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## **Integration of Soviet migrants as a factor shaping identity and citizenship awareness in Estonia**

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### **Introduction: radical changes in the Estonian integration landscape over 10 years**

With the restoration of its independence in 1991, Estonia inherited demographic situation significantly different from the time before the occupation. When the former Soviet Union occupied Estonia in 1940, Estonians made up about 90% of the population. Half century after annexation, Estonians comprised only 62% of the population. Almost one-third of the population could not speak the Estonian language. Furthermore, for most of the non-Estonians, the restoration of independence was unacceptable. Hence, in addition to problems like building up a new state structure and starting the reforms orientated to market economy experienced by all post-socialist countries, the young Estonian state had to find solutions to the problems, tensions and fears caused by ethnic relations.

The efforts of the Estonian Government and various organisations, including many international organisations, helped non-Estonians to adjust to Estonian society and directed them towards integration. Estonia has developed without significant violent ethnic and political conflicts. Nevertheless, by the mid 1990s it became clear that the condition of peaceful co-existence achieved by the two communities no longer satisfied the real interests and needs of either group. Continuing confrontations between Estonians and non-Estonians became a major obstacle to the further development of the country, internal as well as internationally. A new ideology and more radical measures were needed to support and speed up integration. A comprehensive mega-project on ethnic relations was prepared and launched at the Estonian Open Foundation (EOF) in 1997 (Laius, 2000b) to implement such ideas

This, alongside other serious initiatives within Estonian society, transformed the potentially risky demographic situation which had characterised the early 1990s. By the end of the decade it had created a basis for co-operation between the Estonian and Russian communities, at least at the level of political parties. This paper introduces some theoretical principles drawn from the experiences of the integration of minorities in other countries, gives a short survey of the mega-project, and reports on its outcomes as described by sociological and statistical surveys of both non-Estonians and Estonians.

### **Some theoretical ideas drawn from the experience of western countries**

Analysing problems of integration and multiculturalism in the western democracies, Kymlica (2000, p 29) found that for the most of twentieth century ethnicity has been viewed by political theorists as a marginal phenomenon which would gradually disappear with modernisation and thus was not an important topic for the future. Liberal-democratic political theorists have only begun to address issues of secession, nationalism, immigration, multiculturalism, language rights, and indigenous rights in the last few years. Yet, as Kymlica pointed out, ‘... most Western countries have a long (and sometimes bloody) history of dealing with ethnic diversity within a liberal-democratic constitutional framework’ (2000, p 29).

Usually three types of ethnic-cultural minority groups can be found within the western democracies: national/homeland minorities, immigrants, and metics (migrants who are never given the opportunity to become citizens, either because they entered the country illegally or because they overstayed their initial visa, such as the Turks in Germany). Kymlica's analysis shows that in many western countries longstanding attempts to protect the inalienable rights of an aboriginal nation did not succeed. There has been a trend towards a new kinds of nation-building policies (Kymlica, 2000), with different approaches for each type of ethnic-cultural group:

1. for national/homeland minorities, there has been a shift from suppression of minority nationalism to its accommodation, often through some form of multi-nation federalism;
2. for immigrants, there has been a shift from the goal of cultural assimilation to a more pluralist concept of integration, often through some form of multiculturalism;
3. for metics, there has been a shift from the policy of exclusion of metics from society towards the acceptance of metics as a permanent part of society, who are entitled to a regular legal status and to citizenship (Kymlica, 2000, p 44).

Kymlica summarises this: ‘...western countries today exhibit a complex pattern of nation-building constrained by minority rights. On the one hand, the western states remain ‘nation-building’ states: all western states continue to adopt the sorts of nation-building policies ... and no western states have relinquished the right to adopt such policies. On the other hand, these policies are increasingly qualified and limited to accommodate the demands of minorities who feel threatened” (2000, p 45).

From this viewpoint, Estonian policies for integration can be seen as parallel to these emerging western models of multiculturalism. The major difference is that Estonia has to solve these problems from the opposite direction. In the west, immigrants have traditionally been expected to assimilate, and have fought to gain at least minimal forms of institutional recognition for their languages and ethnic identities within the larger society. In Estonia, by contrast, Soviet migrants had acquired a full set of Russian-language public rights and institutional status during the Soviet period, were used to the existence of these, and are fighting to maintain them (Krull, 1998, p 39–40).

Comparing western and Estonian integration policies, Kymlica suggests that there are five interconnected preconditions which will determine the success of western multicultural policies in the paradigm of a nation-building framework (2000, p 51–54).

1. The clarity of rules regarding integration: immigrants need to know precisely what is required of them to be able to be integrated. These rules must clearly state the nature of things that non-Estonians are required to learn and to adopt, and what is not required. Without such clarity, immigrants will suspect that no matter what efforts they make to be accepted, they will never be successful.
2. The terms of integration should be as broad as possible. It is a standard goal of liberal-democratic states to integrate citizens into common societal culture. This is primarily a matter of linguistic and institutional integration, and is not a matter of sharing common habits, customs, religious beliefs, lifestyles, or conceptions of the good.

3. Strong protection against discrimination. It is important that immigrants have faith that if they make efforts to integrate, then members of the larger society will accept them at formal as well as at the informal level.
4. The level of state support for integration. There should be a fair sharing of the costs of integration: if the state requires immigrants to learn the national language and to acquire civic education, it must make it possible for immigrants to learn these.
5. Participation of minorities in the integration policy-process. This is necessary to ensure that immigrants have confidence in the intentions of the policy, especially where there is mistrust between the minority and the larger society.

These five preconditions address the mistrust of immigrants and build their confidence in the future.

### **The mega-project for integration of the Russian-speaking minority into Estonian society**

The radical changes in the integration of non-Estonians into Estonian society in the late 1990s were developed through the efforts of all the interest groups involved. The contribution of many national and international non-governmental organisations, and other foreign experts, was invaluable in the analysis of the demographic situation in Estonia and in the appraisal of the official integration policy that had been introduced at the beginning of the decade. The report on the Forced Migration Project was a warning for the ethnic policy then current in Estonia: ‘...social and political schizophrenia that would weaken any state ... for society with weak democracy and market economy might cause a catastrophe, (Estonia and Latvia. *Citizenship, Language and Conflict Prevention*, 1997, p 71).

The majority of Estonian and non-Estonian experts responsible for integration now realised that the low effectiveness of the old policy was because there was that only one channel that was expected to contribute to the process – the teaching of Estonian. It was now seen as necessary to elaborate, activate and execute a series of much more complex programmes and projects, linked with a shared ideology. A working group was established in the Open Estonian Foundation (EOF) in 1997, with activities based on two leading principles:

- the integration of non-Estonians into Estonian society is an important precondition for realising all the national interests of Estonia in the immediate future, and
- the development of Estonia and the preservation of an Estonian ethos can only be guaranteed by creating a clear perspective for non-Estonians as being an inevitable part of Estonian society (Laius, 2000a, p 21).

During the process of the elaboration of this framework, more specific principles were derived, and six sub-projects were launched. These were:

- Project I** Estonia as a multicultural society: the correction of models of behaviour in inter-ethnic communication
- Project II** Individual and constant study of the Estonian language by Russian children with the help of Estonian families

- Project III** Non-Estonians attending Estonian Universities  
**Project IV** State officials operating in a multicultural environment: training in communication skills  
**Project V** Reflection of ethnic relations in the media  
**Project VI** Monitoring integration of non-Estonians into Estonian society.

As the OEF working group moved this mega-project in a generally accepted direction, the government proceeded to develop its official integration program. The Estonian Integration Foundation was established: it had the task of initiating and supporting different integration projects for non-Estonians and co-ordinating the use of resources in the field. All these measures contributed towards changes in both Estonians' and non-Estonians' perceptions and attitudes towards the issues and the practice of integration.

### **Changes in Estonians' and non-Estonians' integration paradigms as reflected by sociological surveys**

The OEF has initiated and supported surveys of relationships within the nation since 1993. Pettai analysed data from these surveys and derived models of the integration processes for non-Estonians and for Estonians (2000). He divided the non-Estonian process of integration into six phases, and that of the Estonians into five phases (see Table 1).

**Table 1 Development of integration paradigms of non-Estonians and Estonians (Pettai, 2000)**

Phase	Estonians	Non-Estonians
1	Phase of illusions (myths)	Phase of illusions (myths)
2	Passive tolerance (neutral and indifferent attitude)	Adjustment to requirements of Estonian State
3	Conscious tolerance (an attempt to find adequate and pragmatic solutions)	Appreciation of Estonian State
4	Active tolerance (appreciation of non-Estonians = non-Estonians constitute a resource for Estonia)	Development of Estonian-centred outlook on life
5		Active influencing and directing of Estonian society
5/6	Unity (the sense of us)	Development of the sense of us

1. A phase of illusions and myths was characteristic of both groups at the beginning of 1990s. These illusions were:

- for non-Estonians, that all non-Estonians residing in Estonia would automatically receive Estonian citizenship, and that a bilingual country would be preserved; and

- for Estonians, that non-Estonians would leave Estonia; that non-Estonians would learn Estonian very quickly (in 5-6 years) and all problems would thus be solved; and that Estonians would be able to build up the country themselves.
2. A phase of adjustment to Estonian State on behalf of non-Estonians and phase of passive tolerance on behalf of Estonians.
- For non-Estonians, this included a wish to become an Estonian citizen; the active learning of Estonian language; and a wish to serve in Estonian Army. This adjustment phase is still under way: by 1999, 29% of non-Estonians had Estonian citizenship and 18% had Russian citizenship. Of the non-Estonians without citizenship (53% of the total), 71% wished to receive Estonian citizenship, 14% wished to receive Russian citizenship and 11% wished to receive citizenship of some other country (Pettai, 2000, p 72).
  - for Estonians, this phase included acceptance of the fact that non-Estonians will stay in Estonia; and minimal and distanced contacts with non-Estonians. The 1999 survey revealed that practically all Estonians have reached the phase of passive tolerance, typically expressed through indifference towards non-Estonians as opposed to rejection.
3. The phase of appreciation of the Estonian state by non-Estonians, and the phase of conscious tolerance by Estonians
- For non-Estonians, this means getting rid of Russian ideology; the development of trust and security towards the state of Estonia; a feeling that Estonia is interested in the well-being of non-Estonians and willing to help them; and a wish to become loyal citizens. The transition from Phase 2 to Phase 3 is complicated, as less than one-third of non-Estonians have successfully passed through Phase 2 so far. The survey showed that there is only a small percentage of non-Estonians who will learn Estonian and pass the citizenship examination in the next few years. Is it possible for the remaining two-thirds to move into Phase 3 without passing Phase 2? In other words, even without obtaining citizenship, will non-Estonians develop a sense of trust and security towards the country which requires them to live as either as foreigners or as citizens of Russia?
  - For Estonians this phase implies a wish to become more tolerant and to make certain concessions in citizenship policies; a desire to integrate non-Estonians; and an intention to initiate dialogue between Estonians and non-Estonians, including the ability to empathise with the problems of non-Estonians. About two-thirds of Estonians have reached this phase, as is evident from the wish to find pragmatic solutions for the problems of non-Estonians in studying Estonian, in finding jobs and in achieving a sense of security, and so on (Pettai, 2000, p 105).
4. Phase of development of an Estonia-centred outlook on life by non-Estonians, and of active tolerance by Estonians.
- For non-Estonians, this phase would require the continued use of Estonian media channels; valuing the development ideals of Estonian society; development of a new and wholesome vision of Estonia and Estonians; worrying about and feeling responsible for Estonia's well-being; and a wish to contribute to the direction of the development of Estonia in as many areas as possible. The majority of non-Estonians

in Estonia retain a Russia-centred world-view; relying on Russian mass media and heavily influenced by its ideology. They are not well informed about what is going on in Estonia. A recent survey conducted by *Saar Poll* revealed that only 10% of non-Estonians regularly read newspapers published in Russian in Estonia, and only 5-15% of them regularly watch Estonian television channels. At present, most non-Estonians play a passive role in the promotion of Estonian life. Nevertheless, their valuation of Estonian citizenship has gradually grown: in 1993 only 48% of non-Estonians wanted to receive Estonian citizenship but by 1999 71% expressed this wish (Pettai, 2000, p 83).

- For Estonians, this phase requires a realisation that application of non-Estonians' potential is essential for the development of Estonia; and that all barriers have to be eliminated before the development of non-Estonians can be achieved. One-third of Estonians have reached the phase of appreciation of non-Estonians. These groups of Estonians realise that non-Estonians do not constitute a problem but are an essential resource for Estonian society, and that barriers preventing the use of this resource should be removed. For example, 37% of Estonians were willing to teach Estonian to the children of non-Estonians in their own homes, 33% wished to make concessions in citizenship policy, and 33% would be willing for non-citizens to serve in the Estonian Army (Pettai, 2000, p 106).

#### 5. The phase of the development of the sense of "us" and of the unity

- For non-Estonians, this is equal participation in all levels of societal life; the opportunity to contribute to the development of Estonia; and the development of sense of patriotism.
- For Estonians, this phase means the recognition of the fact that the role of Estonians has been overly dominating; and the realisation that non-Estonians should share equal responsibility for the development of the Estonian society.

A very small number of non-Estonians have achieved this phase of development. In reality, this phase cannot be achieved until a more favourable atmosphere is established. As Pettai (2000) points out, by this phase both Estonians and non-Estonians should be equally represented at all levels of social life - in parliament, government, local government, education, culture and economy. This final phase of the integration paradigm should not be viewed as non-Estonians becoming Estonians: non-Estonians should be able preserve their language, culture, traditions, and so on. However, the goals of Phase 5 cannot be achieved if non-Estonians are perceived by Estonians as a threat to preservation of Estonian language and culture.

### Summary

At the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991 the Estonians and Russian-speaking immigrants had opposite and idealistic visions of the future of the country. The efforts made within the framework of the mega-project aimed at the integration of non-Estonians, and they have contributed to some successes during the late 1990s. Despite these advances, the attitudes of Estonians and non-Estonians towards integration, and their understanding of these processes remain different. Only a third of non-Estonians have successfully passed through the phase of adjustment to the Estonian State, and roughly only a third of Estonians have reached the phase of active tolerance. The attitudes

of Estonians and non-Estonians towards the future of the country have a significant impact on the emerging social awareness of younger generations. Consequently, issues of integration are the most powerful factors determining the identity and citizenship of both Estonian and Russian pupils as well as a major determinant of the strategy and content for social studies at Estonian schools.

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