

# ESTONIAN RUSSOPHONE IDENTITY IN 2000<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In 2000, the dominant identity discourse among Estonian Russophones remained centred on the search for an identity of Self, independent of significant Others yet preserving elements of both. Although Estonia's aspiration to join the Western structures was seen positively by Estonian Russophones, they felt uneasy about Estonian government policies that severed economic and cultural ties with Russia and framed the Russian language and culture as threats to Estonian nationhood. Russophones hoped that EU accession would compel the Estonian authorities to abandon the laws and policies they perceived as discriminatory. In their search for identity, Russophones struggled to locate a unifying factor beyond their attachment to both the Estonian land and the Russian language and culture. While the goal of fostering a united Estonian Russophone community was shared by both elites and the masses, elite actors failed to coordinate their actions, leading to the proliferation of political groups and factions that discouraged mass political participation.

### 1. Text selection and classification of sources

The project's archive includes speeches, newspapers, school history textbooks, novels, magazines, and letters (see 'Sources' below for a complete list). This report deviated from the standard MIC sampling strategy due to the absence of films: in 2000, no Russian-language films were produced in Estonia. To compensate for this gap, magazines were incorporated into the sample as a genre representative of popular views.

The selection of specific sources within genres such as newspapers and magazines was based on popularity. In 2000, *Estonia*, an Estonian Russian-language daily newspaper, had a total circulation of 94,300 copies, averaging 7,860 copies per month. *Den za Dnjem*, a weekly newspaper, had a circulation of 204,300 copies, with a monthly average of 17,000 copies (Eesti Ajalehtede Liit, 2000). For both newspapers, articles from the first available issue for each month were sampled.

*Raduga* was one of the most popular Russian-language magazines printed in Estonia, with a circulation of 418 copies (Council of Europe, 2004). All four published issues were coded for the selected year. *Raduga* was published since 1986, emerging during Perestroika and Glasnost, when censorship was gradually being lifted. This magazine focused on Baltic literary works, translating Estonian authors into Russian and discussing revolutionary topics for its time, such as Stalinist repressions and deportations, environmental issues, Baltic independence, and works of banned authors who were forced to emigrate from Soviet Russia and Estonia (Polivanov, 2010). This bold editorial stance earned *Raduga* immense popularity not only among intelligentsia but also among the masses in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

Speeches and letters to the editor were selected from all available issues of the newspapers, *Estonia* and *Molodezh Estonii*. Unlike in 1995 (see Nurseitova, 2023), certain political forces had formed, claiming to represent the Russophone electorate. Accordingly, speeches were coded by prominent and rising political leaders that emerged within the Russophone minority by the 2000s, including Anatoli Jegorov, Aleksei Zõbin, Viktor Andrejev, Yuri Mishin, and Nikolai Maspanov. Many of these figures published their addresses to the public in *Molodezh Estonii*.

Two textbooks were selected for the year 2000. The first, published in 2003, was written by Mart Laar, Maria Tilk, and Eha Hergauk; the second, published in 2004, was authored by Eda Maripuu, Tiina Kilumets, Mart Kand, Sergei Teplov, Vjatsëslav Žiburtoviš, and Joke van der Leeuw-Roord. Since Estonia restored independence, the education system had relied on history textbooks written in Estonian, which were translated to Russian to accommodate Russian-language-based teaching. Textbooks should be approached with caution when assessing the Russophone identity, as they focus on the experiences of ethnic Estonians and mostly mention Russians while discussing the occupations by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

When selecting novels, the project relied on the works of well-known authors active in the early 2000s, including Jelena Skulskaja, Gohar Markosjan-Käšper, Valerii Roštšenko, and Larissa Vanejeva. Vanejeva received an award from the Cultural Endowment of Estonia for her 2001 novel *Liki* (Manukjan, 2002).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Estonian cinematography, previously represented by Tallinnfilm and financed and controlled from Moscow, was more expensive to sustain independently (Kärk, no date). Consequently, Estonia-produced films catered mainly to the Estonian-speaking audience, while films originally produced in Russian and available to the Russian-speaking audience in Estonia were made in Russia. The project did not include any films for coding that would suit MIC criteria for the year 2000.

## 2. Raw identity categories

Due to the uneven distribution of codes across genres, the reports relied on percentages normalized by genre. To do this, a table showing the relative prominence of all 34 aggregated categories was created, based on the raw codes, by genre. Then those categories whose average prominence across genres was below 1% were eliminated, leaving us with 28 categories for further analysis. Subsequently, another table was created showing the relative prominence of these 28 categories, distributed by genre. Valences in two categories did not display significant. In the end, 26 categories whose average prominence in this final count exceeded 1% were used for this report.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the identity categories inductively derived from the sampled texts. This section will provide a detailed explanation of the meaning of these categories.

### *Rule of law and human rights protection*

In 2000, the discourse of feeling discriminated and wronged by the government following Estonia's regaining of independence persisted, primarily in newspapers and letters. The primary categories within this group are *Class inequality and economic degradation*, *Minority rights violations*, *Democracy*, *rule of law*, *human rights*, and *Estonia: West*. The category, Estonia: West, which denotes the perception of Estonia as part of the Western world, was much more prominent in 2000 than in 1995, largely due to the discussions about Estonia's accession to the European Union.

**Class inequality and economic degradation** have been combined, as observed that the related codes were closely linked in textbooks, newspapers, and letters (similar to the 1995 report, see

Nurseitova, 2023). Across the genres, this category consistently highlights negative and neutral valences. Textbooks associate economic deprivation with the occupations. Newspapers and letters, in contrast, focus on the isolation of the Russian-speaking minority due to the lack of knowledge of Estonian or Estonian citizenship. Pensioners, for instance, could not get their working years recognized for Estonian pensions:

By repealing the State Pension Law in 1992, those in power effectively deprived us of even the right to a pension earned through hard work, replacing it with a meagre subsistence allowance. And many of us can only access that by proving that they have the right to live in Estonia in general. (Obornev et al., 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_01200})

Graduates of Russian-language schools faced significant barriers to employment:

When we entered university, they told us, “Study, guys. Estonia needs young specialists — managers, economists.” In fact, it turned out that when you have knowledge, strength, and most importantly, the desire to work – to work where you were born and live, and not far away – no one needs you. (Ida-Virumaa graduates, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_00350})

Meanwhile, many in the working population turned to the grey economy, abandoning their efforts to find legal employment:

Now, after the end of the [prison] term, I will be forced to steal [to pay the legal fees]! I do not like to remain in debt to the state. (Zaharov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_01970})

In July 1999, amendments to the language law came into effect (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004). These amendments mandated proficiency in the Estonian language in the service sector, including for the self-employed. In many ways, the sorrows of 1995 continued, yet by 2000, it seemed that people had lost hope for economic improvement.

As before, the predominance of Russophones in the lower class was attributed in the sources to **minority rights’ violations** by the Estonian government. Primary among these was the inability to obtain Estonian citizenship without naturalization and diminishing opportunities to use Russian in public life, both of which were perceived as obstacles to a better life in the country. These grievances were reflected once again in the newspapers and letters to editors. One Russian-language school graduate, whose education was rendered unrecognized under the new system and who was therefore issued only a certificate of completion rather than a formal diploma, lamented:

I admit that the masses were ready for change. But not for changes, when, in my deep conviction, human rights have been violated since 1995 – mine personally. (Melnikov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_02480})

Another reader expressed a similar sentiment:

[...] this is the position of the government – to absolve itself of all responsibility towards its people. But in this case, why do we need a government that cares only about itself and, having provided itself with all unimaginable benefits, looks down at the people swarming on the earth from its lofty heights? (Luukas, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_00110})

By this time, however, Estonia’s impending accession to the European Union had drawn greater attention to this issue of minority discrimination. Russophones questioned whether **Estonia is part of the West**. Thus, for instance, a character in Valerii Roštšenko’s novel *Romans s golubglazoi*

*Estonieii* (Romance with blue-eyed Estonia), a Russian from Russia, sarcastically calls an Estonian Russian from Tallinn ‘a foreigner,’ as the latter disapproves of his unruly and dangerous behaviour, instead insisting on acting in a ‘Western’ way, i.e., following the rules (Roštšenko, 1999: 286 {2000\_N\_ROSC\_02100}). The implication is that Estonia’s claim to Western identity is not genuine. While many Russophones supported the idea of cooperation with the EU, many doubted that, in 2000, Estonia met its standards for **democracy, rule of law, and human rights** outlined in the Copenhagen criteria, particularly regarding including minority rights protection.

It is difficult to imagine that an international conference on the problems of the Russian population of Estonia would be held here in... Russian. Meanwhile, in Europe, respect for the language of a national minority is the norm. (Šer, 2000 {2000\_P\_DENZ\_05450})

The only promise they make is to get us into the European Union, and then, the folks added, they [Europeans] will sort out all our discriminatory laws. That’s great. (Kuznetsova, 2000 {2000\_P\_ESTO\_19270})

### *Contested identity*

The divergence between significant Others’ identities, Russian and Estonian, led to a deeper questioning of Estonian Russophone identity. Some Russophones claimed that, during Soviet times, they never questioned their own nationality. While in 1995, Estonian Russophones still sought to align themselves with either Estonian or Russian identities, they now felt they shared elements of both yet were rejected from both sides, as these two identities had become mutually exclusive. Expressions of loyalty to Estonia or **Estonianness** were conveyed through newspapers and letters with largely positive connotations, yet this led Estonian Russophones to question the purity of their **Russianness**, a theme reflected in newspapers and novels. Under ‘Estonianness,’ Russophones’ expressions of attachment to the Estonian land, declarations of loyalty to the country, and, in rarer occasions, to the state itself were coded.

Estonia is my motherland, my home. My great-grandfathers, grandfathers, and fathers laid down their lives here. My son was born here. (Melnikov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_02400})

Zhanna Golubchikova, a resident of Narva, admitted that although she was not an Estonian citizen of Estonia, she would be willing to contribute to the fight for its independence in case of war: “Estonia is my motherland, and I want it to be free.” (Den za Dnjem, 2000a {2000\_P\_DENZ\_01780})

Under the auspices of singing and dancing festivals, the Popular Front is attracting more and more supporters and is already beginning to formulate demands... Someone somewhere dug up the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact regarding the annexation of the Baltic states, and on this basis, nationalists are organizing an offensive. But who is this attack against? ... Against us, Russian-speaking people. The West, of course, supports, fanning hysteria: America, for example, which is impatient to play the Baltic card. What about us, Russian speakers, who make up fifty percent of Estonia? Are we sitting idly by, waiting for them to start throwing bottles at us and shooting from around the corner? (Roštšenko, 1999, p. 236 {2000\_N\_ROSC\_01570})

Although **Estonian culture** still was perceived as foreign to their own, Russophones sought ways to accommodate **Russian culture in Estonia**. These desires to see Russian culture accepted in

Estonia, given its greater familiarity to local Russophones than Estonian culture, was primarily expressed in speeches and newspapers.

And you ask why we need a “Slavic Wreath” [song festival]... In schools, children sing Russian songs and dance Russian dances only because they are preparing for our holiday. Otherwise, they would be preparing for the Estonian holidays... The other day I was in Narva. A consolidated rehearsal of amateur artists from the North-East took place there. I asked people the same question: Do you need the “Slavic wreath”? They answered me: “How can you ask such a thing? After all, it is thanks to these holidays that we feel like people of Russian culture, they generate such a tremendous uplift of spirit!” (Babin, 2000 {2000\_P\_DENZ\_03211})

It is necessary to create Russian public organizations of various cultural and artistic areas. We already have created well-functioning Russian choral and choreographic societies, associations of professional Russian writers and artists, amateur theatre studios, and the professional Russian Philharmonic Society. The Russian Research Centre, the Russian People’s University of Culture, the permanent committees of the song and dance festivals “Slavic Wreath”, and the committees of F.M. Dostoevsky, A.S. Pushkin have been operating for a long time, and the Russian Literature Society has recently been formed. An association of Russian filmmakers, a Russian youth association “Spirituality and Culture,” and others are in the process of being established. We strive to develop the same social structures as Estonians in the field of culture. All these Russian public organizations will undoubtedly contribute to the preservation and development of Russian culture in Estonia. (Solovei, 2000 {2000\_S\_MOLO\_02270})

A more significant divide, however, been caused by the language issue. In 2000, the Estonian parliament adopted a programme to transition Russian-language schools into Estonian by 2007. Many Russophones viewed this as a further restricting their life choices. In speeches, newspapers, and letters, they expressed a desire to preserve **Russian language and education in Russian.**

At the same time, it should be necessary at the legislative level to expand the scope of use of the Russian language, at least in those regions (cities, parishes, city districts) where the non-Estonian (i.e., Russian-speaking) population makes up the majority of permanent residents. In those regions, the Russian language should be granted equal status with Estonian in business, administrative spheres, in education – through a decision of local authorities, requiring only a slight adjustment of the law. (Vaganov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_01030})

Parents for whom the Russian language was an important element of their own identity felt deprived of the ability to pass it down to their children and feared raising an Other in their own household.

If a child adopts the norms of behaviour and way of thinking accepted in the Estonian environment, then the family will receive a stranger – if not a hostile individual, then at least someone who will most likely be ashamed of his surname, parents, acquaintances, and Russianness in general. (Molodezh Estonii, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_00580})

Beyond the language of instruction, another factor contributing to a sense of Otherness in a Russophone family was a divergence in views on history between Russophones and ethnic Estonians.

Will we educate our children's historical worldview based on the works of N.M. Karamzin, S.M. Solovyov, and V.O. Klyuchevsky? Or on the writings of Mart Laar? (Jegorov, 2000b {2000\_S\_MOLO\_01510})

Not all families, however, shared the same concerns: some sent their children to Estonian-language schools hoping that this would facilitate better integration and enhance employment opportunities during the early years of Estonian independence:

I am Russian, born in Estonia. I have a blue [Estonian] passport. And I believe that if you live in Estonia, you must be able to speak Estonian. And Russians must adapt, adapt to Estonian life. And receive education in Estonian. My daughter is in third grade. In an Estonian school. (Ivanov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_01340})

While Russian-language education received positive and neutral valences in newspapers and letters, **education in Estonian** language and learning of **Estonian language** elicited more ambiguity with both positive and negative valences present. The uncertainty surrounding the Estonian language, as presented in magazines and letters, suggests that in 2000, Russophones still had yet to commit to learning or using Estonian, instead hoping that the EU might enforce the preservation of the Russian language as a minority language.

However, the motivation for learning the state language among young people of non-indigenous nationality was not particularly stable and was predominantly instrumental in nature. This means that the language was not studied for the purpose of joining a new language community but solely to solve pressing everyday problems. An important incentive in this regard was the acquisition of citizenship of the Republic of Estonia. (Kallas, 2000 {2000\_MG\_RADU\_00050})

Some even advocated for Russian to be recognized as state language at the same level as Estonian, citing the significant number of Russophones in Estonia.

There will still be many years of political struggle to preserve education in Russian and to give the language itself official status so that it is not foreign in a country where a third of the population speaks it as their native tongue. (Jegorov, 2000c {2000\_S\_MOLO\_02480})

In this report, Orthodox **Christianity** gained increased significance for Russophones, with positive sentiments appearing in the newspapers and novels.

For a person who compares their spiritual life with the historical experience of Russian Orthodoxy – an experience that on Estonian soil dates back centuries – all this, of course, is important. They care: who is their pastor? Does a clergyman embody the blessing of his superiors and that experience of spiritual and church life with the experience that the believers themselves have encountered? (Klenski, 2000 {2000\_P\_DENZ\_02990})

Although codes do not explicitly state the reasoning behind this resurgence, it can be inferred that identifying as an Orthodox Christian allowed Russophones to express their Russianness without fear of judgement. Another category that became slightly more contested was the concept of **traditional family values**. While many Russophones still adhered to traditional roles in the family, economic degradation introduced more ambiguity and negativity towards those standards, as women increasingly raised children as single mothers and worked at equal workload with men, yet received lower wages:

It is even harder for girls than for boys. They do not want to hire them at all. What if she gets married and decides to have children? (Ida-Virumaa graduates, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_00310})

In fact, the entire burden of financial support for the family falls on the father – if he is present. (Drašnov, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_01700})

### *Political representation*

To address economic inequality, Russophones sought political representation. While in 1995 they aimed for unity with ethnic Estonians, by 2000 their emphasis shifted to finding **unity** among themselves.

Twice [we] attempted to create an organizational structure that would represent the opinions of all strata of the Russian community in relations both with the Estonian state and the wider world. These were the Representative Assembly and the Coordination Council of Russian public and political organizations. Both attempts failed. (Jegorov, 2000a {2000\_S\_MOLO\_00340})

Ironically, several Russian parties even incorporated ‘unity’ and ‘united’ in their names (the Russian Unity Party, the United People’s Party of Estonia) to suggest that they were the party to join or vote for.

In 1995, Russophones succeeded in securing six seats in the Riigikogu through a coalition of two parties (the Russian Party in Estonia and the United People’s Party of Estonia) forming the ‘Our Home is Estonia’ bloc and establishing a Russian faction. The faction disbanded already in 1996 and was briefly restored in 1998. In the 1999 parliamentary elections, the United People’s Party of Estonia ran independently and secured six seats. By 2000, parties such as the Russian Party in Estonia fractured further, and many new ones emerged, each claiming to represent Russophones in Estonia. None of these parties had electoral success since 2003, primarily due to conflicts between party members. The reasons for conflicts ranged from the views on citizenship and integration to the definition of the voter base (Russophones encompassing all Russian speakers, only ethnic Russians, or anyone who considers Estonia home). **Russian parties** were portrayed negatively or ambiguously in speeches, as they accused one another of wrongdoings. Despite their inability to unite, they had similar programmes in an attempt to attract voters. Political leaders recognized this flaw but did not forge the necessary consensus to run together. Consequently, when Russian Party in Estonia ran independently in the parliamentary elections of 1999 and 2003, it failed to secure any seats (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004).

The conflict among Russian parties hindered their ability to fulfil voters’ demands, leading to a loss of interest from their former supporters. Therefore, in 2000, the Russian elite urged voters to be more proactive in politics, fearing that the lack of **political participation of Russophones** would leave the minority without representation in the parliament or city councils.

In general, the Russian community, which includes not only Russians but also representatives of other nationalities for whom the Russian language and Russian culture are native, still faces a choice: either we will finally lose our influence in society and our approaches in politics, culture, economy [and] will not affect anything in any way, or, over time, through overcoming internal strife, we will be able to strengthen the existing social, economic, cultural, and political institutions to such an extent that

without taking into account our opinion, not a single serious decision can be made in any sphere of public life. (Jegorov, 2000a {2000\_S\_MOLO\_00330})

It is quite obvious that this factor [the visibility and importance of a Russian voter] will increase from election to election, both due to a rising number of citizens of the Republic of Estonia from the Russian-speaking environment, and, hopefully, an increase in the political literacy and activity of the population. (Jegorov, 2000a {2000\_S\_MOLO\_00490})

A parallel development emerged at the time which has also shifted the interest of Russophone voters: Estonian parties introduced Russian sections within their party structures by adding Russian representatives. This gradual shift led to the eventual disappearance of Russian parties from the political system, as Russophone votes were redistributed to the Estonian parties, particularly the Centre Party. ‘I have a negative attitude towards the split. We need one party, not two. But actually, I support the centrists’ (Ivanov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_01360}).

In some respects, the unity with Estonians aspired to in 1995 was realized. However, the result differed from what had been originally envisioned, a shift evident in the category of **Integration**. While integration carried a positive connotation in speeches, it was articulated through rather ambiguous sentiments in newspapers. In 2000, Russophones understood that their view of integration as a process of uniting the Estonian and the Russophone communities on common ground would not in the end be implemented. Estonian authorities were blamed for equating integration with the assimilation of Russophones into the ethnic Estonian community.

In the UN Charter, the concept of “integration” presupposes the preservation of the identity of national minorities in the field of education. And national minorities, in turn, learn the language and comprehend the culture of the majority. And [what do] we have? Where do you see not just equality, but [at least] basic respect for the Russian language? (Melnikov, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_02660})

At the same time, the UPPE [United People’s Party of Estonia’s] board is forced to note with regret that the essence of the programme proposed by the government is at odds with its name, since the concept of the program is based on the false idea of integration as a one-sided process of mastering the Estonian language by the non-Estonian part of society. (Andrejev, 2000 {2000\_S\_MOLO\_00880})

Compared to 1995, when the elites-in-the-making were aspiring to be part of Estonian political system in speeches, in 2000, the category of **Estonian authorities/politics** increasingly demonstrated ambiguous and negative valences. Some members of the Russian parties believed that Estonian politicians were pitting them against each other and stealing their voters by attracting Russian politicians to join Estonian parties.

The right-wing parties within the triple coalition are working out another “Russian” scenario. On the basis of the former electoral union “People’s Trust,” a parallel Russian political centre is being formed, controlled by these Estonian parties, whose task is to prevent the unification of Russian political parties. This is precisely the conclusion that comes from the analysis of the past municipal elections, the history of the creation of the ruling right-wing coalition in Tallinn, and the propaganda campaign in the press that has been launched recently. (Jegorov, 2000b {2000\_S\_MOLO\_01840})

In newspapers and letters, the negative portrayal of Estonian authorities also persisted because of economic and legal hardships that Russophones continued to experience after the Estonian re-independence.

I do not believe that there is justice and equality in this sublunary world, but if there is another one in which we will all sooner or later find ourselves, regardless of the thickness of our wallets, I really hope that those who passed this law [depriving pensioners of welfare benefits] would be put on such a [financial] “diet”. (Makarova, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_02210})

The constant deficit of the city budget, monstrous unemployment, meagre pensions, unaffordable utility bills, growing drug addiction and alcoholism – this is the small list of “achievements” in recent years. (Razguljajev, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_02620})

### *Historical Others*

This section includes five categories corresponding to historical periods experienced in Estonia: HO: Germany, HO: Russian Empire, HO: USSR, HO: Soviet Estonia, and Independent Estonia. Apart from the periods of occupation by Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, **Germany** was the only other foreign colonial power to hold some prominence in the analysis, though only in school textbooks. In these textbooks, German rule – like any other occupation of Estonian territory – was seen negatively or neutrally. A neutral valence indicated a straightforward statement regarding facts of occupation or ways of life. Unsurprisingly, textbooks predominantly conveyed a positive valence for the periods of independence. However, since textbooks are not a reliable indicator of Russophone identity, this section will focus on other sources.

Russian occupations generated more friction in other types of sources. In newspapers, the **Russian Empire** is largely associated with ambiguous valence. In contrast, the Soviet period – represented through categories like **Soviet Estonia** and **USSR** – is characterized through prominent negative, neutral, and ambiguous valences. In letters, Soviet Estonia was perceived positively, as Russophones compared their lives in 2000 to those back in the Soviet era, when they had stable employment, welfare provisions, functioning industries, strong educational programmes, and unity/multiculturalism – all of which they perceived as lacking in the years following independence.

State and city officials have already destroyed everything that could be destroyed – all the “remnants of the past” in the form of production, unique technological equipment, good domestic light industry. At the same time, [they have driven out] the most experienced, rare specialists [and] instead, they flooded the country with Chinese and other disposable junk. (Privalov, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_00050})

“You know,” says a Russian woman of about 45–50 years old (Estonian citizen), “before perestroika, I never really thought about my nationality. We were all Soviet people. I do not even remember the slightest collision with a single person of a different nationality. But now, when we are being chased out from everywhere as occupiers, they accuse us, Russians, of being only carriers of evil, and they are forgetting about our work wherever we ended up — some by direction, some by recruitment (like me, for example), I suddenly realized with heartache that I was Russian, a representative of the most unfortunate nation in the world.” (Raduga, 2000 {2000\_MG\_RADU\_00370})

The categories of the USSR and Soviet Estonia were treated separately, as the former contained references to the Union as a whole, communist institutions, and leaders, while the latter pertained to aspects of people's lives in Estonia under Soviet regime.

The category of **Independent Estonia** exhibited positive and ambiguous valence in novels.

Normal people know that the Popular Front wants to give people independence. As my grandmother told me, it was before the war, in the "Estonian" time... Even if it was worse, more difficult, but [at least we were] on our own! (Roštšenko, 1999: 230 {2000\_N\_ROSC\_01500})

#### *Internal and external Others*

At the initial recoding stage, internal and external Others were merged under 'significant Others' to simplify the aggregation of codes. The most prominent categories with this framework were ethnic Estonians, Russia, the West, and the Baltic states.

Ethnic **Estonians**, understood as an identity separate from the Estonian authorities and the inclusive idea of Estonianness, did not feature prominently in the selected sources, except in textbooks. Their positive and neutral presence in Estonian history textbooks is self-evident. In sources other than textbooks, these codes included references to ethnic Estonians and traits ascribed to them as Other, while 'Estonian politics/authorities' focused primarily on political actors and 'Estonianness' denoted Russophone identification as Estonian residents, expressing a sense of belonging to Estonia.

As in the previous report, **Russia** and **the West** exhibited the greatest salience of valences. Russia gained prominence in nearly all source types, apart from novels. In speeches, references to Russia were rather ambiguous, reflecting dissatisfaction with the Yeltsin administration alongside hopes for the new Putin era. Russophone political figures in Estonia saw Russia as an important cultural and trade partner: '... the recent historical past has left a negative imprint on our relations. But I am sure this is a temporary factor, and good neighbourly relations, as they should be between Estonia and Russia, will be established' (Kapov, 2000 {2000\_P\_ESTO\_00130}).

Some, however, expressed expectations for greater financial and legal support from the Russian government following the adoption of its law on compatriots abroad.

It is here, if this law ['On the state policy of the Russian Federation towards compatriots abroad', adopted on 24 May 1999] is successfully implemented, that there will be sources of funding for cultural, educational, social, and all other programs that will ensure the full functioning of the community of Russian compatriots. (Jegorov, 2000a {2000\_S\_MOLO\_00810})

Newspapers contained the most extensive and diverse set of valences for this category, in part due to the reprinting of articles from both Russian and Estonian media, which introduced additional layers of discourse regarding Russia and the West as significant Others. Neutral and ambiguous valences were predominant, as political and economic developments in Russia were covered systematically. Newspapers also presented as much positive sentiment toward Russia as negative. While Estonian Russophones viewed economic and cultural cooperation with Russia positively, negative valences arose in the texts about obtaining Russian citizenship and Russian government's social support – or perceived lack thereof:

This time, Russia severely offended us, war veterans. [...] When the document on the celebration of the 55th anniversary of the Victory was published, it turned out that gifts from the victorious country would not be received by all participants in the war who shed blood for freedom, but only by its citizens who remained after the collapse of the once-common country. (Malasai, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_01930})

An interesting finding is that while ‘the West’ exhibits all four valences present in its topographical structure, positive valences clearly predominate over others. As Estonia moved toward EU and NATO membership, the West was described as a civilized, democratic world that upholds human rights – an ideal that Estonia should strive for: ‘There is no such thing in Europe. Old people and disabled people are not humiliated there’ (Sidorenko, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_02850}). Even though Russophones supported Estonia’s pursuit of stronger cooperation with the EU, they did not see this as necessitating the abandonment with Russia, as there was a belief that Russia itself would eventually democratize and be a prosperous, good neighbour.

In this report **Baltic states** emerged as a significant category for Estonian Russophones. While textbooks and novels discussed them in a neutral and descriptive manner, newspapers also contained negative and ambiguous valences, as Estonian Russophones compared their experiences to those of the Russophones in Latvia and Lithuania. They also assessed the Baltic governments’ policies towards their Russophone minorities: ‘Estonia is jealous of Lithuania’ (*Den Za Dnjem*, 2000b {2000\_P\_DENZ\_07310}). Discussions also assessed different paths to the EU:

Relations between Latvia and Estonia have changed significantly since the ‘Singing Revolution’ of the late 80s, and not always for the better. In Estonia, it has become fashionable to accuse Latvia of playing the role of a ‘bandwagon’, slowing down Estonia’s movement into the Euro-Atlantic structures. (Šegedin, 2000 {2000\_P\_ESTO\_19110})

### 3. The predominant discourse and its challengers

The dominant identity discourse in 2000 is encapsulated by **Lost in Transition**. Many of the discourses circulating in 2000 remain similar to those of 1995. Even though Estonia began implementing International Monetary Fund recommendations for transitioning to a market economy, Russophones felt excluded from the desired modernization. The government was blamed for growing class inequality, economic degradation, and lack of respect to certain freedoms and rights. The West, however, continued to serve as a reference point for democratic, just, and humane way of life. During the 1990s, Russophones perceived that Estonian national identity as being constructed around ethnic Estonians. Estonia’s aspirations for joining the European Union offered hope that Estonian government would fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and place Russophones on equal footing. Lost in Transition also aligns with discourses on integration and inter-ethnic unity. While Russophones saw integration as a means of forming a shared Estonian national identity alongside ethnic Estonians, the integration programmes introduced by 2000 exhibited tendencies toward assimilation, requiring Russophones to adapt to ethnic Estonian way of life.

This dominant discourse also shaped the situation within the political community. At the time, Russophones struggled to unite among themselves, as elites presented conflicting messages towards their electorate and undermined one another’s efforts by forming numerous political groups that, when divided, could not compete with larger Estonian parties. As Russophone elites were fighting engaged in internal competition for members and voters, Estonian parties began

including Russian candidates on their electoral lists to attract Russian votes. Whereas Russophones in the mid-1990s had advocated for political pluralism and representation, by 2000 the elites had fragmented into smaller factions with largely similar ideas and programmes. This political disarray contributed to the depoliticization of Russophones, who became disappointed in both Estonian and Russian-speaking politicians, particularly given that, a decade after independence, living conditions had not improved.

I will never go to the polls again, and I will never vote for anyone. Life shows that all representatives of the people, as soon as they come to power, immediately forget their promises and, moreover, begin to harm their voters. And it doesn't matter at all whether the chosen one is Russian or Estonian. (Bulõtšev, 2000 {2000\_L\_ESTO\_00020})

While Russophone masses found themselves lost in the transition to economic development and modernization, their elites were lost in the transition to political pluralism. To date, parties established by Russophones have secured seats in Riigikogu only twice, in 1995 and 1999.

Among the broader Russophone population, there are attempts to define the Estonian Russophone Self. A decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these people had achieved full acceptance neither in Russia nor in Estonia. This stark contrast in how those significant Others developed their identity led Russophones to contest their own. They saw themselves as existing between the larger identity groups, combining elements of each: loyalty and identification with the Estonian land and a shared aspiration for a democratic, just, and prosperous Estonia, while simultaneously seeking to preserve Russian culture, history, and language. The presence and will to preserve both Russianness and Estonianness fractured the Estonian Russophone minority and caused contestation of the uniting features:

It is the Estonians who think that the Russian community is homogeneous. They consider me Russian too. And as soon as the slogan about the indestructible friendship of peoples disappeared, reasons for all sorts of splits arose – both in the past and in the present... (Sofia, 2000 {2000\_L\_MOLO\_01490})

The concept of the Estonian Russophone Self often proved too broad to serve as a unifying categorization. Differing views on its definition contributed to a lack of unity among both elites and the masses, as defining the Self required negotiating between two conflicting identity markers.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Having failed to integrate fully into either Estonian or Russian national identity, Estonian Russophones found the prospect of an independent Estonian Russophone identity also difficult to define, yet it seemed the most reassuring option. It could express both Estonianness and Russianness, blurring the boundaries that significant Others imposed on them. However, a unifying factor for the elites and the masses was lacking at the time, leading to fragmentation into small groups. At the time, Estonian national identity had not yet incorporated that unity, instead remaining centred around ethnic Estonians, but the pursuit of EU membership already signalled a move toward inclusive political representation. The segregation or infringement of human and civil rights, as noted in the previous report, was perceived to be Estonia's most pressing challenge. On its way to the EU, Estonia's envisioned future – as a democratic, just, prosperous, and neutral country – Estonia, as an independent state, Russophones thought would benefit from cooperation with the EU and Russia.

**Table 1. Raw counts**

Category	Total codes	Speeches	Text-books	News-papers	Novels	Magazines	Letters
SO: Russia	305	25	8	219	9	12	32
Class inequality / economic degradation	278	5	54	111	15		93
Estonian authorities / politics	221	26	1	104	13	2	75
SO: the West	202	5	30	125	23	1	18
HO: Independent Estonia	176	1	124	9	26	1	15
HO: USSR	160		88	26	43	1	2
Estonian language / education in Estonian	134	1	15	56	10	7	45
Traditional family values	113		19	58	31		5
Minority rights violations	108	12		46	13	2	35
Russian parties	101	58		20	10		13
HO: Soviet Estonia	98		33	10	31	3	21
Estonianness	94	4	34	29	1	1	25
Russian language / education in Russian	89	12	5	43	8	2	19
Integration	83	15	1	37	3	5	22
Christianity	80	2	23	33	22		
HO: Russian Empire	77	2	55	10	10		
Estonian culture	71	1	39	23	5	1	2
Russian culture in Estonia	71	14		52		2	3
SO: Estonians	65	4	33	2	12		14
HO: Germany	55	1	49	1	4		
SO: Baltic states	52	1	10	31	7	1	2
Estonian nationalism	49	8	9	14	12	2	4
Russianness	48	2		18	16	6	6
Estonia: West	40		5	22	6	2	5
Unity	39	15	11	1			12
Political participation of Russophones	37	24		4			9
Citizenship: Estonian	34	4		8	2	2	18
Democracy / rule of law / human rights protection	32	6	3	5	1		17
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2912</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>649</b>	<b>1117</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>512</b>

**Table 2. Topography of Estonian Russophone identity**

	<i>Speeches</i>	<i>Textbooks</i>	<i>Newspapers</i>	<i>Novels</i>	<i>Magazines</i>	<i>Letters</i>
<b><i>Rule of law and human rights protection</i></b>						
Class inequality / economic degradation		///--	---//~	~		---/
Democracy / rule of law / human rights protection						+
Minority rights violations			--~			--
Estonia: West			~	~		
<b><i>Contested identity</i></b>						
Estonianness		++/	+~			+
Estonian culture		//+	~			
Estonian language / education in Estonian		+	~+//-		~	~+/-
Russianness			~	~		
Russian culture in Estonia	+		++~~/			
Russian language / education in Russian	+		++//	~		+/
Christianity		//~	++/	+		
Traditional family values		//	++~~-	+~		
<b><i>Political representation</i></b>						
Russian parties	--~~/			~		
Political participation of Russophones	+~					
Unity	+	+				+
Integration	+		~+~			
Estonian authorities / politics	~~-		---~			---
<b><i>Historical Others</i></b>						
HO: Germany		--//				
HO: Russian Empire		//+-	~			
HO: Soviet Estonia		-/~		-/~		+
HO: USSR		---~~/		//~~-		
HO: Independent Estonia		++++///~		+~		
<b><i>Significant Others</i></b>						
SO: Estonians		+/~				
SO: Russia	~+~	~	////~	~	~	++
SO: the West		+/~	+++~	~		
SO: Baltic states		/	~~/	/		

Salience of categories is measured on the following scale: 1.0–2.0 (1); 2.0–5.0 (2); 5.0–7.5 (3); 7.5–10.0 (4); above 10.0 (5).

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