

ESTONIAN RUSSOPHONE IDENTITY IN 2020¹

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March 28, 2025 (7528 words)

Introduction

In 2020, the dominant narrative surrounding identity is one of *Social Reinvention*. Russophones in Estonia shaped their identity in relation to the Soviet past, Estonians, Russians from Russia, and Westerners as Others. There remains a desire to improve economic conditions, which were further exacerbated by the pandemic. The development of Estonian Russophone identity is largely driven by cultural evolution, a factor highly valued within the minority. While concerns persist about the potential loss of Russophone cultural space built over the years, there is an acknowledgement that integration through learning the Estonian language can improve living standards for future generations. Still, there is a strong desire to preserve Russian schools in Estonia, as they remain a vital symbol of Russophone identity, reinforcing cultural and linguistic bonds within the minority. This report begins by outlining the chosen sources, followed by an in-depth examination of the identity categories identified during data analysis, emphasizing the key discourses found in the selected texts.

1. Text selection and classification of sources

The data includes speeches, newspapers, novels, films, magazines, and letters to editor (see ‘Sources’ below for a complete list). As in the previous report, the 2020 data excludes textbooks, as there were no Russian-language Estonian history textbooks published in Estonia since the early 2000s. The education system solely relies on textbooks that were translated in the late 1990s and early 2000s or on the Estonian-language textbooks (Haridus- ja teadusminister, 2007).

Two speeches were coded for 2020. The first was delivered by Jana Toom, an Estonian Russophone politician, member of the Centre Party, and Member of the European Parliament, during the European Russian Forum in Brussels on 9 December 2019. The second was by Sveta Grigorjeva, an Estonian Russophone poet, publicist, and choreographer, who spoke at the annual presidential reception for the reestablishment of independence on 20 August 2020.

For the newspaper data, two publications were chosen: *Delfi* and *MK-Estonija*, based on their popularity. *MK-Estonija* was the most circulated Russian-language weekly newspaper around 2020. According to the Estonian Newspaper Association, its circulation averaged 12,500 copies per month in 2019 (EALL, 2019). By this time, most Russian-language newspapers had either closed or stopped printing, opting instead for digital platforms. People increasingly turned to online sources rather than print editions. *Delfi*, the most viewed online news outlet in Estonia by 2022 (Nurseitova, 2023), was also included in the analysis. For both newspapers, articles from the first available issue of each month in 2020 were selected. Letters were sourced from these same issues.

Because of their limited audience, novels by Estonian Russophones do not appear on Estonia's bestseller lists. Therefore, the data includes works by well-known, award-winning Estonian

¹ This national identity report was completed as part of the *Making Identity Count (MIC) Estonia* project (PRG1052 – *National Identity and Estonian-Russian Relations: A Longitudinal Study of Elite and Mass Discourses*). The sampled material was coded using the standard MIC procedure (Allan 2016). The full collection of MIC Estonia national identity reports is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/108183>.

Russophone authors recognized also by the Annual Estonian Culture Capital Award for Literature (Repson, 2012; Kultuurkapital, 2021). The selected authors were Jelena Skulskaja, P. I. Filimonov (a pseudonym for Estonian Russophone author Roman Fokin), Andrei Ivanov, Andrei Anissimov, and Vladimir Poljakov. Eight novels were coded to increase the amount of information, as there were limited sources available, such as a reduced number of magazines and letters to editor.

The selected magazine, *Plug*, was published between 2009 and 2019. Editors Dan and Olesja Rotar created the magazine to discuss the lives and popular culture of young Estonian Russophones. The magazine was distributed for free in public spaces and did not publish circulation numbers. However, in 2012, it also received the Estonian Culture Capital Award for Literature (Kultuurkapital, 2021). *Plug* ceased print publications in August 2019 (Malova, 2019), but it had produced three issues in 2019 (January, May, and August), which were used for coding and this report.

For the film section, one documentary and one TV series were selected. The documentary, *Anketa* (English: *Soviet Friendsbook*), was directed by Aljona Suržikova and was screened in November 2020 at the Black Nights Film Festival (BNFF or PÖFF) in Tallinn. It documents the changed lives of the director's classmates, who started secondary school in Tallinn in 1989, just before Estonia reestablished its independence, and graduated in the years following independence. The second work is the TV series *Lasnagorsk*, directed by Irina Vassiljeva. The show, consisting of 10 episodes, aired on the ETV+ channel in 2018. It follows the life of a mixed Estonian-Russian family living in Tallinn's Lasnamäe district.

2. Raw identity categories

The procedure for selecting aggregated categories diverged from the standard Making Identity Count methodology due to the uneven distribution of codes across genres. Using the raw count table, genre-normalized percentages were calculated to assess the relative prominence within each genre. Categories with an average prominence below 1% were excluded, resulting in 23 categories for further analysis. In the final calculation of valence prominence, one category's valences were not salient, reducing the list to 22 categories. Table 1 and 2 summarize the identity categories inductively recovered from the sampled texts. The categories were grouped into four broader category groups to facilitate understanding of the discourses and identify the most prominent discourse. The following section explains each category group.

Economic inequality

This section highlights categories that encapsulate narratives of inferiority within Russophone identity in Estonia in 2020, especially as the economic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic of 2020 intensified existing grievances. The section includes the following categories: Class inequality, Economy, Estonian politics/authorities, Healthcare crisis, and Social welfare.

As in previous reports, Russophones were dissatisfied with **class inequality**, perceived as a consequence of ethnic segregation. These same grievances persisted for decades and are visible across speeches, newspapers, and novels. Estonia's EU membership prompted Russophones to compare their socioeconomic conditions with those of other states, such as Finland.

Journalist: You have been living in Estonia for a long time, since 1980. Do you think things have improved?

Roman: For some people, things have surely gotten better. But I always think that everything could have been not just "better," but *much better*, and most importantly – different. Those who keep repeating year after year, "It has gotten better, it has gotten

better" – I am afraid they do so to justify the limitations of their imagination. (Ivanov, 2017, p. 43; {2020_N_PECH_00520})

I think Ms. Kaljulaid does not fully understand how people live in Estonia. Of course, she receives a good salary. What is it, five or seven thousand euros? She does not know what it is like to have loans or to face difficult choices – like whether to finally fix something in the house or buy the promised tablet for the kids. She's doing just fine. But she clearly does not realize that, aside from her, only a few dozen people in Estonia live that well. She does not think about the fact that everyone else is living paycheck to paycheck and that their savings could be incredibly helpful *right now*. People need them *now*, not sometime in the future. (Valentina, 2020; {2020_L_MOLO_06640})

A notable addition in this report is a further division along class lines. Some Russophones have fared better financially than others. Over the years of independence, they have accumulated wealth or recognition in society. These people separate themselves from the rest of the Russophone minority but also are labeled as “integrationists”. The term integrationist or *integrast* is used pejoratively in reference to Russophones who support integration of Russophones into Estonian society, as they are often seen as abandoning the minority's culture and language. This is starkly illustrated in Andrei Ivanov's novels:

That winter, Roman was invited to a presidential reception held at the Estonia Theater, but – unable to endure the tension of the formal setting – he fled without even getting in line for a handshake. ("I will end up in all the newspapers – they will start criticizing me! 'Integrationist' and so on," he thought. He downed five glasses, felt like he was burning up inside, and – taxi!). Alya teased him for a long time: "You chickened out! You chickened out of shaking Ilves' hand!" (Ivanov, 2017, p. 39; {2020_N_PECH_00380})

"You forget," Lena said, "that the people she invites as guests have set themselves apart from our community so much, considering themselves exceptional, that they no longer associate themselves with the concept of 'Russians.' To them, Russians are others – just ordinary people." "You mean – rabble?" (Ivanov, 2021, p. 111-174; {2020_N_UNTE_00520})

In newspapers members of the Russophone elite also admitted unequal access to the job market:

Only a few could secure a job in the civil service – those who had citizenship, knew the state language, or were willing to learn it. Making a name for oneself in business was significantly more difficult in general, and as employees, Russian-speaking fellow citizens, often sought work with Russian-speaking employers. The latter, however, primarily oriented their businesses toward the East, making them vulnerable to various crises. As a result, they were constantly going bankrupt, deceiving their employees, or paying them mere pennies – often under the table. (Krištafovītš, 2020; {2020_P_DELF_06100})

The economic hardships caused by the pandemic were a contributing factor to the dissatisfaction with class inequality, the **economy**, and **Estonian authorities**. Once again, state authorities are presented as the Other, political class that stands above ordinary people and disregards their concerns. The **healthcare crisis** added to the sense of insecurity, primarily financial but also related to physical wellbeing.

"We are responsible for those we have tamed"—a wise and fair quote from *The Little Prince*. It remains highly relevant today, as the severe economic crisis caused by the pandemic has already left over a hundred thousand people unemployed or will do so in the near future. Since many of them have families, unemployment will directly affect every third or fourth resident of Estonia. (Klaus, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_04250})

It is convenient for large business owners to cut their workforce cheaply. It is convenient for the state – no need to pay out benefits. The only ones inconvenienced are the people caught in this situation. (Sommer, 2020; {2020_P_DELF_05180})

As is well known, even without a state of emergency, the wait times for specialist doctors in our country stretch for months. To get an appointment, you sometimes have to "hunt" for an available slot around the clock. Now, however, all visits – except for the most urgent ones – are being postponed indefinitely. Many patients who were expecting to receive medical care soon must now wait indefinitely. Not everyone agrees with this situation. (Kjutšjuk, 2020b; {2020_P_MOLO_03110})

Outside of economic grievances, the newspapers also expressed neutral and positive sentiments regarding Estonian politics and economy, reporting on the state of affairs. For instance, ‘Last week, the government introduced crisis measures aimed at supporting various sectors, which, according to the country's leadership, will help the state emerge from the crisis’ (MK-Estonija, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_04220}). Changes to the social welfare system, where the additional pension tax became voluntary, were also encouraged, as people see higher net salary as a result:

Important changes in the second pension tier will take effect as early as July. The economic downturn following the coronavirus pandemic has brought adjustments to the pension system, partly creating opportunities anticipated by the upcoming pension reform. Realizing that there is not enough money in the state treasury after the state of emergency, the government has decided to suspend contributions to the second pension tier starting from July 1. (Petrova, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_05660})

Social in/exclusion

This set of categories includes the following topics: education, emigration, Estonian language, Russian language, and minority rights violations. Russophones often reflect on their rights and sense of belonging while discussing these issues.

In speeches and newspapers, Russophones expressed a positive outlook at the status of the **education** system in Estonia. By 2020, most schools had either Estonian as the language of instruction or a bilingual policy, with Russian-language schools gradually transitioning to Estonian as the language of instruction, with 60% of upper secondary school classes taught in Estonian (Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus, 2019).

Jana Toom, a Member of the European Parliament from Estonia and Estonian politician affiliated with the Centre Party (*Keskerakond*), has long advocated for maintaining Russian as the language of instruction schools. Having worked previously as a journalist, she is familiar with the issues of the Russophone minority through her work in Russian-language newspapers. She has also been a member of Estonian parliament from 2011 to 2014. In the 2010 report, she gave a speech at an organized protest in Tallinn. In this instance, she delivered a speech at the European Parliament. The speech, given in the Russian language, was addressed to Russophones in Estonia and governments of the Baltic states and Russia. In her speech, Toom expressed concerns over proposals in

the Estonian parliament to transition to a fully Estonian-language curriculum in schools that had formerly taught some subjects in Russian language. She stated:

If there are no Russian schools, there will be no language. It is not enough to simply defend the Russian schools. That will not change anything because these teachers – I am 53 years old, they are my peers, the youngest among them. They studied at the Pskov Pedagogical Institute during Soviet times. We have not trained subject teachers for 30 years, and as a result, it will all simply fade away quietly. So, just defending them is not enough; there needs to be some kind of development program for Russian schools. I do not see any political force in either Estonia or Latvia that could make this happen. Ideally, Russia should lend a helping hand here, but for some reason, that is not happening. (Toom, 2020)

These concerns are shared by some in Estonia as well. Some Russophones are open to bilingual education where students gradually learn Estonian. A teacher from Tallinn, Marina Rüütel, shares her insights:

– How has the school changed over the past 20 years?

– Now, parents are interested in language immersion for their children. At first, when it was just starting, parents were hesitant and did not know what it was. But now, it is the opposite. Since 2013, my favorite workplace has been Haabersti Russian Gymnasium. Our school now offers all types of language immersion programs. There is an early immersion option where, from 1st grade, all subjects are taught entirely in Estonian. Russian is introduced only in the 2nd grade. Every year, more and more parents choose this option for their children. (Kjutšjuk, 2020c; {2020_P_MOLO_09170})

At the same time, others are not ready for complete Estonian-language instruction. By 2020, there was only one gymnasium left in Kohtla-Järve in the Ida-Viru region of Estonia where 74% of population are ethnic Russians (Statistics Estonia, 2021). Initially, the school principal wanted to set up two groups – some students who would study in the Estonian language and others in a bilingual program that would have 60% of classes in Estonian, with the remaining 40% in Russian. This idea was rejected after locals protested. The principal was then changed. The language of instruction in this school is now Estonian (Korsten, 2020).

In September, Kohtla-Järve State Gymnasium opened its doors to students, a school that had sparked many debates primarily on the question of in which language children should be taught. And now, after the very first school break, thirty students did not return to their desks. (Titov, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_00250})

In either case, even if the language of instruction is debated, one thing that unites both groups is a desire to preserve the cultural identity of their children. Such an instance was expressed in the words of a young teacher and aspiring Russophone politician, Aleksei Jašin: ‘I see that this will be a unified school where both Estonian and Russian children study together. It is important to preserve the cultural identity of each’ (Bestšastnoi, 2020; {2020_P_DELF_07080})

In 2020, Russophones understood the need of learning the **Estonian language** in schools (thus, there were no objections to partly-Estonian-language education) and speaking the language elsewhere as well: “‘Estonian language is a part of my life; I cannot imagine it any other way. I learned everything on my own. At home, we speak Russian, but both my wife and children are fluent in

Estonian,” he [Estonian doctor Arkadi Popov] added’ (Delfi, 2020b; {2020_P_MOLO_04140}). Newspapers and novels reflected this dynamic with a positive valence in this category.

In 2020, **Russian language** did not appear as significant identity marker relevant for one’s identity. In films, the language received an ambiguous valence. In both selected films, Russophone children are portrayed as sharing but also lacking level of the language skills of their parents and grandparents’ generations.

– Wait. Please. Just don’t tell Mom. – And what exactly am I not supposed to tell her?
– Well, it’s like... um... – So, I grasp it you’re skipping a lot of Russian lessons, huh?
Or are you guys currently studying filler words? – No, it’s just that... while the teacher wasn’t looking, I kind of tweaked my grade in e-School, and I think I got caught. (Vassiljeva, 2018; {2020_M_LASN_00320})

– Is Alicia Russian or German? Does she speak Russian too? – Alicia... Russian? No way! If you ask her, she’ll say she’s German. – Really? – By blood, she’s Russian. – But she considers herself German? – Well, yeah, she has citizenship. (Suržikova, 2020; {2020_M_ANKE_00583})

Perhaps this low level of proficiency in the Russian language among children is what motivates adult Russophones to express support for the maintenance of Russian language in schools.

At the same time, the report retained the **Minority rights violations** category, which was present throughout the years following the reestablishment of independence. By this point, Estonian Russophones had largely learned the language and adapted their behaviors to the political realities, although this change had not removed the perceptions of obstacles to socioeconomic advancement. ‘They are pressuring us, they are. Feels like they are pushing us out of the country. Do not get me wrong, my Estonian is fine. I can explain myself... I fill out paperwork in Estonian’ (Filimonov, 2015, p. 110-111; {2020_N_FILI_00190})

These minority rights violations seem to be fundamental to the Russophone’s understanding of the world. Some have sided with the argument that they do not belong Estonia (see Emigration section); others are frustrated with the alienation they feel or continue to experience.

In one of the scenes, the characters used the English word *retards*, which in Russian means "dimwits" or "mentally challenged." A proper translation into Estonian would have been *juhmaidid*, but, instead, the subtitles featured *tavalised tiblud*—"ordinary *tiblas*." The translator, a well-known figure of the Estonian intelligentsia, literary scholar Eneken Laanes, explained that she chose the word to give the characters’ speech a more natural tone but did not consider its offensive nature for some viewers. Laanes acknowledged her mistake, publicly apologized, and requested that the broadcaster remove the term *tibla* [a derogatory term for Russophones in Estonia] from the subtitles. (Kjutšjuk, 2020a; {2020_P_MOLO_01240})

Another aspect that arises is an acknowledgement of other minorities (sexual and racial) that are also being discriminated against.

I live in a country where the current coalition spends every day humiliating women, youth, minorities, foreign students, labor migrants, and local employers. A country where the ruling coalition is actively promoting the idea that a free state and individual freedom are only possible for people of a certain nationality, religion, and sexual orientation. (Grigorjeva, 2020)

The issue of Estonian Russophones feeling alienated in Russia also arises:

It was easy to distinguish Tartu natives who had long settled in Moscow yet still preserved their language and even remained recognizable in appearance. (I remember Kolya writing about how he had to explain in St. Petersburg that, in spirit, he was not from Tartu, even though he had studied there, but he had not become a "talking doll." It was hard for him, very, very hard: "There is no trust in me, they do not accept me well, all because I studied in Tartu. In Moscow, it was simple – Tartu means something there, it is respected. But in St. Petersburg, it is the opposite: if you are from Tartu, you are an idiot, and no one trusts you."). (Ivanov, 2017, p. 54; {2020_N_PECH_00760})

Like earlier decades, many Russophones chose **emigration** rather than remaining in Estonia and settled elsewhere, a phenomenon that occurs both with those who managed to integrate and the ones that did not. For the former group of Russophones, their rationale was financial, as they struggled to find a well-paying job in Estonia.

It is really sad that we cannot stay in the place where we were born if we cannot make a living and survive there, unfortunately. I never planned this, never in my life would I have thought that I would move to some Sweden. Why on earth would I have needed Sweden? No, it never even crossed my mind. Quite the opposite – I had no such thoughts at all. I learned Estonian, I felt very comfortable and confident in Estonia. I could go to any job interview without fear. But when I arrived here... Oh, so many challenges, so many moments of having to start over, climbing and struggling again. And once again, without the language, you are nobody here. (Suržikova, 2020)

The latter group, however, discusses the feeling of uneasiness due to calls to leave Estonia:

What really had a strong impact on me was that our Estonian teacher used to say, "If you do not like something, you can head East right away." Maybe it is similar to what people say about refugees now. I do not know – I just felt uncomfortable. I kept hearing this message over and over, that Russians here are basically a problem, that they are in the way. (Suržikova, 2020)

Although less prominent than in previous years, the sentiment of alienation remains present in the Russophone discourses. This alienation is primarily evident in the economic and education spheres of Russophones' lives.

Value system construction

This discussion leads to a section that focuses on the following categories: Estonian Russophone culture, Estonian Russophone: in-between, Soviet legacy, and Traditional family values.

As mentioned in the previous reports, Russophones began to establish their own identity already in early 2000s by combining elements of Estonian and Russian culture. Compared to the previous years, however, Estonian Russophones viewed their hybrid status more positively, as categories such as Estonian culture or Russian culture were not prominent in their discourses.

In films and magazines, the category **Estonian Russophone: in-between** gained a positive valence:

Our brand is about making peace with our true selves. You see, I am from Estonia – I was born and raised here. Being Estonian is not just about blood. But for the so-called "real" Estonians, we are not Estonian enough. And we do not want to prove that we

are. We embrace our roots, the history we carry. We do not try to prove that we speak perfect Estonian – we do not owe anyone that. I see a certain oppression among Russians, especially in Tallinn – they feel like second-class citizens. There is an insecurity tied to nationality. Through fashion, we aim to break that feeling. We take old pieces associated with Soviet culture and show that you can play with them, own them, and not be ashamed of being Russian in Estonia. It is your uniqueness – and it is something interesting. (Rotar & Osipovskaja, 2019; {2020_MG_PLUG_01020})

This dynamic reflects a post-Soviet part of identity as well. The **Soviet legacy** category emerges in these discourses: positively in magazines and neutrally and negatively in newspapers. In newspapers, it either relates to reporting on the events in the post-Soviet space or a lack of desire in continuing the Soviet cultural legacy primarily due to generational change.

In novels, this in-betweenness is presented as neutral.

What is this city doing to me? I somehow got used to Moscow, and life was easier in the '90s – not because life itself was simpler, but because I was young, had more energy, and saw things differently. Besides, back then, everyone was hit by the same chaos, and Estonia hadn't yet faded from people's minds. People didn't treat me differently. Now, for them, Estonia is some distant place, like it drifted away on an iceberg. They ask, "So, how are things over there?" – as if I came from God knows where. Back then, I was part of the flow, part of the crowd, and I felt Russian – not just to them, but even to myself. But now, I'm not the same anymore – I've spent too long "abroad." They look at me here like I'm Swiss cheese, full of holes. (Ivanov, 2017, p.20; {2020_N_PECH_00280})

In speeches, some ambiguity about the in-betweenness is present. The in-between position of Russophones vis-à-vis Estonian and Russian politics and culture is claimed to have been imposed from outside, something locals simply adapted regardless of their own volition.

We did not preserve it [our identity] – it was preserved for us. Because identity, as we know, is shaped by external factors. At first, we became "non-Estonians" – that was our first identity. There were Estonians, and then there were non-Estonians. But since we were non-Estonians who spoke a non-Estonian language – Russian – we, so to speak, became Russians. (Toom, 2020; {2020_S_TOOM_00230})

This positive outlook on their own unique position in the world is partially a result of the further development of **Estonian Russophone culture**. Newspapers, novels, and magazines all display strong positive sentiments to Russophone cultural production, whether in the form of small local bands or an award-winning or internationally recognized projects.

It has become a tradition in Tallinn's cozy Russian-speaking music scene that whenever two or three musicians gather, a new band or project immediately emerges. (Moltšun, 2019; {2020_MG_PLUG_01200})

We have successfully built our brand – we see that our clothing and aesthetics are appealing, for example, in the United Kingdom. (Rotar & Osipovskaja, 2019; {2020_MG_PLUG_00930})

The last category in this section is **Traditional family values**. In newspapers, novels, and films, this category has received a largely positive valence, meaning that Russophones prefer to maintain

strict gender roles and patriarchy. The ambiguous valence is representative of discourses in which feminism or LGBT agendas are questioned.

There are some that are so striking, you take one look, and you are floored, you never forget them. And then there are others you notice, appreciate, think to yourself, yeah, not bad, but still just walk past. And of course, I am talking about women... Who else would I, a healthy man with healthy needs, be thinking about? (Filimonov, 2015, p. 95; {2020_N_FILI_00140})

My attitude toward this topic – the #MeToo movement – is ambivalent. [...] In this sense, I do not fully feel the purity of this movement. I ask myself, “Why did they wait so long?” (Tregubov, 2020b; {2020_P_MOLO_08510})

Historical Others

Compared to previous years, Russophone discourses ceased covering historical events as prominently relevant to their identity formation, with the exception of one category: **HO: USSR**. In 2020, the data also had categories, as in previous years, such as Soviet Estonia and WWII separately treated; however, they were not as cumulatively significant in this reporting period. The USSR category has a complicated valence structure, with all valences becoming somewhat prominent throughout the source types. It is predominately viewed negatively or ambiguously, as Russophones compared life in the Soviet period to their contemporary conditions and reassessed their values.

There is also an acknowledgment of the wrongdoings in relation to the deportations of Estonians during 1940s: ‘This organization [KGB] has a dark past. It sent thousands of Estonians to Siberia. How many people have suffered from it in recent years? Among my relatives, there are families with loved ones who never returned from the camps or prisons’ (Poljakov, 2017, p. 17; {2020_N_POLY_00400}). As before, however, the Soviet system was treated separately from the people who lived in it. ‘People were forced to vote for the right candidates! And those who disagreed were already in prisons or in Siberia’ (Poljakov, 2017, p. 19; {2020_N_POLY_00640}). Nostalgia for the Soviet Union was also slowly dissipating as time progressed: ‘Truth be told, no one wants to go back to the Soviet era’ (Tregubov, 2020a; {2020_P_MOLO_03850}). This sentiment was expressed in newspapers and novels.

Significant Others

This section consists of the following categories: SO: Estonians, SO: EU/Europe, SO: Russia: media, SO: Russia; politics/authorities, SO: Russia: popular culture, SO: Russians from Russia, SO: USA: culture, and SO: USA: politics. The data distinguishes Europe and the United States from the former category of ‘the West’, as references to ‘the West’ were significantly lower compared to mentions of the United States, the EU, or Europe. Additionally, complex categories such as Russia and the United States were further divided into subcategories for a clearer understanding of the valence distributions.

One of the prominent categories in novels is **Estonians**, which displays positive, ambiguous, and neutral valences. Neutral valence here arises in the acknowledgement of Estonians as the internal Other: ‘Although our different nationalities added some complexity to our relationship. I was Russian, she was Estonian. Language and traditions subtly influenced us’ (Poljakov, 2017, p. 8; {2020_N_POLY_00200}). Positive valence portrays Estonians, ordinary people, and their character in a complimentary fashion: ‘And Estonians are truly sensitive, attentive, and warm-hearted

people!’ (Skulskaja, 2019, p. 35; {2020_N_POGR_00160}) or ‘He was friends with his neighbors – the kind of friendship only Estonians know how to have. [...] If needed, they will come to help, day or night. They will lend a hand without pretense or unnecessary words. But if there is no need, they will never disturb you unnecessarily. They will not knock on your door uninvited. They will not raise their voices in the street or blast loud music. You can live next to them for years without even noticing their presence. Only someone who has lived among ordinary Estonians for a long time can truly appreciate their innate sense of tact’ (Anissimov, 2021, p. 230; {2020_N_EVRO_05470 and 2020_N_EVRO_05490}).

EU and Europe, however, were not shown in such a positive light. The category is quite diverse in valences in novels. Such a distortion could be attributed to the novel *European Tango* by Andrei Anissimov, which depicts a European Union of the future as ultra-tolerant in a negative fashion:

After mass migration at the beginning of the century, Europe had to adjust its tolerance policies. Widespread looting, assaults, and vandalism by newcomers forced Brussels to reconsider the law on immigrants and ban them from working in government institutions. Then, the Chinese stepped in to help. (Anissimov, 2021, p. 5; {2020_N_EVRO_00280 and 2020_N_EVRO_00290})

In films, this category has a positive valence. For some, other EU countries are temporary places of residence for economic reasons:

Are you staying long? – Nah, I’ll be heading to Finland soon for a new project. You know, I was just thinking – before I spend all my money, maybe I should invest it in a business, huh? - What kind of business? - Well, I buy alcohol here since it’s cheaper, then resell it in Finland. What do you think? – So, you’ve decided to become a businessman? – Well, why not? I can’t be working on this construction site like a madman forever. It’s time to start using my head, not just my hands. (Vassiljeva, 2018; {2020_M_LASN_00461})

Others had moved or were planning to move to other European countries: ‘When I started learning German, I just knew I felt drawn to that country. I wanted to live there’ (Suržikova, 2020; {2020_M_ANKE_00520}). A similar positive outlook is visible in novels. Other European countries are seen as providing greater opportunities than Estonia does: ‘I like it in Finland... I would move there... (I would work as anything there – a janitor, a street vendor selling coffee and pastries – it does not matter what)’ (Ivanov, 2021, pp. 129-174; {2020_N_UNTE_00230}). At the same time, Russophones perceive a class divide between people from Estonia and those from Western Europe:

I have figured out your Danish relatives a long time ago. They have a fixed idea of how we live. They have created their own model of our existence, many levels below theirs, and they will never let go of it. No matter what we say, they will fit it into their model, interpreting every word and action through their own judgments about us. To them, we are poor, unremarkable people. We exist so they can look at us condescendingly, sigh, give advice, and lament among themselves: What kind of people... so poor, they’re so poor... Saying that about us makes them feel better. They exchange glances, thinking, “Look how bad they have it, and how well we do!” As if we ever needed them! (Ivanov, 2021, pp. 129-174; {2020_N_UNTE_00200}).

Newspapers predominantly mentioned the EU and Europe in the context of the joint fight against the coronavirus. Neutral and positive valences represent reporting regarding bureaucratic developments on the EU level:

The European Union countries will create a fund to help the economy of the Old Continent recover from the recession as quickly as possible after the COVID-19 pandemic. By May 6, the European Commission must develop specific proposals on this matter. (MK-Estonija, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_04340})

At the same time, an ambiguous valence arises during discussions regarding different policy choices in specific EU countries in response to the pandemic:

Estonians, in terms of mentality, are closer to their northern neighbors, such as the Swedes, who stood out with their unique approach to the coronavirus problem – choosing a different strategy to combat it. The Swedes generally refuse to restrict themselves with quarantine, believing that only those for whom COVID-19 is dangerous – the elderly and at-risk individuals (those with weakened immune systems, diabetes, asthma, etc.) – should impose limitations on themselves. (Dozhdeva, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_03400})

The category of Russia was represented in four sub-categories: media, politics and authorities, popular culture, and Russians from Russia. **Russian media** gained predominantly neutral prominence in newspapers, which cited Russia's media channels (both independent and state-controlled). In newspapers and novels, **Russian politics and authorities** were negatively and ambiguously perceived. The Russian government was often regarded as lacking prudence or competence. 'While Roman was traveling from St. Petersburg to Tallinn, a law banning lace underwear was passed in Russia' (Ivanov, 2017, p. 28; {2020_N_PECH_00320}). Authoritarianism is highlighted as well: 'Putin had to choose between building a civil society capable of advancing progress or forging spiritual bonds for his throne. The throne proved to be more important. As a result, the country is retreating into the Middle Ages' (Anissimov, 2021, p. 144; {2020_N_EVRO_04440}). 'The fact that the ballot lists not Putin's name but rather an impersonal package of constitutional amendments is merely a legal formality. In reality, the country is being asked to grant Vladimir Putin a fresh mandate of trust' (Rostovskii, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_05820})

Russian popular culture received a positive valence in films and magazines, which note the relatability of the TV shows, celebrities, and music.

I really like Vladimir Pozner. He is very clever, intelligent, and shrewd. Pozner is actually my weakness as a woman. I keep hoping he will call me and invite me for a cup of coffee, but he has not done so yet. Of course, I also like Yuri Dud – he is a fantastic, modern journalist who has shaken things up and introduced the bold format that Russian YouTube clearly needed. I appreciate his stance on drugs and the way he discusses topics others prefer to avoid. I also often watch the YouTube show "A Pogovorit'", hosted by the very skilled and diplomatic journalist Irina Shikhman. (Jakubovitš, 2019; {2020_MG_PLUG_00220})

Newspapers have more noise in their valences, garnering an ambiguous valence that dominates in this category. This is because news outlets like Delfi also resort to tabloid news focusing on Russian popular culture figures.

The word “prostitute” has been popping up frequently in showbiz news lately. First, Ivan Okhlobystin called Alena Vodonaeva that, then apologized to actual prostitutes for the comparison. Now, Andrei Razin has added fuel to the fire – this time, taking aim at none other than Lev Leshchenko! (Delfi, 2020a; {2020_P_DELF_00200})

Consequently, like in the previous reports, Estonian Russophones separate themselves from **Russia’s Russians** and present them as external Others:

About Russians: "They have all changed their last names and rushed to Europe." (Skulskaja, 2019, p. 171; {2020_N_POGR_00570})

Even here, at the resort, they continued to demonstrate loyalty to the regime and steadfast patriotic convictions – though they could not clearly explain what those convictions actually entailed. (Anissimov, 2021, pp. 67-68; {2020_N_EVRO_02480})

Similarly to the Russia category, the United States was also broken down to subcategories, of which politics and culture proceeded to the final topographical table. Monitoring the political developments in the United States resulted in largely neutral sentiments in the category **USA: politics**. In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement dominated the political discourse in the United States. It is also reflected in sources like newspapers, where political news received either ambiguous or negative sentiment:

This year, Donald Trump was hit by two "black swans" at once. First, the coronavirus wiped out all the president's economic achievements, and then a "cold civil war" began, in which he had to confront supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement. (Guljaev, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_08050})

Human rights organizations note that law enforcement officers sometimes use excessive force and engage in racial profiling, unjustified arrests, surveillance, and searches. They also intimidate witnesses, falsify physical evidence, give false testimony under oath, and so on. Corruption also exists, although its scale is incomparable to police corruption in Russia. (Baranikas, 2020; {2020_P_MOLO_05130})

Culture, on the other hand, has an ambiguous and positive valence in newspapers and magazines.

Actress Ellen Page came out as a transgender man. The announcement was posted on Instagram, according to Meduza. (Delfi, 2020c; {2020_P_DELF_07130})

A woman wanted to become stronger and more independent. I really liked the story of Lady Gaga. She helps girls who, like herself, have been victims of violence, including by giving lectures and working with them. (Rotar & Osipovskaja, 2019; {2020_MG_PLUG_01090})

3. The predominant discourse and its challengers

The dominant identity discourse in 2020 is *Social Reinvention*. Russophones in Estonia construct their identity as being distinct from but relying on the Soviet past, Estonians, Russians from Russia, and Westerners as Others. Estonian Russophone identity construction largely occurs through cultural development, which is highly regarded in the minority. There are still aspirations for improvement of socioeconomic conditions, which were depressed during the 2020 pandemic. Amid the fears of the eradication of the Russophone cultural space that had been created over preceding decades, there is an acknowledgement that integration through learning Estonian will improve living conditions of the future generations. Nevertheless, the desire of maintaining Russian schools

in Estonia as an important marker of Russophone identity, where cultural and linguistic affiliation with the minority is built, remains.

Conclusion

Russophones in Estonia shape their identity in opposition to, yet still drawing from, the Soviet past, Estonians, Russians from Russia, and Westerners as the Other. The formation of Estonian Russophone identity is primarily driven by cultural development, which is highly valued within the minority. There remain ongoing hopes for improved economic prospects, prospects that were further lessened by the challenges posed by the 2020 pandemic. Despite concerns of the potential loss of the Russophone cultural space that had developed since the restoration of Estonian independence, an understanding that learning Estonian could enhance the living conditions for future generations emerged. However, the desire to maintain Russian-language schooling in Estonia persists, as these schools represent a crucial aspect of Russophone identity, where cultural and linguistic ties to the minority are fostered.

Table 1. Raw counts

Category	Total codes	Speeches	Newspapers	Novels	Movies	Letters	Magazines
SO: Russia: media	207	1	202	2	2		
SO: Russia: popular culture	198		176	6	4		12
SO: Russia: politics / authorities	186	3	119	59	4		1
SO: EU / Europe	168		45	103	17	1	2
Estonian politics / authorities	141	21	84	19	4	11	2
Traditional family values	136	6	46	57	17		10
HO: USSR	121	3	54	63	1		
SO: USA: politics	107	1	99	7			
SO: Russians from Russia	102		12	88	1		1
Economy	92		77	3	2	9	1
Class inequality	83	8	11	54	8	2	
Minority rights violations	78	15	16	40	5	1	1
Estonian Russophone culture	67	1	23	15	3		25
Healthcare crisis	48	3	36		1	8	
Estonian Russophone: in-between	43	11	1	17	7		7
SO: Estonians	40	2		30	6	1	1
Estonian language	38	1	13	14	9		1
Education	37	8	21	1	7		
Emigration	30	2	1	1	25	1	
Social welfare	30		21	1	1	7	
SO: USA: culture	24	1	15	2			6
Russian language	16	1	1	4	9		1
Totals	2035	93	1090	589	142	41	80

Table 2. Topography of Estonian Russophone identity

	<i>Speeches</i>	<i>Newspapers</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Movies</i>	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Magazines</i>
<i>Economic inequality</i>						
Class inequality	-	-	--~/			
Economy		--++/			-	
Estonian politics / authorities	~	--//++	~-		-	
Healthcare crisis		-/~			-	
Social welfare		/+				
<i>Social in/exclusion</i>						
Education	+	+/				
Emigration				+-		
Estonian language		++	+			
Minority rights violations	-	-	--~			
Russian language				~		
<i>Value system construction</i>						
Estonian Russophone culture		++	+			++
Estonian Russophone: in-between	~		/	+		+
Soviet legacy		/-				+
Traditional family values		++~--	+++~~/	~+		
<i>Historical Others</i>						
HO: USSR		--/+	~--++/			
<i>Significant Others</i>						
SO: Estonians			+~/			
SO: EU / Europe		//+~	~--+++/	+		
SO: Russia: media		////~-				
SO: Russia: politics / authorities		---~//+	--~/			
SO: Russia: popular culture		~--~//+++--		+		+
SO: Russians from Russia			--~+/			
SO: USA: culture		~+				+
SO: USA: politics		///~--				

Salience of categories is measured on the following scale: 1.0–3.0 (1); 3.0–7.5 (2); 7.5–12.0 (3); 12.0–15.0 (4); above 15.0 (5).

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2. Newspapers:

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- 2) *Molodezh Estonii*, 2020

3. Novel:

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