estonian politics. Whatever the specific substance of the cooperation scenario, the condition for initiating the scenario is that a unanimous and clear national desire and commitment be expressed.”¹⁵

These positions are also in line with a comment by Yana Toom, the first ethnic Russian from Estonia elected to the European Parliament, in the weekly *Sirp*, where she said that the good of the Estonian state depends on “realizing that a society of subjects (Estonian community) and objects (the Russians being integrated) is not democratic or sustainable.”¹⁶

Objects can be turned into subjects and civic identity instilled not only by the educational system and NGO activities but also by the national defense system. National defense instruction in schools was already mentioned as an important factor – implementing it more widely in Russian-language schools is very important for shaping a uniform national identity. Compulsory military service also has an

¹⁵ Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, p. 26

¹⁶ Yana Toom „Võib olla kellegi meelest oleme me tulnukad“ [Maybe in Someone's Mind, We Are the Aliens], *Sirp*, 6 June 2014

important role, and its functions should be seen more broadly than just as part of military training. Studies show that most of the young ethnic Russian men who serve in the military improve their Estonian language skills. It would be important to ensure that they find ethnic Estonian friends there as well, and develop a clear understanding of their role, rights, and responsibilities in the functioning and defense of the Estonian state.

Even though as a member of the EU, Estonia recognizes European multicultural values in its legislation and other standards, daily life tends to be too segregated, with distinctions made between ethnic groups with a different primary language. The common identity that is needed to overcome this differentiation will not arise of its own accord; rather, shaping it will require constant, systematic efforts.

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