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# A Plan for the Future? The Estonian State Integration Programme on National Minorities 2000-2007

Malte Brosig

Events surrounding the replacement of a Soviet bronze statue in spring 2007 in Tallinn and subsequent international tensions between the EU and Russia marked a low point in inter-ethnic relations between Russian-speakers in Estonia and ethnic Estonians in recent years. This raises the question of how successful current integration efforts directed towards Russian-speakers have actually been. The paper analyses the development of the Estonian State Integration Programme (SIP) 2000-2007 from its earliest moments in the 1990s to its current form. It is argued that although its theoretical basis is well grounded, the programme does not account for minority integration needs systematically. Instead it follows a unidirectional action-plan, targeting Russian-speakers without a prior needs-assessment at grass-root level and insufficient minority participation during the drafting and implementation period. Furthermore, the paper highlights the influence the legal-restorationist concept maintains on the implementation of the SIP which partly has the effect of re-enforcing inter-ethnic alienation.

## **Introduction**

In April 2007 a Red Army bronze soldier statue in Tallinn's city centre was removed and placed in a cemetery outside to town centre. Two nights of street riots by the Russian-speaking youth in Tallinn followed. The bronze soldier controversy had already existed for some years before its relocation. But the mobilisation of the Russian-speaking community against its removal and the subsequent street battles with police forces were unseen in the recent history of the country and echo events in 1993 when the so-called Alien Crisis hit the country and ethnic tension was tangible. Without a doubt, significant changes have taken place in Estonia between the years 1993 and 2007. The country has made remarkable progress in the transition from foreign occupation to democratisation, economic prosperity and membership of NATO and of the EU. However, the social and ethnic differences between Estonians and the Russian-speaking minority remain unsettled and a potential source for social unrest as events concerning the bronze soldier crisis have shown. Under these circumstances the reactions are all the more surprising as Estonia has implemented a minority integration programme since the year 2000 and international financial support for minority integration has been considerable. Consequently, this paper evaluates the impact of the Estonian State Integration Programme (2000-2007) on minority integration in the country, and asks what part the SIP has played in reducing ethnic divides and social inequalities.

## **Minority Integration in Estonia: Early Attempts**

In the early 1990s Estonians expected Russian-speakers to leave the country, and state planning on minority issues promoted the remigration of Russophones. At that time minority integration was not an official policy goal and thus no systematic integration policy existed. This situation lasted for a number of years until the end of the last decade at which point Estonia started to develop a central

minority integration programme. Main parts of Estonia's minority integration programme have been developed within the country by its academic elite. International involvement was less direct and essentially entailed stressing the need to develop such a strategy. Nonetheless, without EU conditionality and external funding the setting up of minority integration programmes would have been delayed, and would have been much less effectual. From 1996 onwards the Council of Europe (COE) started a programmatic cooperation with Estonian officials with the aim of fostering Estonian integration efforts<sup>1</sup> but Russian-speakers were rarely involved during the drafting process.

In cooperation with the UNDP Estonia developed its first integration programme "Integrating non-Estonians into Estonian Society: Setting the Course" in 1997 under the guidance of Rein Taagepera<sup>2</sup>. However, the programme did not develop directly applicable project proposals but sketched out general objectives and problems. The main concern of the document is to transform an imperialistic non-Estonia mind-set into a national minority (see Section IVa From an imperialist people to national minority). Russian-speakers are generally seen as having "questionable loyalties" and their mass naturalisation would just result in "unpredictability and instability" of the country (Section IVc). The role of the state in the process of minority integration is to "ensure the perpetuity of the Estonian way of life". Furthermore, the document continues by stating that "The Estonian wants to live in an Estonian language environment and therefore understandably wishes to see Estonia-minded policy carried out (...)". This defensive attitude against Estonian culture and language reappears in all subsequent integration strategies.

In 1997 the so-called '*Vera group*' led by the Estonian sociologists Marju Lauristin and Mati Heidmets started a larger research project on non-Estonians and their prospects of integration<sup>3</sup>. In 1997 the first minister on population and ethnic affairs was appointed. Mrs Andra Veidemann founded a governmental commission which aimed at drafting a first minority integration concept. Lauristin and Heidmets were appointed as members of the commission. Almost without minority representatives they drafted a four page document. The paper was entitled "The Integration of Non-Estonians into Estonian Society" which was adopted by the government on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1999.

The title already indicates the direction the programme was meant to follow. Its main goal was the unidirectional integration of Russian-speakers into Estonian society. The protection and development

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<sup>1</sup> E. Jurado, "Complying with 'European' Standards of Minority Protection: Estonia's Relations with the European Union, OSCE and Council of Europe", PhD thesis on file at Oxford University (2002), 106.

<sup>2</sup> See for the following: Government of Estonia, Office of the Minister for Population and Ethnic Affairs, *Integrating Non-Estonians into Estonian Society: Setting the Course*, UNDP, Tallinn, September 15 1997, Available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20020108070236/www.undp.ee/integrat/eng/>, Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>3</sup> V. Pettai, "Prospects for Multiethnic Democracy in Europe: Debating Minority Integration in Estonia", in J. Ferrer and M. Iglesias (eds.), *Law, Politics and Morality: European Perspectives I* (Duncker & Humboldt, Berlin, 2003), 53-81, here: 64.

of minority rights, culture and language is not recognised adequately<sup>4</sup>. The paper was followed by an Action Plan for integration developed in 1998/99. The Action Plan mentions multiculturalism as an underlying concept for integration. The Estonian version of multiculturalism and integration is summarised in the following paragraph of the Action Plan:

“A multicultural society can work successfully only if its members possess a sufficient common core. This common core lays the foundation for mutually enriching interaction and a sensing of common interests; it creates a situation where different nations feel secure. It is natural that a large part of this common core will derive from [ethnic] Estonian culture; both the state language as well as the dominant language of societal communication is Estonian; the day-to-day norms as well as behavioral patterns, which have evolved here, must also become part of the common core. Estonia’s minorities will contribute their share to this common core, just as an important part of this commonality will come from the ongoing Europeanization process.”<sup>5</sup>

The Action Plan takes a defensive position against the existing Estonian citizenship and language policy and does not try to foster new approaches to deepen integration and multiculturalism. The already strong emphasis on the state language and Estonian culture gives the document a unidirectional character. The Action Plan ensures Estonian cultural dominance over cultural rights of minorities. A truly multicultural character is hardly visible. It is mostly written from the Estonian perspective. Minority interests formulated by minority members scarcely shine through this document. It continues by stating that:

“Within the context of societal dialogue, all functioning cultures in Estonia are equal. In relations with the state, [ethnic] Estonian culture is in a privileged position. The objective and meaning behind Estonia’s statehood is the protection and development of the [ethnic] Estonian cultural space. As a democratic state, the task of the Estonian state is both to support the development of [ethnic] Estonian culture, as well as to ensure the developmental opportunities of minority cultures. Whereas society may become multicultural, that state is and shall remain Estonian-centered. Estonian nation-statehood is manifested in the state’s responsibility for the preservation and development of the Estonian cultural space within a globalizing, multicultural world.”<sup>6</sup>

The position of the state and its tasks and obligations towards minorities become clearer. The Estonian state sees its primary goal in securing Estonian culture and language. It describes a clear hierarchy. All cultures are equal but the Estonian culture should be given special protection<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the document decouples state and society when stating that society is multicultural but

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<sup>4</sup> V. Pettai, "Prospects for Multiethnic Democracy" ..., 68.

<sup>5</sup> V. Pettai, "Prospects for Multiethnic Democracy" ..., 70.

<sup>6</sup> V. Pettai, "Prospects for Multiethnic Democracy" ..., 71.

<sup>7</sup> R. Vetik, *Democratic Multiculturalism: a New Model of National Integration* (Åland Islands Peace Institute, Mariehamn, 2001), 17.

the state remains “Estonian-centred”. This is a rather awkward attempt to limit societal diversity in state institutions. Its exclusionary character is mostly directed against the Russian-speaking minority making up almost one third of the population. However, the importance of cultural diversity and its recognition by the state is far reaching. Will Kymlicka<sup>8</sup> in his attempt to establish a liberal theory of multicultural citizenship has shown that there is a direct connection between societal cultures and the availability of meaningful choices which cannot be reached by only guaranteeing individual civic rights. The Action Plan picks up a constitutional principle. The Preamble to the Estonian Constitution similarly decrees that the state “shall guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture throughout the ages”<sup>9</sup>, whereby the term language was only recently added in April 2007. Designed in such a way, the Action Plan scarcely addresses minority needs or fosters integration.

Raivo Vetik, another architect of the SIP, justifies the central position Estonian culture and language is given in previous concepts. For him and presumably for many Estonians the small size of the population (only around one million ethnic Estonians live in Estonia), its geographic position, historical experience, and overall vulnerability of Estonian nationality put its long-term survival under pressure<sup>10</sup>. Especially in the early years of the restored republic the so-called securitisation of ethnic relations<sup>11</sup> in Estonia was limiting the acceptance of minority rights in the Estonian society. After decades of Soviet occupation and with powerful Russia as a neighbour, there was little space and sympathy for minority integration. In the first years transition meant regaining control over state institutions by Estonians replacing a Soviet administration by an ethnic Estonian one. The dominant state ideology was and still is that of a restoration of the pre-Second World War Estonian Republic, thereby excluding all Soviet-time Russian-speaking settlers. The legal restorationist concept representing the founding concept of the Estonian Republic has had far-reaching consequences for minority policies in general and later for integration projects in particular<sup>12</sup>. The widespread statelessness of most Russian-speakers especially in the early 1990s has lead some scholars to speak about an *ethnic democracy* only permitting ethnic Estonians the right to vote in national elections, and thus excluding almost one third of its population from basic democratic rights<sup>13</sup>. Therefore all national

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<sup>8</sup> W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship. A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995), 82-84.

<sup>9</sup> President of the Republic of Estonia, *Constitution of the Republic of Estonia*, Available at: <http://www.president.ee/en/estonia/constitution.php>, Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>10</sup> R. Vetik, *Democratic Multiculturalism...*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> W. Kymlicka, "Multicultural Odysseys Symposium", 6 *Ethnopolitics* (2007), 588.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Reinikainen, "Right Against Right – Membership and Justice in Post-Soviet Estonia", Ph.D. thesis on file at Stockholm University (1999) ; V. Pettai, "Framing the Past as Future: The Power of Legal Restorationism in Estonia", Ph.D. thesis on file at Columbia University (2004).

<sup>13</sup> S. Smooha, "The Model of Ethnic Democracy", European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI Working Paper #13, October 2001, 71, 80, available at: [http://www.ecmi.de/download/working\\_paper\\_13.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_13.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008 ; P. Järve, "Ethnic Democracy and Estonia: Application of Smooha's Model", European Centre for *JEMIE* 7 (2008) 2 © 2008 by European Centre for Minority Issues

laws effecting minority groups directly have been drafted with minimal or non-political participation of minority members. Although Estonian laws were seldom in open breach of international law, a number of national regulations appear restrictive because of the legal restorationist concept. The Law on Cultural Autonomy only allows citizens to set up cultural organisations and administer them independently, non-citizens can neither join nor found political parties, and minority language use for local council meetings or for communication with authorities is only officially accepted if more than half of the population in a municipality belongs to a minority group. Tight language regulations for private business and public employment are enforced at the same time. Most of the mentioned regulations have been past by parliament in the early to mid 1990s. Pettai and Hallik have characterised this phase of Estonian transition as an ‘ethnic control regime’<sup>14</sup>. Minority integration efforts during that time wore a clear imprint of Estonian cultural dominance that hardly acknowledged minority culture or language as equally valuable for society and state. The burden of integration laid solely within the minority community which needed to adapt into Estonian culture and language.

### **The Estonian State Integration Programme 2000-2007**

In its annual progress reports from 1998 until 2003 the EU Commission has raised the issue of minority integration several times. Nonetheless, European minority rights law does not strictly formulate state run minority integration programmes. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) of the COE guarantees equality before the law and non-discrimination in Article 4 which also formulates a soft obligation towards minority integration. It obliges countries “(...) to adopt, where necessary, adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority.”<sup>15</sup> It remains open as to which measures are adequate and necessary for promoting equality. Furthermore, the article leaves open the question of whether affirmative action or positive discrimination can be used for promoting equality. Article 4(2) partly takes account of this question when it states that countries “(...) shall take due account of the specific conditions of the persons belonging to national minorities.”<sup>16</sup> Of course international law cannot define clear conditions for promoting equality. This naturally must be connected to living conditions

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Minority Issues, ECMI Working Paper #7, July 2000, Available at:  
[http://www.ecmi.de/download/working\\_paper\\_7.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/download/working_paper_7.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>14</sup> V. Pettai and K. Hallik, "Understanding processes of ethnic control: segmentation, dependency and co-optation in post-communist Estonia", 8 *Nations and Nationalism* (2002), 505-529.

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and Explanatory Report* (ETS No. 157), Strasbourg, February 1995, H(1995)010, Available at:  
[http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/1\\_AtGlance/PDF\\_H\(1995\)010\\_FCNM\\_ExplnReport\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/1_AtGlance/PDF_H(1995)010_FCNM_ExplnReport_en.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe, *Framework Convention ...*

of minority members and a societal discourse on equality. But also political theorists have to acknowledge the lack of a normative theory capable of guiding us through questions of how much or what protection, minority rights should enjoy<sup>17</sup>. Defining concrete integration programmes remains a requirement for national and regional governments. International law does not proscribe specific policy measures. Abstract standards as Article 4(2) can only outline a general frame but cannot account for the very different conditions national minority groups are living in. Nevertheless, the soft wording of the mentioned article might prevent states from adopting necessary equality and integration measures since it makes it easy to adopt only superficial equality programmes. The political will for changing deep rooted chasms in society becomes key under such conditions. The discretion for FCNM signatory states is immense, as they carry the weight and responsibility to develop adequate instruments suitable for remedying existing disparities between minority and majority society.

In Estonia the drafting of a new integration concept was made possible after the national conservative party *Pro Patria* under Prime Minister Mart Laar had to form a coalition with the Moderates and Reform Party following the general elections in 1999. Lauristin became chairman of the Moderates party caucus in parliament and initiated the drafting of a new integration programme<sup>18</sup>. At the ministerial level Katrin Saks, the minister for population and ethnic affairs, started working on a new integration programme in the same year. Saks reorganised the governmental commission on integration and set up a working group that finally established the SIP which sets guidelines for Estonia's minority integration policy from the year 2000-2007. The working group again was mainly composed of ethnic Estonians and few Russian-speakers. Representatives of the Estonian Federation of Associations of Ethnic Cultural Societies and the Association of Estonian National Minorities were invited as guests. Two Russian delegates later left the working group because of disagreements on the integration policy. The new integration programme now speaks about integration taking place within Estonian society and not integration into Estonian society. Therefore the programme is named "Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007". The government adopted it on 14 March 2000, the programme states:

“(...) integration in Estonian society means on the one hand the harmonisation of society – the creation and promotion of that which unites all members of society – and on the other hand the opportunity to preserve ethnic differences – the offering to ethnic minorities of opportunities for the preservation of their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Patten and W. Kymlicka, "Introduction: Language Rights and Political Theory: Contexts, Issues, and Approaches", in A. Patten and W. Kymlicka (eds.) *Language Rights and Political Theory* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003), 1-51, here: 32-37.

<sup>18</sup> D. Laitin, "Three Models of Integration and the Estonian/Russian Reality", 34 *Journal of Baltic Studies* (2003), 197-222, here: 200-201.

What is of significance here is that integration is a clearly bilateral process - both Estonians and non-Estonians participate equally in the harmonisation of society.”<sup>19</sup>

Whereas former integration conceptions defended Estonian culture and language, this document clearly highlights the role of non-Estonian cultures as deserving protection. Preserving ethnic difference is mentioned as a distinct goal. The programme does not rank the aim of harmonising Estonian society over preserving ethnic differences. Interestingly, it speaks only about preservation and of differences and not of further developing minority cultures - which could be interpreted as limiting the scope of the integration programme only to preserving minority cultures<sup>20</sup>. The programme understands integration as a two-way process needing the active commitment of not only minority members willing and motivated to integrate, learn Estonian, respect Estonian traditions and culture, but also ethnic Estonians welcoming non-Estonians and accepting minority cultures as part of Estonian identity. The state integration programme works with multiculturalism as a conceptual item. The programme indeed is a step forward to a multicultural understanding of democracy. It abandons the idea of a mono-ethnic Estonian nation state and recognises the ethnic and cultural diversity of the state which is an essential element of multicultural democracy<sup>21</sup>. It describes “a multicultural society, which is characterised by the principles of cultural pluralism, a strong common core and the preservation and development of the Estonian cultural domain”<sup>22</sup>. The notions ‘development’ and ‘preservation’ appear again. This time the term ‘development’ is used in connection with the Estonian cultural domain, which should be developed. The mentioned strong common core refers to Estonian culture as forming and founding culture in Estonia. However, in practice the SIP’s focus is unidirectional rather than multicultural, or promoting differentiated rights for minority groups. Various reasons account for this. First, Estonia is officially a country with only one state language. Estonians have therefore been able to build up a legal protectionist wall for defending and securing the use of Estonian in public matters reflected by the SIP. Second, the knowledge of Estonian among Russian-speakers was or is poor and could thus be identified as a main hurdle for integration. Third, international financial aid heavily supports Estonian language teaching as a priority. The SIP focuses on three main fields of activity.

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<sup>19</sup> *State Programme 'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007'*, adopted by the Estonian Government on 14 March 2000, 5, Available at: [http://www.rahvastikuminister.ee/public/state\\_programme111.pdf](http://www.rahvastikuminister.ee/public/state_programme111.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>20</sup> R. Toivanen, "Das Paradox der Minderheitenrechte in Europa", 45 *SWS-Rundschau* (2005), 185-207.

<sup>21</sup> P. van den Berghe, "Multicultural democracy: can it work?", 8 *Nations and Nationalism* (2002), 433-439, here: 436.

<sup>22</sup> *State Programme...*, 5.

**Linguistic-communicative integration**, i.e. the re-creation of a common sphere of information and Estonian-language environment in Estonian society under conditions of cultural diversity and mutual tolerance.

**Legal-political integration**, i.e. the formation of a population loyal to the Estonian State and the reduction of the number of persons lacking Estonian citizenship.

**Socio-economic integration**, i.e. the achievement of greater competitiveness and social mobility in society regardless of ethnic or linguistic attributes<sup>23</sup>.

A strong emphasis is put on linguistic and communicative integration, which means supporting learning Estonian amongst non-Estonians. Drafting the integration programme is mostly a domestic concern and ethnic-Estonian interests, especially in the two earlier versions, have been visible. Nonetheless, in the preliminary pages of the programme one can read two paragraphs on the normative basis for the integration programme. There Estonia emphasises that integration must be “based on internationally recognised standards and Estonia’s constitutional principles, on our current national and social interests, and on the goal of ensuring rapid modernisation of society in the context of accession to the European Union, all while preserving both stability and a commitment to the protection and continued development of Estonian culture”<sup>24</sup>. With the inclusion of this passage, Estonia was seeking to satisfy external demands for minority protection and at the same time, demonstrate its steadfastness in continuing to defend and protect the Estonian culture first and foremost.

The EU generally welcomed the launch of an integration programme. But the Commission also reminded Estonia that “It is necessary for the Estonian government to continue to devote adequate resources and give proper attention to the implementation of all elements of the integration programme. This includes, in particular, the need to ensure a high level of awareness and involvement in integration process across all sections of the Estonian population.”<sup>25</sup>. This soft critique points to an often mentioned ‘defect’, and that is its over-focus on Estonian language training. Indeed the linguistic component of the SIP gets the largest share of funding, whilst social and economic integration are practically absent. Table 1 below gives an overview of the SIP’s annual budgets from 2000-2004. The annual budget has risen from 35,229,084 to over 51,000,000 Estonian Kroons in that period. The SIP remains chiefly funded by external donors of which the EU is the most important. Sub-programme I, which primarily aims at increasing Estonian language knowledge among Russian-speakers gets the lion’s share or between 36 to 55 per cent of the total budget. This is in contrast to the

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<sup>23</sup> *State Programme...*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> *State Programme...*, 4.

<sup>25</sup> European Union, Commission of the European Communities, *Regular Report from the Commission on Estonia’s progress towards accession, 2001* (European Union, Brussels, 2001), 23, Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/2001/ee\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2001/ee_en.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

SIP's engagement in Sub-programme II "Education and Culture of Ethnic Minorities". Here Estonia is spending only 1.9 to 7 per cent of the annual budget. The following sub-programme III fostering the teaching of Estonian to adults, which one might assume to be of particular importance to Estonia is almost completely funded by external resources. Together with Sub-programme I, the linguistic component of the SIP consumes between 50.3 to 72 per cent of the annual budget clearly outweighing all other aspects which in the theoretical concept of the SIP enjoy an equal standing. Although the language component is highly important to further integration and for reducing the still high number of stateless persons, the SIP hardly tries to remedy social and

**Table 1 Integration Foundation Budgets 2000-2004 in Estonian Kroons**

	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
total budget	51,611,032	59,359,958	38,030,392	38,446,565	35,229,084
total foreign aid	29,502,656	35,130,234	22,146,415	26,089,031	26,457,870
percent of budget	57.2%	59.2%	58.2%	67.9%	75.1%
Sub-programme I	28,440,000	24,681,378	18,374,767	13,147,494	12,743,349
percent of budget	55.1%	41.6%	48.3%	34.2%	36.2%
foreign aid	19,631,169	16,608,851	12,013,612	11,400,892	9,770,509
percent of program	69%	67.3%	65.4%	86.7%	76.7%
Sub-programme II	1,700,000	1,059,639	2,540,789	2,674,716	1,845,286
percent of budget	3.3%	1.9%	6.7%	7%	5.3%
foreign aid	0	454,181	1,213,000	1,802,608	555,200
percent of program	0%	42.9%	47.7%	67.4%	30%
Sub-programme III	7,450,000	7,590,225	6,600,748	6,202,490	12,604,257
percent of budget	14.4%	12.8%	17.4%	16.1%	35.8%
foreign aid	7,450,000	7,074,642	6,345,748	5,929,659	12,432,950
percent of program	100%	93.2%	96.1%	95.6%	98.6%

Sub-programme IV	5,050,000	6,942,607	3,087,474	5,223,554	3,519,207
percent of budget	9.8%	11.7%	8.1%	13.6%	10%
foreign aid	2,224,247	2,093,990	712,075	3,646,659	2,458,604
percent of program	44%	30.2%	23.1%	69.8%	69.9%
Part V	8,790,000	11,370,365	7,486,614	6,151,311	4,516,837
percent of budget	17%	19.2%	19.7%	16%	12%
foreign aid	197,240	8,898,570	1,861,980	3,309,213	1,069,300
percent of program	22.4%	78.3%	24.9%	53.8%	23.7%

Source: Own calculation drawn from the annual budgets for the integration programme 2000-2004.

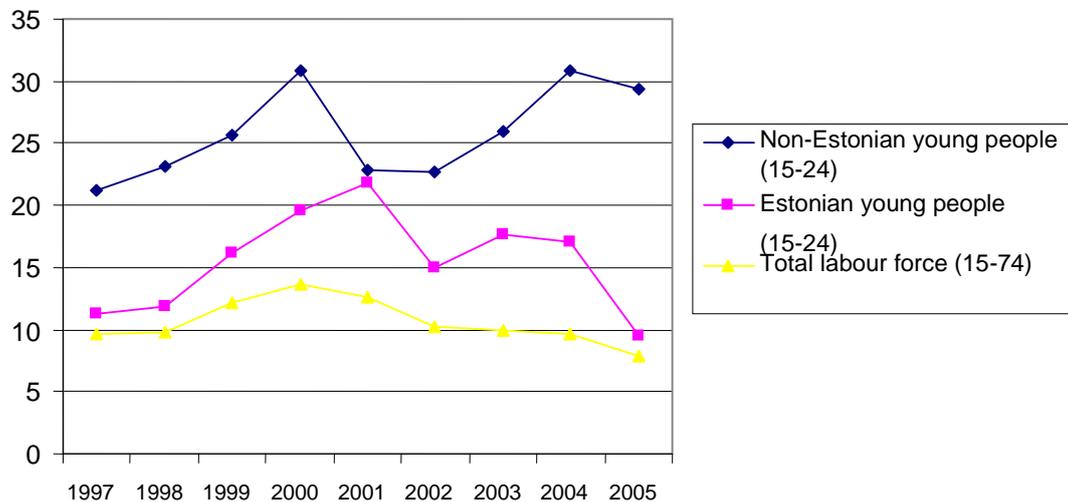
economic gulfs. Sub-programme IV “Social Competence” cannot compensate for the lack of economic or societal integration, which the SIP only scratches at. Paltry funds were earmarked for inter-ethnic projects facilitating ethnic tolerance and understanding. The involvement of ethnic Estonians is minimal and reduced to teaching Estonian. Minority problems and local demands by various different ethnic groups did not find their way into the SIP systematically. Thus, the day to day reality of many people remains untouched.

The dimension of economic disintegration belong ethnic lines should not be underestimated. The hardship of economic transition hit Russian-speakers with more intensity than Estonians because many of them worked in large industrial complexes which did not survive the introduction of market reforms. These complexes were placed in areas mostly inhabited by Russian-speakers like the North-Eastern county of Ida-Virumaa. For 2006 the Estonian Statistical Office announced a national unemployment rate of 5.9 per cent and for Ida-Virumaa of 12.1 per cent<sup>26</sup>. Thus Russian-speakers living in that part of the country are running a risk of becoming unemployed, which is more than 100 per cent higher than the average throughout Estonia. The Estonian labour survey discloses another alarming disparity between Estonians and non-Estonian youth unemployment. Whereas 9.5 per cent of Estonian young people aged between 15 and 24 years in 2005 were unemployed, this number more than triples in the same age group by ethnic non-Estonians (29.4 per cent) as displayed

<sup>26</sup> See *Statistics Estonia*, Available at: <http://www.stat.ee/>, Accessed 11 March 2008.

in table 2. This means that Russian-speaking youth belong to the highest risk group and are far more likely to be unemployed.

**Table 2 Estonian youth unemployment by nationality 1997-2005  
in per cent**



Source: Strategy for the integration of Estonian society 2008-2013; taken from: Estonian labour survey

This situation is further aggravated by a rapidly increasing number of HIV infections. The epidemic spread of HIV/AIDS started in Narva the third biggest city of Estonia at the Estonian/Russian border with a Russian-speaking population of more than 90 per cent. The disease first spread among drug addicts but numbers of infections saw an exponential growth from 2000 on. Until now the reported HIV infection rate in Estonia has been the highest in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) European Region since 2001<sup>27</sup>. Russian-speaking young males are among the most vulnerable groups. For Estonia the WHO reports an annual opiate use prevalence rate of 1.2 per cent of the adult population which is among the highest world wide. Here again Russian-speaking young males are dominating in this group.

The above data describe a very alarming trend among Estonia's minority population and point to a number of deficiencies and strategic misjudgments about the instruments and direction of minority integration in the SIP. The SIP does not differentiate enough between age, sex and region for tackling those problems that predominately affect minority groups and have a direct effect on inter-ethnic relations in Estonia. The integration programme applies a 'one size fits all' approach. It does not distinguish between the different living conditions of minorities in Estonia. The programme largely disregards a prior socio-economic mapping of minority living conditions in order to evaluate potential useful integration measures. However, there is a growing international consensus that the recognition

<sup>27</sup> World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, *Sexually transmitted infections/HIV/AIDS, Estonia*, Available at: [http://www.euro.who.int/aids/ctryinfo/overview/20060118\\_13](http://www.euro.who.int/aids/ctryinfo/overview/20060118_13), Accessed 11 March 2008.

of cultural rights and political integration efforts are not sufficient if social and economic disparities are widening and start dominating inter-ethnic relations negatively<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, the programme pays little attention to other minorities outside the Russian-speaking community. Different living conditions of Russian-speakers are not recognised. There appear not only significant differences between non-Estonians and Estonians, but also significant differences between Russophones living in Narva where the language environment is predominately Russian or Russian-speakers living in Tartu where around 17 per cent of the population are Russian-speakers and the dominant culture is Estonian. In towns like Narva with more than 90 per cent Russian-speaking population integration is hardly more than learning Estonian in language courses. Contacts with Estonians are rare. In Tartu Russian-speakers will clearly find it harder in everyday life to survive without Estonian language knowledge. Contacts with Estonians are much more likely if not unavoidable, for example, in work life or at university.

There is no doubt that supporting the teaching of Estonian to non-Estonians is an essential part of minority integration, as it is not only a means of reducing the still high number of stateless persons, but also a prerequisite for entry into the labour market, and for communication in general and contacts with Estonians in particular. From that perspective the strong focus on Estonian language learning is warranted. But it should not lead to the neglect of the social and economic dimensions of integration, as did the SIP.

In 2005 a Mid-Term Appraisal Report was compiled by Ernest & Young measuring the overall success of the SIP as regards minority integration<sup>29</sup>. Its assessment of the SIP is disappointing, rating it only *satisfactory* and further connotes “we must also point out there has generally been a low amount of success in furthering integration in Estonia”<sup>30</sup>. The SIP’s focus on Estonian language learning has not paid off. In its eight years of existence the SIP failed to make any significant improvement in the language proficiency of non-Estonians. Only 40 per cent of non-Estonians are able to communicate in Estonian. A lack of Estonian language teachers in Ida-Virumaa still complicates language learning. A divided schools system in which Estonians and non-Estonians effectively do not meet or mix very often does not provide enough opportunities for inter-ethnic understanding. It is worth noting that a number of recommendations for furthering success in integration in Estonia are also made in this report.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> M. Martiniello, "How to combine Integration and Diversities: The challenge of an EU multicultural citizenship", EUMC Discussion Paper (2004), 8 Available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/discussion/discussion\\_paper1.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/discussion/discussion_paper1.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>29</sup> See for the following: M. Rabi *et al.*, *State Integration Programme 'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007' Mid-Term Appraisal Report* (Ernst & Young, Tallinn, 2006), Available at: <http://www.meis.ee/book.php?ID=163>, Accessed 11 March 2008.

<sup>30</sup> M. Rabi *et al.*, *State Integration Programme...*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> M. Rabi *et al.*, *State Integration Programme...*, 132-135.

A further issue of central importance in minority integration is adequate participation and involvement of minority groups in matters concerning them. Especially when setting up integration programmes, minority participation during the drafting - but also implementation and evaluation process - is crucial for guaranteeing the over-all success of the programme. The COE, in recent years has underpinned the importance of minority consultation mechanisms by publishing a *Handbook on Minority Consultative Mechanisms* in 2006<sup>32</sup>. The Handbook lays down the Council's expectations and requirements for minority consultation. As regards the FCNM, a legal basis for consultation can be found in the Explanatory Report to Article 15 of the FCNM. There the Council asks the contracting parties to involve "these persons in the preparation, implementation and assessment of national and regional development plans and programmes likely to affect them directly". The Handbook (para. 43) specifies consultative measures by calling states to engage minority groups in programming through for instance, participation in setting policy targets, assessing needs of minority groups, involving them in funding decisions, taking part in the execution, supervision, the evaluation of minority programmes and reaching out to the wider public with information on minority issues.

The SIP shows substantial shortcomings in almost all of the mentioned categories. Minority participation when drafting the SIP was negligible, a needs assessment procedure is not visible and the execution and evaluation only shows sporadic and unsystematic minority involvement. The consequence of this been that important subject areas like youth unemployment, HIV/AIDS or a regional differentiation of minority needs have not been integrated into the SIP. The fact that most priorities and targets have been developed without substantial minority involvement has led to minority groups tending to adopt negative positions towards integration goals. The low success rate in teaching Estonian may also result from inadequate minority participation or influence when planning and setting out integration priorities. In circumstances in which minority integration goals have been developed without systematic minority consultation, minorities may feel that the ruling ethnic majority is imposing most if not all aspects of integration and develop resistance against policy targets and may even question the legitimacy of the policy-making process. However, securing the successful implementation and acceptance of integration goals and programmes requires a constant consultation process in which minority groups can express their interests and actively take part in programming, execution and evaluating integration programmes. By consulting minority members, state organs grant minorities social recognition, which in itself fosters integration between central state authorities and minority groups. Indeed consulting with minorities can be seen as an independent component of integration.

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<sup>32</sup> See for the following: Council of Europe, Committee of Experts on Issues Relating to the Protection of National Minorities (DH-MIN), *Handbook on Minority Consultative Mechanisms* (Council of Europe, Strasbourg), 20 October 2006, DH-MIN(2006)012, Available at: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/5\\_IntergovWork/PDF\\_DH-MIN\\_Handbook\\_MinConMecanisms\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/5_IntergovWork/PDF_DH-MIN_Handbook_MinConMecanisms_en.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

The forms of minority consultation should take due consideration of national circumstances in which minority-majority relations are taking shape. Consultation instruments can take very different forms but should ultimately be related to the specific circumstances that exist within the country<sup>33</sup>. Minority participation instruments in Europe vary from co-decision, co-ordination, consultation to self-governance of minorities. The first category refers to obligatory common decision-making in which minority interests are recognised by the state formally. Coordination mechanisms are often inter-ministerial working groups into which minority interests are channelled and which allow a better coordination of minority projects between different state organs. Consultation instruments often engage minority participation through minority consultative councils. In the case of Estonia a Presidential Roundtable on National Minorities has been established. However its working effectiveness has been problematic in the past. Lastly, self-governance grants minorities the highest degree of independence by enabling them to administer projects by themselves but with coordination from central or regional state institutions. In order to enable these consultative mechanisms to work properly, the COE's Handbook recommends a fine-tuning of its sub-structures. Consultation is more effective if its multi-level oriented meaning it does cut across different layers of public administration from central state to regional and local bodies. Specialised consultative mechanisms may be needed in order to allow focussing on particular topics such as unemployment, education, crime etc. And finally mechanisms can address particular groups within the minority population. For Estonia, young unemployed Russian-speakers may qualify as a target group. Target groups can and should also be those groups who have not been recognised by existing consultation instruments. In Estonia one may think about smaller minority groups inside and outside the very heterogeneous group of Russian-speakers. In these respects the SIP seems to be unfocussed. It surely would profit from specification, in geography, issue areas, and target groups.

As we have seen, successful minority integration requires a high degree of minority consultation and involvements. This is particularly true for Estonia because minority political participation in parliament has been very low in recent years, if not non-existent following the national elections in 2003 and 2007. However, this participation presupposes the ability of minority groups to formulate their interests, and their ability and willingness to take part in programming, monitoring and evaluating policy initiatives.

Civil society in Estonia is rather weakly developed. Potentially a stronger civil society commitment of Russian-speakers would constitute an extra channel for societal and political integration. Russian-speakers in Estonia, however, remain mainly passive and until now have not

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<sup>33</sup> See M. Weller, *Consultation Arrangements concerning National Minorities*, Council of Europe, Committee of Experts on Issues Relating to the Protection of National Minorities (DH-MIN) (Council of Europe, Strasbourg), 24 February 2006, DH-MIN(2005)011 final, Available at: [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/5\\_IntergovWork/PDF\\_DH-MIN\\_MWeller\\_Consultation\\_Arrangements\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitorings/minorities/5_IntergovWork/PDF_DH-MIN_MWeller_Consultation_Arrangements_en.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

sought to organise a mass movement for their rights and interests<sup>34</sup>. Several reasons bear responsibility for this situation. The communist party was prohibited almost immediately after independence and Russian-speakers lost a possible platform to formulate their interests. With the communist party outlawed, its organisational structure as network for further political activities also vanished. Furthermore, non-citizens are not allowed to found or join political parties as the Estonian Constitution writes in Article 48(1). Consequently, the vast majority of Russian-speakers in the direct aftermath of independence could not set up political party structures. Consequently, Russian-speakers faced organisational and legal deficits for organising their interests in the past. Finally, the Russophone community is a heterogeneous community. While Russians form the majority within this group other nationalities and ethnicities also form part of the Russian-speaking community. Soviet-time immigrants came from all over the Soviet Union and thus make up a mixture of ethnicities and cultures. Although Russian political parties exist, they fail to gain the large-scale adherence of their kin. Russian-speakers mostly vote for mainstream Estonian parties or abstain from voting. Widespread statelessness has pushed a substantial number of Russian-speakers to acquire the Russian citizenship (ca. 100,000) these people of course cannot vote in national elections.

Within the Russian speaking community a certain degree of political apathy is visible. So far they have not been able to organise their political interests effectively. The small Russian elite was not successful in building a trustworthy relationship with their peer-group, thus Russian-speakers tend to mistrust their representatives. The political inertia of Russian-speakers turned into activism only during the bronze soldier crisis in spring 2007. One example is the organisation [Night Watch \(Nochnoy Dozor\)](#) which was founded to protect the bronze statue against supposed vandalism and its feared demolition. Minority consultative measures thus face the challenge of the political apathy of large parts of the Russian-speaking community. Integrating consultative measures for minority projects thus need to take into account these circumstances and foster the building of minority and special target groups.

A further subject the SIP acknowledges is that minority integration involves both the minority and majority population. It is indeed a bi-lateral process, as the SIP states<sup>35</sup>. Without addressing both sides, the teaching of inter-ethnic tolerance, mutual understanding and language learning appears to be almost impossible. The European Union has recognised this when commenting in 2002 on minority integration in Estonia:

“(...) there is a continuing need to ensure the awareness, consultation and involvement of all sections of the Estonian population including civil society organisations actively involved in evolving the integration process, including at local level. In this context, the

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<sup>34</sup> D.J. Smith, "Russia, Estonia, and the Search for a Stable Ethno-Politics", 29 *Journal of Baltic Studies* (1998), 3-18, here: 9.

<sup>35</sup> *State Programme 'Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007'*, adopted by the Estonian government on 14 March 2000, 5, Available at: [http://www.rahvastikuminister.ee/public/state\\_programme111.pdf](http://www.rahvastikuminister.ee/public/state_programme111.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

Estonian authorities should ensure that emphasis is placed on a multicultural model of integration as stated in the aims of the state integration programme.”<sup>36</sup>

The Commission calls for adequate minority consultation in combination with the participation of “all sections of the Estonian population”. However, the SIP is not fully acknowledging this goal. The number of integration projects involving mutual tolerance building remains too small. Projects which actually engage in this area are unidirectional. While it is highly desirable to organise summer camps for Russian-speaking youngsters in an Estonian language and cultural environment, no equivalent steps have been taken for the Estonian side. A number of suitable projects can be borrowed from experience in other countries. A range of projects is available starting with, mixed kindergarten groups, school partnerships, human rights education, public campaigns, exchange of state personnel in ministries and regional offices etc.

### **Summary**

The first Estonian State Integration Programme “Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007” terminated last year, which gives reason to evaluate its performance. In order to lower the high number of stateless persons, the SIP has focused extensively on teaching Estonian to Russian-speakers. Although this decision is highly commendable, it should not overrule other important aspects of minority integration. Social and economic rifts such as disproportional high youth unemployment rates among minority members as well as drug addiction and AIDS infection rates, are practically left out of the programme. There is no regional approach visible that takes into account actual minority living conditions which indeed vary significantly across the regions in Estonia. The identification of special needs groups and a fine-grained regional approach to integration seem to be highly desirable for successful integration. Minority participation during project planning and implementation should be extended systematically across regions and for special target groups. Lastly, integration should truly be recognised as a two-way process engaging not only the minority but also the majority population. This goal might be realised by extending mutual tolerance education.

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<sup>36</sup> European Union, Commission of the European Communities, *Regular Report from the Commission on Estonia's progress towards accession, 2002* (European Union, Brussels, 2002), 32, Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/2002/ee\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2002/ee_en.pdf), Accessed 11 March 2008.

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