



**ETHNIC MINORITY POLICIES AND POLITICAL PARTIES’
APPEAL TO ETHNIC VOTERS:
A CASE STUDY OF ESTONIA’S RUSSIANS**

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on a case study of Estonia’s major political parties’ relations with the ethnic Russian electorate, the article examines the role of ethnic minority policies in the electoral appeal of nation-wide parties towards the ethnic minority electorate, attempting to assess whether pursuing efficient minority-related policies is a necessary precondition for a nation-wide party achieving electoral success among ethnic voters, and whether the migration of an ethnic minority electorate from ethnic parties to mainstream parties can be considered a sign of successful accommodation. Applying the theoretical concept of “informational shortcuts”, the article assesses persuasion strategies employed by Estonian political parties in their appeal towards the minority electorate, exemplifying the ways in which mainstream political parties can consolidate their monopoly over ethnic voters without prioritizing special minority-related policies.

KEYWORDS

Ethnopolitics, ethnic voting, ethnic minority politics, ethnic minority political participation, electoral politics, Estonian Russians

INTRODUCTION

The disintegration of socialist multiethnic federations in Europe along ethnic lines imposed ethnicity as one of the fundamental political cleavages within many of the newly-emerged states. In the states characterized by a considerable degree of ethnic heterogeneity, the politicization of ethnicity at the very outset of democratic transition tended to generate discrepancies between official ethnicity-related policies and social realities. Set as a crucial factor at the turning moment of history, the ethnic dimension not only made an impact on various aspects of policies, institutions, party programs, beliefs and the expectations of electorates, but in certain cases manifested trends of correlating with other relevant cleavages in society.

Among the states that (re-)emerged on the map of Europe in the early 1990s, Estonia is perhaps the most eloquent example of a nation-state that defined its identity in explicit ethnic primordialist terms, whereas the mechanisms of the practical implementation of the conception of political membership had clear ethnopolitical implications, resulting in an all-encompassing stratification overlapping with ethnic divisions. Starting with the premise that the overlap between ethnic and socioeconomic cleavages shapes perceptions of group interests along ethnic lines, this article explores ethnicity as a dividing line in electoral and post-electoral political processes. It presumes that a shift from "frozen" ethnicity-based perceptions of social and political realities toward civic concepts of social and political participation and a higher degree of social cohesion could be achieved only by means of political attention toward sensitive issues for the minority community. Assuming that perceptions of individual interests derive from concrete every-day existential problems, while an individual's identification with a group strongly correlates with perceptions of commonality of individual and group interests, a series of questions arise with regard to the way in which a relatively deprived ethnic minority group may impact nation-wide politics. For example, in which way do ethnic cleavages influence the nation-wide political spectrum and programs of individual parties? What is the role of an ethnic minority electorate in the electoral competition of nation-wide parties? Which tactics of electoral appeal on the part of political parties prove to be effective with regard to ethnic voters? All of these questions could be summarized by the main objective of this article, which aspires to find out the extent to which electoral orientation of nation-wide parties toward a sizeable and relatively deprived ethnic minority prompts them to consider policies aimed at improving the minority's situation in relevant policy areas. The case of

Estonia's Russians provides valuable insights into these numerous questions related to the role of ethnicity as a factor of nation-wide politics.

1. ETHNIC VOTING AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Theories dealing with electoral behavior have thus far raised three hypotheses on the role played by ethnicity. The first approach refers basically to divided societies, considering ethnic identity as a crucial factor that prompts members of ethnic groups to vote for respective ethnic parties, turning elections into a mere "ethnic census".¹ The second hypothesis, applicable to a broader range of situations, suggests that voters in making their choices are guided by policy options proposed by various parties.² The third approach, the most supported by available empirical research, expands the second one and is based on the assumption that an average voter is unable and unlikely to engage in collection and thorough evaluation of information on parties' policies. Instead, ethnicity is regarded as an "informational shortcut" that, in a situation of uncertainty, provides ethnic voters with credible cues on various political forces' favorability towards their group.³

In order to be considered ethnic voters, an ethnic community should demonstrate a correlation between ethnic belonging and electoral choices. Seeing the politicization of ethnicity in a broader context, I pay particular attention to mass awareness that an individual's prospects in the given society are conditioned by his membership in a particular ethnic group. Perceptions of ethnicity as a crucial factor shaping individual prospects are typical for societies affected by historical ethnic cleavages: aware of negative past experiences, members of the ethnic group tend to associate their individual interests with those of the group, whereas ethnic identity may serve as a group-based label or cue helping them to reduce uncertainty in a variety of micro- and macro-level social and political contexts and relationships.⁴ As a rational actor, the ethnic voter thus makes his choices, being guided by "ethnic credentials" exhibited by various parties, or party "labels" seen through ethnic lens. These cognitive shortcuts that guide the voters' choices are based on information that is easily acquired and is usually related to party ideology

¹ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

² Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1972).

³ Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957); Samuel Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter: Communication and Persuasion in Presidential Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁴ Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33 (1) (2004); Henry E. Hale, *The Foundations of Ethnic Politics: Separatism of States and Nations in Eurasia and the World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

and other relevant information that helps voters evaluate the extent to which a party is supportive of their group.⁵

In shaping minority-related policies, parties are important as channels of legislative representation of their voters' political preferences and sources of policy expertise. Typically, ethnic minority representation in a democracy has two available venues: ethnic minority parties and mainstream (nation-wide) parties. Assuming an ethnic voter is a rational actor, the representativeness of a party has to be taken into account when assessing the voter's proneness to choose between these two types of channels. The party's representativeness is contingent on its capacity to access government, which may be achieved by means of influencing policy within a ruling coalition, aligning with the government, or having a sufficient representation in the legislature in order to voice the group's claims. Thus, the ethnic group can exert influence over policymaking by means of access to government, which can be achieved either by an ethnic party's joining a coalition government, exerting influence on a minority government, or with the ethnic group's representation in government through a nonethnic party.⁶

Therefore, members of the ethnic group are expected to give their support to the party as long as the party is representative of their interests, and are likely abandon it and switch to another party as soon as they evaluate that the latter party better represents the group. Theorists dealing with the utility of ethnic voting suggest that ethnic voters' incentive to give electoral support to a party persists as long as the party responds to their expectations with regard to policy enactment⁷. The voter is guided by a cost-benefit calculation, where the benefit refers to the voter's policy preferences, while the cost is determined by the ability of the party to enact policy: the lower is the party's ability to enact the voter's preferred policies, the higher are the costs incurred by the voter.

In this respect, ethnic parties differ from nonethnic ones in one important aspect: acting as interest groups aimed at benefitting a particular ethnic community, they, as a rule, have an elaborated set of specific minority-related policy measures, while nation-wide parties do not tend to prioritize minority issues in their appeal to the electorate.

In addition, crucial limits to ethnic representation in elected bodies are set by the size of the respective ethnic electorate. Therefore, in case the ethnic electorate

⁵ Theorists of voting behavior consider gathering political information as costly to an average voter in terms of time and energy. Therefore, the voter is prone to rely on "free" sources of information, among which the most important source is information obtained from contacts with fellow group members. The other sources include publications of the ruling parties, partisan information from all political parties, political information available on the mass media, etc. (Anthony Downs, *supra* note 3, p. 209; pp. 222-223).

⁶ Jóhanna Kristín Birnir, *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 19-59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

has limited demographic resources, it would seem more likely to prefer the representation through a nation-wide party instead of supporting an ethnic party. Unequal strength of ethnic and mainstream parties raise a dilemma to the ethnic voter between the representation utility (a stronger mainstream party is likely to be more influential in elected bodies) and the policy utility (in most cases ethnic parties offer by far more elaborated minority policies).

In turn, the relative salience of the ethnic component of a voter's preferred policies is determined by the degree of importance of ethnic cleavage in the society.⁸ Successful ethnic accommodation can reduce the importance of ethnically defined motivation in voting behavior, increasing instead the importance of other cleavages (e.g., economic) over the ethnic cleavage. Conversely, when social and economic cleavages overlap with ethnic cleavages instead of cross-cutting them, ethnic motivation remains crucial in shaping voting behavior.

The above-cited literature on ethnic voting suggests that, in case the ethnic party is not representative (unable to access government or inefficient in pursuing policies), a nation-wide party can successfully challenge the ethnic party in attracting the minority electorate by simply including the most salient ethnic issues into its policy platform. Besides, mainstream parties gain advantage over ethnic ones in situations when the minority electorate is forced to pursue the "strategic voting" tactics (i.e. to vote for a more powerful second-choice party in order to prevent the victory of a least preferred third party).

Representedness of ethnic groups can have important implications for the country's stability: as numerous examples across the world show, unrepresented ethnic groups are more prone to recurring to unconventional means of voicing their political claims. If ethnic issues remain salient and both ethnic and nonethnic parties prove limited representedness of the ethnic group, the latter can demonstrate loss of interest in participating in elections and look for alternative, nonelectoral forms of political participation (exit, protest and violence).⁹

The question remains whether the migration of ethnic minority electorate from ethnic parties to mainstream parties can be considered a sign of a successful accommodation, reducing the need for prioritizing specific minority-related policies.

In the present article I study the case of Estonia's Russians in an attempt to find out to what extent the orientation of mainstream parties toward minority

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁹ Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in 36 Countries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); David A. Lake and Donald S. Rothchild, *Ethnic Fears and Global Engagement: the International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflict* (San Diego: Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, University of California, 1996); Roger Dale Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

electorate prompts them to recur to policies responding to the needs exhibited by the ethnic minority. The question is whether a consistent pursuit of policies aimed at benefiting minorities is a necessary precondition for a nation-wide party to win its electoral support. This question is particularly relevant for countries in which ethnic minority policies are dependent on major nation-wide parties. The case study of Estonia's Russians provides an example of an ethnopolitical configuration in which minority politics are structured through major nation-wide parties. The analysis is focused on the strategies applied by the parties vis-à-vis the minority electorate, attempting to find out the degree to which nation-wide parties tend to exploit the correlation between individual and group prospects, the ways in which these parties create their reputation with regard to ethnic groups, as well as the degree to which their orientation toward the minority electorate fosters their involvement in minority-related policies.

2. ESTONIA'S RUSSIANS AS ETHNIC VOTERS

The core of post-Soviet Estonia's ethnopolitical dilemma can be summarized as a stark contrast between the official ideology of the monoethnic Estonian nation-state and the country's nearly bi-communal ethnodemographic composition.¹⁰ Notably, the two decades that have passed since the restoration of Estonian statehood did not bring about significant changes to the main principles of official citizenship, language and migration policies: based on the concept of the state and citizenry framed in ethnic primordialist terms, they were accompanied neither by an official recognition of collective legal status¹¹ of the Russian community nor by practices of positive discrimination towards it on the part of the state.¹² A notable degree of underrepresentedness of non-Estonians in the political life of the country suggests that a gradually increasing share of non-Estonians in the citizenry did not lead to an increase in importance of their role in politics.¹³ The share of Russian

¹⁰ According to the 2000 census, Russians account for one-fourth of Estonia's total population. The Estonian-Russian bi-communality is particularly expressed in the capital Tallinn, where ethnic Estonians make up 55%. Russians constitute majority in the main cities of the country's North-Western Ida-Viru County (Narva, Kohtla-Järve and Sillamäe) (Statistikaamet [Statistical Office of Estonia], 2000. *aasta rahva ja eluuumide loendus [Population and Housing Census 2000]* (Tallinn: Statistikaamet, 2001)).

¹¹ In legal terms, as long as the Russian national minority does not manage to constitute institutions of cultural autonomy, it is not endowed with a collective legal status in Estonia. Among the groups that have collective legal status in Estonia, beside ethnic minorities that implemented their right to cultural autonomy (the Swedish and Finnish national minorities), the following groups can be distinguished in legal terms: the Estonians as a majority group, citizens and non-citizens.

¹² The main principles of ethnicity-related policies, enshrined in the agreements of coalition governments, included citizenship policies based on a rigid procedure of naturalization, focused on passing a language exam, and an absolute monopoly of the Estonian language in the public sphere and in the economy.

¹³ Initially, citizenship was granted to less than 40.000 out of 430.000 of non-Estonians living in Estonia. As a result of disfranchisement of absolute majority of the non-Estonian population, in the referendum on the Constitution, held on June 28, 1992, the number of people entitled to vote shrank to 60% of the pre-independence electorate. Nevertheless, the subsequent years marked a steady trend of Estonia's

deputies in the Parliament was significantly lower than the percentage of citizens having active voting rights.¹⁴ Similarly, since 1992, a non-Estonian only once became member of the Government.¹⁵ Even more importantly, representatives of national minorities had only limited participation in the elaboration of the state integration program.¹⁶

Before moving to an analysis of the evolution and peculiarities of the system of political participation of the Russian community, we turn to an assessment of whether the application of the “ethnic voters” approach to Estonia’s Russians is justified.

Numerous research projects on the socioeconomic situation of Estonia’s Russian community confirm that over the first two decades since the restoration of Estonian statehood, structural changes in economy, privatization and legislative policy in Estonia generated socioeconomic inequality which overlapped with ethnic cleavages in the society.¹⁷ The reversal of economic resources led to the socio-economic dependence of Russians on the Estonian political community.¹⁸ In all cases that a legal, economic, and social difference occurred, it was to the detriment of non-Estonians: the latter manifested significant differences in employment structure, income level, higher unemployment rate, job insecurity, bigger discrepancy between level of education and opportunities to get a job corresponding to their qualifications.¹⁹ Moreover, the trends over the two decades proved that Estonian citizenship, Estonian language proficiency and higher

Russian population recurring to the procedure of naturalization. In 2007, naturalized citizens already constituted 1/6 of electorate (170 589, accounting for one third of the overall non-Estonian population, and including almost 100.000 of people that came to Estonia after the Second World War and their descendants) (Marju Lauristin, “The participation of non-Estonians in Estonian social life and politics”: 33; in: Mati Heidmets, ed., *Estonian Human Development Report 2007* (Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu, 2008)).

¹⁴ The highest ever share of Russian participation in the Parliament (9 deputies out of 101) was achieved in the wake of the 2011 elections.

¹⁵ Eldar Efendijev served as minister without portfolio for the population affairs in the 2002-2003 government led by Siim Kallas.

¹⁶ The state integration program focused mostly on fostering the learning of the Estonian language on the part of non-Estonians. In 1999, two members of the Centre Party, M.Stalnuhhin and V.Velman were included in the working group on the integration program, and abandoned it after the minister rejected their proposals to the program. After the violence that took place in Tallinn in April 2007, the integration program was officially recognized to be a failure. Simultaneously, the number of Russians participating in the annual celebrations of the Victory Day (9 May) has been steadily growing since 2007. E.g., in Narva it grew from ca. 350 people in 2006 to 8.000 in 2010, indicating a considerable degree of quest for alternative forms of political participation.

¹⁷ An overview of statistical data of the first decade of independence is presented in: Aleksei Semjonov, “Estonia: nation-building and integration – political and legal aspects”; in: Pål Kolstø, ed., *National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies: the Cases of Estonia and Moldova* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002). For the data on the end of the second decade, see Kairi Kasearu, “The socioeconomic situation of non-Estonians”; in: Mati Heidmets, ed., *Estonian Human Development Report 2007* (Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu, 2008).

¹⁸ Vello Pettai and Klara Hallik, “Understanding processes of ethnic control: segmentation, dependency and co-optation in post-communist Estonia,” *Nations and Nationalism* 8 (4) (2002).

¹⁹ Kairi Kasearu, *supra* note 16: 47-54; Kristjan-Olari Leping, Ott Toomet, *Ethnic Wage Gap and Political Break-Ups: Estonia During Political and Economic Transition* (Tartu: University of Tartu, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, 2007).

education did not help to bridge the socio-economic opportunities inequality gap between Estonians and non-Estonians.²⁰

Objective inequality was accompanied by corresponding subjective perceptions: throughout the two decades Estonia's Russians manifested a high degree of collective awareness of a state of relative deprivation that affected their group since the restoration of independence.²¹ Among newer data, the Monitoring of the Integration Programme conducted by the Ministry of Culture and the Integration Foundation revealed that non-Estonians assessed their economic chances worse than Estonians, and the gap in the subjective assessment of their situation between the two groups was increasing every year.²² Thus, in 2010, 91% of Russophones believed ethnic Estonians to be in more favorable position and to have higher incomes and better socioeconomic prospects. In addition, the majority of non-Estonians believed ethnic Estonians to have better opportunities for their children's education (80%), political activities (93%) and obtaining a governing office in state and municipal institutions (95%).

In the sphere of culture and language use, the official course aimed at establishing Estonian as the sole language of the public life in the long run proved to be a failure, as shown by the trends of the media use of the Russian community.²³ Even more importantly, the transition of Russian gymnasiums to Estonian as the language of instruction was met with skepticism by the population affected by it.²⁴

Against this background, contrasting interpretations of history, retained by the two communities, in the long run transcended the realm of history proper: the protests over the removal of the Soviet Army monument from the centre of Tallinn turned into a symbolic manifestation of discontent over the overall marginalization of the Russian community in Estonia's public life and an outburst of mass mobilization in support of bigger "voice" opportunities for non-Estonians in Estonia.²⁵

Therefore, abundant socioeconomic research and survey data reveal a series of preconditions for Russian-speakers in Estonia to act as ethnic voters, highly aware of the fact that their opportunities in the society depend on their ethnic

²⁰ Even beside the possession of citizenship and Estonian language proficiency, the Estonian Human Development Report explicitly states that the very fact of belonging to an ethnic minority reduces the probability of a person being employed in an executive position or as a top specialist in the public sector (Kairi Kasearu, *supra* note 16: 49).

²¹ Aleksei Semjonov, *supra* note 17: 136; Vello Pettai and Klara Hallik, *supra* note 18: 519.

²² Veiko Pesur, "Usaldus riigiasutuste vastu on venekeelsete inimeste seas väga madal" [The trust in public institutions among Russian-speaking people is very low], *Postimees* (September 14, 2010).

²³ Peeter Vihalemm, "The infosphere and media use of Estonian Russians": 77-80; in: Mati Heidmets, ed., *Estonian Human Development Report 2007* (Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu, 2008).

²⁴ Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, *Russkaya shkola Estonii: sbornik materialov [Estonia's Russian School: a Compendium]* (Tallinn: Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, 2010).

²⁵ Aleksandr Astrov, *Samochinnoe soobshchestvo: politika men'shinstv ili malaya politika? [Arbitrary community: minority policies or minor politics?]* (Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2007).

background. Besides, the available data distinguishes the following main issues on which Estonia's Russian community manifested collective awareness of its distinct interests: equal opportunities in social, economic and political life, on the labor market, the status of the Russian language, availability and quality of Russian-language education. These issues have to be taken into consideration when assessing approaches to minority policies on the part of leading political forces.

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF RUSSIANS IN ESTONIA

Since the restoration of Estonian statehood in 1991, the political representation of the Russian-speaking population in the Estonian Parliament has undergone three phases.

The first phase was marked by a complete isolation of non-Estonians from national politics, as no one political force contested the 1992 Riigikogu elections due to the internal disorientation of the Russian-speaking community and its political elites against the background of absolute ethnic homogenization of Estonia's electorate in the wake of the disenfranchisement of the majority of non-Estonians.

The second phase coincided with the 1995-1999 and 1999-2003 convocations of the Parliament and saw the predominant participation of non-Estonians through ethnic Russian parties. The Russian parliamentary group, based on the coalition "Our Home is Estonia" (composed of the United People's Party of Estonia, ONPE, and the Russian Party of Estonia, RPE), was created in the Parliament in 1995 under pressure from the European Union. However, its experience was not successful: the group split twice without having achieved any political success in representing the Russian-speaking community. The Russian deputies proved unable to participate efficiently in the decision making process, manifesting a lack of political experience and professionalism. Deputies of ethnic parties did not initiate any motions in the Parliament. The absence of human, financial, media and reputational resources contributed to the inability of the leaders of the Russian parties to create a sustainable party network. Besides, these parties demonstrated the inability of long-term cooperation and partnership even within their lists. Several Russian votes were sufficient only for voicing issues, but not for influencing decisions. The immaturity of the first generation of Russian deputies in the Estonian Parliament conditioned their inability to exploit the possibility to manage issues

relevant for the Russian community with the help of various European organizations, with whose representatives they were constantly meeting.²⁶

As a consequence, the non-Estonian electorate demonstrated a gradual alienation from the Russian parties. In the 2003 parliamentary elections, the electoral support for all the major Russian parties decreased dramatically: compared to 1999, the support for the ONPE decreased three times (11108, or 2,2% of the total votes). The party had an especially weak performance in the predominantly Russian-populated Narva. Similarly, the support for the RPE decreased 10 times, falling from 2% in 1999 to 0,5% (990 votes) in 2003.

Simultaneously, the Russian electorate was increasingly taken over by the Estonian Centre Party (Eesti Kerkerakond, KE) that gradually pushed numerous ethnic Russian parties off the political scene. In 2003, 4 Russian deputies were elected on the KE lists, and one Russian deputy elected on the lists of the Reform Party. The reorientation of the Russian electorate from the Russian parties towards the KE became especially manifest in the 2007 parliamentary elections, when, despite the growing activity of the electorate, two Russian parties, the Constitutional Party (formerly ONPE) and the RPE, did not pass the 5% electoral threshold, altogether having won 1,2% of the total votes. In 2007, 5 Russians were elected on the KE lists, and one elected from the Reform Party. In 2011, the KE's Russian faction grew to 8 people, and one deputy was elected on the lists of the Social Democratic Party.

The third phase of Russian political participation in Estonian nation-wide politics was thus marked by the exclusive representation of the non-Estonian population through major Estonian parties.

In this context it is worthwhile to outline the structure of Estonia's nation-wide political arena from the viewpoint of minority policies. The results of parliamentary elections in Estonia show that in the second decade since the introduction of the multi-party system, the country's political field assumed a clear structure, dominated by four major parties: the centre-left Centre Party (Keskerakond, KE), the centre-right Reform Party (Reformierakond, RE), the right-wing conservative Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica (Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit, IRL) and the Social Democratic Party (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, SDE). These parties thus established themselves as major actors in defining ethnicity-related policies. The main cleavage line divides the KE on the one hand, and the IRL, RE and SDE on the

²⁶ These paragraphs draw on primary sources obtained in the course of interviews with Estonia's Russian politicians: Sergei Ivanov, member of the Riigikogu, member of Tallinn City Council, deputy from the Reform Party (April, 2008); Aleksei Semjonov, director of the Legal Information Centre for Human Rights (April, 2008); Mihhail Stalnuhhin, head of Narva City Council, member of the Centre Party (February 8, 2011).

other,²⁷ as the SDE demonstrated proneness to join coalition governments led by the right-wing parties.²⁸

The voting patterns of the Russian-speaking community in Estonia show a considerable degree of uniformity in political preferences: election results suggest that Russian votes constitute an important part of the KE's electoral support.²⁹ This fact, together with the already analyzed Russians' awareness of their ethnically-framed interests, justifies the "ethnic voting" perspective with regard to the electoral behavior of the Russian community.

For the opponent right-wing parties, two contrasting ways existed to counterbalance the KE's monopoly over the Russian electorate: to compete with the centrists, appealing to the Russian electorate, or to increase their support among the Estonian electorate. Electoral campaigns of 2007 and 2011 and the subsequent victory of the IRL and the Reform Party in ethnic Estonian constituencies imply that these parties opted for the first way of contrasting the KE, prioritizing the mobilization of the ethnic majority group on ethnicity-sensitive issues. Accordingly, in 2007, the Reform Party pushed for the removal of the Bronze Soldier from the centre of Tallinn as a part of its electoral campaign. In 2011, all the major Estonian parties targeted the KE on the latter's allegedly corrupt ties with Russia.

Against this background, the reaction of the Russian electorate is noteworthy: election results show a steady growth in support for the KE on the part of Russians. In the 2007 elections, 22,7% of Estonians and only 3,9% of non-Estonians claimed to have voted for the RE. The IRL was supported by 11,5% of Estonians and by only 1,9% of non-Estonians. The SDE was supported by 10,3% of Estonians and by only 1,3% of non-Estonians. In contrast, the KE garnered 51,6% of non-Estonians' votes, and only 12,9% of Estonians were supportive of this party.³⁰

After the shock caused by the Bronze Soldier crisis, support for the KE on the part of the Russians increased further. According to a later survey conducted in July, 2007, 50% of ethnic Estonians and only 13% of non-Estonians declared their support to the RE. Instead, the KE was supported by 74% of non-Estonians, and by

²⁷ The most important dimension of this cleavage regards the values of the electorate with regard to minority participation, addressed later in this text.

²⁸ The SDE participated in the following centre-right governments: Mart Laar's (Pro Patria Union) government of 1992-1994, Mart Laar's second government in 1999-2001 and Andrus Ansip's (Reform Party) government in 2007-2009.

²⁹ Since the 2003 parliamentary elections, the KE has an overwhelming support in constituencies populated by ethnic Russians, e.g., Lasnamäe and Põhja-Tallinn in the capital, as well as in the country's North-East with its main cities Narva, Kohtla-Järve and Sillamäe. The data of: Estonian Electoral Committee, "Elections and referendums in 1992-2009," (March 2011) // <http://www.vvk.ee/past-elections> (accessed May 18, 2011).

³⁰ Tartu Ülikooli, Saar Poll, *Rahvussuhted ja integratsioonipoliitika väljakutsed pärast Pronkssõduri kriisi [Inter-ethnic relations and challenges to integration policies after the Bronze Soldier Crisis]* (Tallinn: Rahvastikumistri büroo, 2007).

only 7% of Estonians.³¹ Demonstrating its allegiance to the only available civic-like channel of political participation, the Russian community in Estonia confirmed its predominant centripetal and civic orientation.

Therefore, in monopolizing the political representation of the Russian-speaking community, the KE benefited from the absence of alternative channel for the Russian community: the Russian parties were marginalized and proved to be unable to represent its interests, while other Estonian parties did not manage to establish contact with the Russian electorate, prioritizing an appeal to the ethnic Estonian electorate, based on issues dividing the two communities.

As of writing (2011), the most recent developments highlighted three trends: an increasing dependence of the KE on the Russian electorate, an increasing political isolation and apathy of the latter, and the definitive consolidation of the Russian voters' support for the KE.

These trends were particularly strengthened in the 2011 parliamentary elections, in the wake of the political scandal involving the KE. The cooperation agreement of the KE with the Russia's ruling party "United Russia", along with a huge support among the Russian-speaking electorate and the allegedly corrupt affairs in Russia, consolidated an image of the KE as a "Russian" party in the Estonian electorate's eyes: the crisis of the KE helped other parties to attract the votes of ethnic Estonians, as the 2011 elections demonstrated. Instead, the KE repeated its success in electoral constituencies populated by ethnic Russians, manifesting thus trends of sliding into becoming "a Russian party" in functional terms: the "Russian" share in its electorate rose to ca. 80%.

Still, despite the ethnic homogenization of the KE's electorate on the basis of the Russian-speaking population, its role of potential representative of Russian interests was the first to suffer. Rocked by accusations of having tried to find financing for the party in Russia, the KE found itself in complete political isolation after the elections, shunned by all potential coalition partners. As an opposition party, the KE could efficiently represent interests of its electorate only by means of cooperation with other parties.³² Isolation extremely reduced these opportunities to secure its electoral success by means of post-electoral coalitions.³³

³¹ The data of the EMOR survey are presented in: Kristina Kallas, "The participation of non-Estonians in Estonian social life and politics": 62; in: Mati Heidmets, ed., *Estonian Human Development Report 2007* (Tallinn: Eesti Koostöö Kogu, 2008).

³² In this situation, the KE experienced negative consequences of its own previously adopted strategy of treating ethnic Russian parties as opponents and consistently pushing them off the political field. In a short-term perspective, the Russian parties, indeed, were their competitors over the same electorate. In a long-term perspective, nevertheless, the KE prevented the emergence of potential allies on the left side of the spectrum.

³³ Surveys suggest that, Russians investing their trust in the KE, at the same time did not trust any democratic institution: Saar Poll, *Mitte-eestlaste perspektiivid. Elanikkonna küsitlus [The prospects of non-Estonians. Public opinion survey]* (Tallinn: Saar Poll, 2006); Veiko Pesur, *supra* note 22.

Political isolation, in turn, threatened to increase the apathy of the Russian-speaking electorate, manifested by a steady decline in voter turnout among the Russians. For example, already in the 2005 local elections in Tallinn, voter turnout in the predominantly Estonian-populated electoral constituency of Piritä was 56%, and in Nõmme it was 52%; meanwhile, the turnout in the Russian constituency of Lasnamäe was as high as 43%; in Põhja-Tallinn it was 42%. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the overall activity of the Russian-speaking electorate was by 10-15% lower than that of the Estonians: the turnout in Piritä was 72%, in Nõmme it was 68%; while the turnout both in Lasnamäe and in Põhja-Tallinn was 58%. Therefore, the voter turnout in homogeneous Estonian constituencies (constituting the Reform Party's support base) was considerably higher than in constituencies covering Russian-populated areas. Since the 2007 elections, the importance of this factor rose, as lower voter turnout among Russians allowed the Reform Party to win the elections both in 2007 and in 2011. On the other hand, in 2011, against the background of traditionally low voter turnout in Russian-populated constituencies, the success of the KE among Russian voters showed that, responding to the political "blockade" of the KE, the most active part of the Russian electorate unanimously expressed its allegiance to the KE as the only channel of political representation.

4. REPRESENTATION OF RUSSIAN POLITICS IN MAJOR ESTONIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

The theoretical literature reviewed earlier in this article suggests that the degree of major political parties' representativeness of an ethnic minority can be assessed in several dimensions: addressing issues relevant for the minority in main party policy programs; promotion of minority members on party lists and for other relevant offices; and promotion of actual minority-related policies. Then I summarize the practice of the major Estonian political parties according to all of the above-mentioned criteria and the significance of these practices for electoral appeals of political parties to the minority community.

4.1. PARTY POLICY PROGRAMS

Throughout the two decades, not a single Estonian party has elaborated efficient all-encompassing program documents dedicated to ethnic minority issues. Nevertheless, various parties gave proof of different practices in this respect.

The right-wing Reform Party (RE) and "Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica" (IRL) gave proof of a very radical stance with regard to ethnicity-related policies,

demonstrating commitment to rigid policies vis-à-vis the Russophone population on the issues of citizenship and language and virtually no proneness to concessions.³⁴ The foundations of these policies were laid by the government of Mart Laar (leader of the "Pro Patria" party and Prime Minister in 1992-1994). More recent stances of the IRL and the RE on minority-related policy issues are reflected in coalitional agreements of these parties in 2007-2011 and 2011-2015. The main stipulations of the program documents of the latest ruling coalition's are in line with the rigid principles set by the previous governments in the spheres of language, citizenship and other minority-related policies.

For instance, the coalition government constituted in 2007³⁵ by the RE, IRL and SDE, prioritized the protection of the Estonian language and its use, increasing financing of various programs of language use, and support to the activities of the Language Inspection. 5 out of 12 policy measures formulated by the coalition government were focused on the promotion of learning the Estonian language. With regard to the reform of secondary education, the program prioritized the promotion of the Estonian language of instruction, while the preservation of cultural identity and native language of national minorities was addressed only by means of doubling the financing of culture and cultural schools of national minorities. Here, the term "national minority" was not applied to ethnic Russians, since their community did not manage to create institutions of cultural autonomy. Hence, dealing with the preservation of Russian culture, the coalitional agreement referred only to the Russian Old Believers settled by the lake Peipus. Meanwhile, the overall Russophone population of Estonia was not addressed as a community with specific needs (except the officially recognized need of learning the state language and conforming to the naturalization requirements). Notably, the program did not deal with the inequality of social and economic opportunities faced by non-Estonians and did not foresee any measures aimed at overcoming it.

The coalitional agreement signed between the IRL and the RE in the wake of the 2011 parliamentary elections³⁶ largely reiterated the principles of integration policies of the previous years. The document explicitly stated that the directions of

³⁴ The stances of major Estonian political parties on minority issues in the first years of independence (1992-1995) are presented in: Klara Hallik, "Rahvuspoliitilised seisukohad parteiprogrammides ja valimisplatvormides" [Ethnopolitical stances in party programs and electoral platforms]; in: Mati Heidmets, ed., *Vene Küsimus ja eesti valikud [Russian Question and Estonian choices]* (Tallinn: Tallinna Pedagoogiaülikool, 1998).

³⁵ Estonian Government, "Reformierakonna, Isamaa ja Res Publica Liidu ning Sotsiaaldemokraatliku Erakonna valitsusliidu programm aastateks 2007-2011" [The programme of the ruling coalition of the Reform Party, the Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica and the Social Democratic Party for the years 2007-2011], (April 2, 2007) // <http://www.valitsus.ee/et/valitsus/valitsuste-loetelu/45-andrus-ansip/valitsusliidu-programm-2007-2011> (accessed May 18, 2011).

³⁶ Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, "IRLi ja Reformierakonna valitsusliidu programm" [The programme of the ruling coalition of the Reform Party and the Union of Pro Patria and Res Publica for the years 2011-2015], (March 23, 2011) // <http://poliitika.postimees.ee/?id=407612> (accessed May 18, 2011).

the citizenship policies did not change. The novelty was the enumeration of ethnic minorities entitled to the protection of their cultural heritage: Jews, Baltic Germans, Russian Old Believers, Estonian Swedes, Ingrian Finns. Again, the overall Russian community of Estonia was not mentioned among minorities entitled to specific collective rights. Besides, it is notable that the 2007 "Bronze Soldier" crisis did not prompt the ruling parties to reconsider their political strategy vis-à-vis the Russian community.³⁷

The cleavage between the stances of the KE and those of the right-wing IRL and RE on ethnicity-related issues goes back to the times of rivalry between the Popular Front and the Congress of Estonia. The ideology and membership of the former two parties was the legacy of the Congress. The KE emerged out of the rival organization Popular Front, which, however, contained many adherents of ethnocentric vision of the state among its members as well.³⁸

Nevertheless, the first Estonian political party to introduce a minority-related clause into its program was the KE.³⁹ The program, generally in line with the goals of integration policy pursued by the state, raised several problems faced by the non-Estonian population: the alienation and second-rate role of national minorities in the society, their underrepresentation in the Government, Parliament, local municipalities and the public sector, the structural unemployment of skilled workers among non-Estonians, a disproportionate share of non-citizens in the society, the continuing isolation of Estonian and Russian communities, an uncertain future of Russian schools, and the social alienation and marginalization of minorities. In order to manage these problems, the party proposed a set of measures covering social, economic and cultural policies that altogether were aimed at rendering the "one-sided" integration policies⁴⁰ more systematic. The program formulated a general goal of passing anti-discriminatory laws and creating a system of their implementation (ombudsmen, inspections, courts), as well as measures aimed at

³⁷ Among the most significant effects of the 2007 crisis, the KE-led initiative of the Tallinn City authorities to organize regular public debates "Civic Peace" intended to "break the ice" on integration-related issues is notable.

³⁸ Comparing the two rival organizations for Estonia's political renewal on the eve of independence, the Popular Front had a more liberal stance on language and citizenship issues than the Congress of Estonia. Nevertheless, the subsequent period saw an equalization of attitudes between the two organizations. In the long run, the PF and the political forces that emerged out of it adopted the legal restorationist model of citizenry, initially promoted by the Congress (see Vello Pettai, "The Construction of State Identity and Its Legacies: Legal Restorationism in Estonia," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2007)).

³⁹ Centre Party, "Eesti Keskerakonna III Programm" [3rd programme of the Centre Party], (August 21, 2005) // <http://www.keskerakond.ee/erakond/programm/programm> (accessed May 18, 2011).

⁴⁰ The official integration program prioritized learning the Estonian language on the part of non-Estonians and considered measures aimed at contrasting the influence of the mass media of the Russian Federation on Estonia's Russians. Ethnically based socio-economic inequality received only scant attention (Ministry of Culture, "Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007," (March 14, 2000) // http://www.kul.ee/webeditor/files/integratsioon/state_programme111.pdf (accessed May 18, 2011); Estonian Cooperation Assembly, "Estonian Integration Strategy 2008-2013," (April 10, 2008) // http://www.kogu.ee/public/documents/Loimumiskava_2008-2013_ENG_VV_11.06.pdf (accessed May 18, 2011)).

combating alienation, unemployment and fostering social equality and official tolerance towards ethnic minorities. With regard to the transition of Russian schools to the Estonian language of instruction, the KE program advocated a “more flexible” approach, warning of possible negative consequences of radical solutions.

The SDE introduced a clause on integration in its program as early as on the eve of the 2011 parliamentary elections, which marked a considerable change of the party’s strategy vis-à-vis the Russian electorate. While confirming its commitment to the “privileged right of the indigenous Estonian people to the perpetuation of its nation, language and culture” in Estonia, the programme enumerated the main problems faced by the non-Estonian population due to unsuccessful state integration policies: mutual isolation of Estonian and Russian communities in separated media worlds, educational environments, labor markets, living environments; alarming social and economic inequalities; and social exclusion and alienation of the non-Estonian part of society. The party stressed its commitment to involving national minorities in decision-making processes both at the local and at the national level and expanding career opportunities in the public sector (without, however, specifying concrete steps to be undertaken in this direction). Among the policy measures proposed by the program, the party committed to prioritizing the quality of education in the Russian gymnasiums in the process of transition toward the Estonian language of instruction. In addition, the party expressed its support for the creation of minority cultural autonomies; although not specifying whether it intended to prioritize concrete minorities. The program, although introducing new relevant insights with regard to minority-related policies, generally followed the guidelines of the IRL and RE programs: besides not questioning the overall strategy of the transition of secondary education to the Estonian language of instruction, it combined prioritizing the spread of the Estonian language with several measures aimed at increasing the sphere of use of the Russian language in the public and media spheres. On the other hand, it reiterated the issues already voiced by the KE (e.g., granting the Estonian citizenship to non-citizens’ children). The program thus marked a new stage in the SDE’s competition for the “Russian” votes.⁴¹

4.2. MINORITY MEMBERSHIP IN THE MAJOR ESTONIAN PARTIES

Since 1999, the results of parliamentary elections clearly demonstrated that the KE was nearly the only Estonian party that consistently offered its minority members real chances to get into the Parliament: the party’s Russian membership

⁴¹ Social Democratic Party, “The program of the Social Democratic Party for the 2011 parliamentary elections” // <http://valimised2011.sotsdem.ee/programm/loimumine/> (accessed May 18, 2011).

in the Riigikogu grew from 2 deputies in 1999 to 8 in 2011. Another party that had individual minority members elected in the Parliament in 2003 and 2007 was the Reform Party. In other major nation-wide parties, most notably, conservative Pro Patria and Res Publica, non-Estonian members were ranked at lower positions on the party lists and never made their way into the Parliament.

Thus, the overall staffing policy of the KE contributed to its image as the only Estonian party offering to Russian-speakers perspectives of a political career and promotion both at the national and at the local levels of governance as well as in public service.⁴² Likewise, since 2005, the KE has been retaining a majority of mandates in the main cities of the predominantly Russian-populated Ida Viru County: Narva, Sillamäe and Kohtla-Järve.

Beside purely quantitative representation, the KE managed to attract the most active Russian political activists, a notable example being Mihhail Stalnuhhin, the author of over 50 law drafts in the spheres of language, citizenship and migration in the Parliament in 1999-2003, and the chair of Narva City Assembly since 2002.

A sign of consideration of the Russian electorate shown by the RE and the SDE was their decision to constitute Russian factions. Nevertheless, these steps did not result in notable changes of minority-related policies of the respective parties.

The RE became the first Estonian party to create a Russian faction. Initiated by Sergei Ivanov, the faction elaborated the program on National Minorities, turning the RE into the only Estonian nation-wide party to have such program. However, the document was ignored by other deputies of the party; it did not make its way to the public and subsequently did not have any effect in preventing the events of the "Bronze night".

The policies of the SDE with regard to orientation toward the Russian electorate by means of promoting candidatures from minorities were characterized by inconsistency. The party did not prioritize the minority electorate till the 2011 parliamentary elections.⁴³

4.3. MINORITY-RELATED POLITICAL PRACTICE

In their minority-related political practice, even those Estonian political parties that provided for representation of Russians in the Parliament demonstrated limited inclusivity towards minority claims. With respect to real political power, the

⁴² E.g., in Tallinn City Assembly elected in 2005, 24 of 63 deputies were non-Estonians, overwhelmingly members of the KE (63% of 32 members of KE faction was non-Estonian; in contrast, there were only 2 non-Estonian members in the RE faction, and only 1 non-Estonian in the IRL faction).

⁴³ In 2011, Jevgeni Ossinovski became the first Russian deputy elected to the Parliament from the SDE.

participation of non-Estonian members in governing boards of all the Estonian parties remained extremely limited.

The practice of the KE showed that actual promotion of minority-related policies was contingent on an intra-party pressure exercised on the party leadership by its Russian members. The example of the Parliament of the 9th convocation is relevant: a set of minority-related laws was adopted only after the Centre Party entered the Government in the wake of the breakup of the "Tripartite Government" led by Mart Laar and composed of IRL, RE and Moderates (SDE). The laws adopted included the registration of the Russian Orthodox Church (which had no official legal status in Estonia until then); the Law on Primary School and Education that was welcomed by Russian schools; liberalizing provisions of the Law on Foreigners, the Language Law, and the Law on Citizenship. However, the elaboration and adoption of these legal provisions were the result of consistent persuasion activities initiated by individual Russian activists inside the KE towards the party leadership.

The 2007 "Bronze Soldier" crisis became the most notable manifestation of limited efficacy of channels of minority representation provided by the RE, when its two Russian deputies, Sergei Ivanov and Tatjana Muravjova, trying to avoid confrontation with their party's line, did not participate in the session of the Parliament on January 10, 2007, in which the Law on the Protection of Military Cemeteries⁴⁴ was adopted by a victory margin of exactly two votes. The SDE followed the lead of the RE in imposing the unilateral decision to relocate the monument: its member Jüri Pihl served as Minister of Internal Affairs during the April events which saw uncompromising use of force on the part of the police against the protesters. The Tallinn City Assembly, governed by the KE, opposed the decision to relocate the monument. Nevertheless, the KE exploited its role of opposition party: although its opposition to the relocation of the monument was mostly declarative,⁴⁵ the party managed to strengthen its reputation of the most liberal party toward the Russian population.

The KE's electoral campaigns demonstrate the following directions of the KE's advocating non-Estonians' rights: redrawing borders of electoral constituencies in Tallinn that were unfavorable to Russian-populated districts and privileged predominantly Estonian districts of Piritu and Nõmme, and the protection of Russian-language education. Nevertheless, the possibilities of changing situation in the mentioned spheres were hindered both by the fact that the KE was an opposition party in the Parliament, and a lack of political will on the part of its

⁴⁴ The law was initiated by the Reform Party, Isamaaliit, Res Publica and the Social Democratic Party, and was intended to lay the ground for the removal of the Soviet soldier's monument from the centre of Tallinn, opposed by a vast majority of Estonia's Russian population.

⁴⁵ Out of 21 deputies of the KE in the Parliament, 6 voted against the Law on the Protection of Military Cemeteries, 9 supported it, and 6 abstained from voting.

Russian activists. For example, on the eve of the 2007 elections, the KE did not introduce any motion with regard to the proposed changes to the Law on Elementary School and Gymnasium (entered into force in January, 2010) during the parliamentary debates (although during the final vote, all the 28 members of the KE faction did vote unanimously against the law draft). The passivity of the KE with regard to the problems of Russian-language education translated to the local level as well. In Loksa (57% Estonian), the Russian Gymnasium was closed by the City Assembly, where the KE had 14 seats out of 15. This was one of the first initiatives of the newly-elected assembly after the 2009 local elections, where most deputies were Russians.⁴⁶

4.4. ELECTORAL APPEALS OF MAJOR ESTONIAN PARTIES TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN ELECTORATE

According to surveys conducted in the Estonian political parties,⁴⁷ not a single party claimed to have special strategies for attracting Russian votes.

The IRL had an explicitly Estonian-centered view on ethnicity issues, combining its insistence on integration of non-Estonians with an Estonian-centered vision of state, and stressing the necessity of “historical education” of Russian-speakers. In contrast, the KE and the RE claimed to have a balanced stance with regard to the whole of Estonia’s population, regardless of ethnic affiliation, therefore seeing no need for special policies among non-Estonian population.

In the electoral appeals of the KE,⁴⁸ the party preferred to employ an approach cutting across ethnic lines, aimed at convincing the Russian-speaking voter that his interests harmonized with those of the overall population of Estonia, instead of emphasizing the distinct needs of the Russian community. The party contrasted itself to the ruling RE and IRL, presenting itself as the only alternative to their policies. Notably, the principles of the minority-related policies were not questioned; the KE’s criticism targeted the ruling parties’ economic and social policies. The KE invoked its own experience of ruling Tallinn, where it had

⁴⁶ Similarly, having a majority in Tallinn City Assembly, the CP did not use this possibility for voicing the education question, although the law foresaw a possibility to introduce other languages of instruction with the consent of a majority of the school’s parents and the council of trustees, the consent of the City Assembly, and the consent of the Government.

⁴⁷ The survey conducted by the agency Turu-uuringud is presented in: Aleksei Gunter, “Parlamentskie partii ne delyat svoih izbirateley na russkih i estoncev” [Parliamentary parties do not divide voters into Russians and Estonians], *Postimees* (April 21, 2009). The stances of the mainstream parties on ethnicity-related issues on the eve of the 2011 parliamentary elections are available in: Ksenija Repman, “Krupneyshie politicheskie partii Estonii ne delyat svoih izbirateley po natsional'nosti” [Estonia’s major political parties do not divide their voters by ethnicity], *Postimees* (January 17, 2011).

⁴⁸ See, for instance, the appeal of the KE to the Russian-speaking electorate, made during the conference “Russian policies of the Centre Party” on the eve of the 2009 local elections: *Postimees*, “Obrashchenie Tsentristskoy partii k russkoyazychnoy Estonii” [Appeal of the Centre Party to the Russian-speaking Estonia], (18 September 2009) // <http://rus.postimees.ee/?id=166325> (accessed May 18, 2011).

overwhelming support from the Russian population. Explicitly opposing electoral tactics based on “playing the national card”, the KE targeted the ethnic Russian parties as its opponents, not potential allies, and presented itself as the only alternative and claiming that votes cast for “loser” ethnic Russian parties would strengthen the position of right-wing parties.⁴⁹

Likewise, the ethnic Russian political forces perceived the KE as their main opponent. However, unlike the KE, the Russian party based its electoral appeal on policy measures proposed with the aim of overcoming ethnically based social and economic inequality. In the wake of the “Bronze Soldier crisis”, the political tactics of the remaining Russian forces underwent a notable redefinition.⁵⁰ During the 2011 electoral campaign, the united Russian list “Russkaja Sbornaja” (“Russian Team”), created on the institutional platform of the RPE, presented an “Antidiscriminatory Programme”⁵¹ proposing a set of concrete policy measures in the spheres of social and economic policies, education, cultural autonomy and voting rights. The Russian party stressed its interpretation of the “Russian question” as a sociopolitical issue rather than an ethnic one, and justified the need of political consolidation of Russians with the goal of seeking “inter-ethnic justice”.⁵²

The KE, in turn, emphasized its success in building and monopolizing an image of the only Estonian party with a genuinely civic approach, cutting across ethnic lines, as opposed both to the divisive approach “us versus them” employed by the ruling IRL and RE with regard to the Estonian and Russian communities, and to that of the Russian parties that tried to position themselves as “protectors of Russian interests”.⁵³ In its public discourse, the leadership of the KE expressed anxiety over the future of the state in which an individual’s nationality is appreciated more than his personal abilities. Contrasting itself to the IRL and RE, the KE cited its own cadre’s policies in the Tallinn City Assembly as an example of

⁴⁹ In practice, these votes only strengthened the position of the KE in 2002 and 2005: according to the Estonian electoral system, the votes of parties that fail to pass the threshold are distributed among the winning parties.

⁵⁰ Three political paths of ethnic Russian parties in Estonia can be distinguished. The Russian-Baltic Party of Sergei Ivanov, which pursued the explicit pro-integration stance by basing its political identity on the idea of cultural distinctiveness of Baltic Russians, declared its rightist orientation and in the long run merged with the RE. The United People’s Party (ONPE, since February 2006 renamed into the Constitutional Party, *Konstitutsioonierakond*) merged with the Left Party of Estonia, which, nevertheless, repeated the former’s destiny of turning into a dwarf party. The Russian Party of Estonia (RPE), led by the ex-activists of the former Russian section of the Popular Front, continued to exist, competing with the KE for the electorate and never passing the threshold since the 2005 elections.

⁵¹ Russian Team, “Antidiskriminatsionnaya programma Russkoy Obshchiny Estonii” [Antidiscriminatory program of Estonia’s Russian community], Tallinn (February 19, 2011) // http://www.slavia.ee/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5875:2011-02-03-12-00-15&catid=161:-riigikogu-6-2011&Itemid=221 (accessed May 18, 2011). Adopted as a program document by the candidates of the “Russian Team” (electoral list of the Russian Party in Estonia) for the 2011 parliamentary elections.

⁵² Interview with Dimitri Klenski, leader of the “Russian Team” in the 2011 parliamentary elections (11.03.2011.).

⁵³ Edgar Savisaar, “Kakim mne viditsya budushchee Russkogo voprosa” [How I see the future of the Russian question], (April 20, 2011) // <http://www.keskerakond.ee/savisaar/rus/2011/04/20/> (accessed May 18, 2011).

openness of the party's institutional channels to activities of non-Estonians with social ambitions. Other major Estonian parties, competitors of the KE, avoided such strategy(s) with regard to the non-Estonian population.

Another important dimension of the KE's electoral strategy which helps to understand its popularity among the Russian population was constituted by an appeal to the so-called "Second Estonia", or "losers" of transition.⁵⁴ The Russian population gave proof of susceptibility to this appeal, as it was directed to the population aware of its socioeconomic deprivation.

In addition, the Russians' support for the KE as a more representative channel of participation, compared to weak ethnic Russian parties, finds its explanation in research on the political culture of Estonia's Russians, which suggests a low degree of protest mood and proneness to adapt to the forces in power.⁵⁵

Thus, the Russian community, having to choose among Estonian nation-wide parties, opted for a combination of the party's prospects to access the power and the party's inclusivity towards the non-Estonian community. Both features became the crucial cognitive shortcuts of the KE's electoral appeal to the Russian electorate that explain the party's absolute victory over the ethnic Russian party.

The patterns of the political behavior of Estonia's Russian community showed that their mobilization clearly followed civic lines of political participation, not that of confrontation with the state or with the Estonian community. The results of the referendum on independence, the number of Russians recurring to naturalization procedure in the 1990s⁵⁶ as well as sociological surveys all show that Estonia's Russians, supportive of civic model of society and open for integration, never challenged the right of Estonians to their nation-state.

The situation of relative deprivation prompted Estonia's Russians to direct their anxieties and expectations towards the Estonian state and its institutions, as a community aware of being underrepresented in Estonia's political and economic life. Thus, in 2007, an absolute majority of Russians manifested a wish to see their community participating in Estonia's political and economic life on equal footing with the majority community, believing that the majority political elite should show greater consideration for their views.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Kristina Kallas, *supra* note 31: 62.

⁵⁵ Eiki Berg, *Estonia's Northeastern Periphery in Politics: Socio-economic and Ethnic Dimensions* (Tartu: Tartu University, 1999), p. 78. Studies on Estonia's Russians identity and integration dynamics are presented in: Aksel Kirch, *The Integration of non-Estonians into Estonian Society: History, Problems and Trends* (Tallinn: Estonian Academy Publishers, 1997). The study of D.Laitin deals with patterns of adaptation of Estonia's Russians to the new socio-political realities in early 1990s: David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ Aleksei Semjonov, *supra* note 17: 116.

⁵⁷ Tartu Ülikool, Saar Poll, *supra* note 30.

Nevertheless, the same surveys reveal a sharp contrast between attitudes of ethnic Estonians and Russians towards participation of non-Estonians in Estonia's political and economic life. Only 28% of ethnic Estonians were supportive of Russians' aspirations for increased participation; in contrast, 34% of Estonians considered the involvement of Russians to be rather harmful to the country. Only one third of ethnic Estonians approved the Russians' representation in the national Parliament proportional to their share in the Estonia's population, while over one half of members of the ethnic majority group opposed it.⁵⁸ Later survey data confirm the predominant commitment of more than one half of the majority community to ethnic primordialist values: in January, 2011, 54,1% of ethnic Estonians regardless of education and income level still considered the preservation of the Estonian nation and culture to be a major challenge for the country.⁵⁹

Thus, the Estonian community manifested a stronger commitment to ethnocratic models, confirmed both by the results of sociological surveys and the electoral results. The attitudes of the majority group prove to be an important factor to take into consideration when assessing the orientations of major Estonian parties with regard to minority-related issues. Comparing the practice of the parties with the attitudes of ethnic Estonian public opinion toward perspectives of increased political participation of non-Estonians in the political life, one conclusion is obvious: one half of Estonia's society exhibited the values prioritized by the RE, IRL and SDE. This part of the society constitutes a stable electorate of these parties that make up a traditional coalition opposing the KE. The KE, in its turn, could count on one third of ethnic Estonians' votes. This layout determined the outcome of the 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections.

These facts might help explain the link between the perpetuation of restrictive principles in Estonian minority policies and overall Estonian politics, which prove to be clearly structured along ethnic lines.⁶⁰

As a consequence, a consistent ethnopolitical exclusivity pursued by the state in the long run resulted in a loss of value of Estonian citizenship in Estonia's

⁵⁸ Raivo Vetik, "Kelle oma on Eesti riik, kui ta on rahva oma?" [Whose is the Estonian state, if it belongs to the people?], *Eesti Päevaleht* (February 27, 2007).

⁵⁹ The findings of the "Klaster" survey company are presented in: Mirko Ojakivi, "Eesti järgmine suur eesmärk: rahvuse ja kultuuri säilitamine" [The next great Estonian objective: the preservation of the nation and of the culture], *Eesti Päevaleht* (February 7, 2011).

⁶⁰ The impact of Russian votes became particularly evident back in 1995, when the Moderate Party (Möödukad, later SDE) hardly passed the 5% threshold in the parliamentary elections. It became clear that if the number of Russian voters had been higher by 30.000, the layout of national political arena would be noticeably different, shaped by a stronger performance of the political forces uniformly supported by the Russian voters. The 1995 elections marked the beginning of a long period during which the Estonian language requirements for obtaining citizenship were increasingly toughened and led to an extreme reduction of the number of naturalized citizens per year. The number of naturalized Estonian citizens among adults was gradually declining each year and in the long run was minimized. New naturalized citizens were overwhelmingly children that had the right of obtaining citizenship after passing graduation examinations in the primary school.

Russians' eyes: research conducted from 2000-2010 showed that the number of those willing to obtain Estonian citizenship decreased drastically.⁶¹

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of Estonia's Russians provides a relevant case study for understanding the correlation of electoral orientation of nation-wide parties toward the ethnic minority electorate and forms of its engagement in minority-related policies in situations where minority politics are structured through nation-wide political parties.

The example of Estonia's Russians shows that nation-wide parties possess a wide range of persuasion strategies based on ethnicity-related informational shortcuts that allow them to attract a considerable share of ethnic minority votes without prioritizing special minority-related policies or ensuring the efficiency of these policies.

The case study of Estonia's Russians thus gives only limited support to the theoretical assumption that ethnic voters' incentive to give electoral support to a party persists only as long as the party responds to their expectations with regard to policy enactment. The ethnic Russian parties in Estonia, indeed, lost their electoral support as they demonstrated unsatisfactory representative and policy enactment capacity in the Parliament. Renewed membership and policy strategies did not help the ethnic Russian parties to claim their electorate back from the KE, despite limited policy enactment capacity demonstrated by the latter party. The KE, as the most minority-inclusive nation-wide party, gave proof of possessing a set of cognitive informational shortcuts that successfully target the beliefs and perceptions of group interests of the Russian electorate, most closely simulating the ethnic voters' preferred policy package, without, however, elaborating it fully.

The comparative analysis of the practice of Estonian nation-wide parties in the sphere of minority policies shows that these parties' minority-related program guidelines are in the initial phase, while concrete policy measures initiated by these

⁶¹ Veiko Pesur, "Eesti kodakondsuse väärtus kahaneb katastroofiliselt" [The value of Estonian citizenship is decreasing at a catastrophic pace], *Postimees* (September 14, 2010). In 2010, 7,5% of Estonia's population were stateless (compared to 32% in 1992). The number of those willing to obtain Estonian citizenship was rising till 2005 up to 74%, but the year 2008 marked a decline: only 51% wanted to become citizens in 2008, and 33% in 2009. In 2009, ca. 40% of stateless did not want to have any citizenship, although in 2005, only 7% shared this view. The biggest problem faced by the stateless people was difficulty of learning the language and passing the exam. Besides, an alarming sign was an increase in the share of stateless people that did not feel part of Estonia (from 32% in 2008 up to 50% in 2009). This showed an increasing alienation from the political system of people that had potential for successful integration: among non-citizens uneager to obtain Estonian citizenship, about 40% were younger than 45 years, 46% spoke Estonian, 40% felt strong or very strong attachment to Estonia, 76% claimed to love Estonia, and 92% considered Estonian citizenship policies to be too rigid and unjust toward non-Estonians. State officials, although admitting the importance of these figures, did not see necessity to introduce radical changes to citizenship policies.

parties remain subject to the engagement of minority politicians within these parties. Moreover, the general stances of the most inclusive party on relevant minority-related issues (most notably, on the Russian-language education) proved to be in line to those of its opponents; measures of overcoming socio-economic inequality were not debated either. The "Bronze Soldier" crisis events of the year 2007, as a manifestation of recurring to non-parliamentary (protest) forms of political participation due to limited efficiency of available institutional channels, became the most alarming signal prompting the classification of Russian politics in Estonia between a marginal political representation and no representation at all.

Moreover, the institutionalized ethnic segregation that characterizes the political arena in Estonia is shaped by a considerable degree of polarization manifested by the Estonian and Russian ethnic communities on a range of important issues, including the most crucial one: the reluctance of an overwhelming share of the ethnic majority community to see an increased participation of the minority in politics and economics of Estonia. In the face of the challenge of polarized political preferences of the two ethnic groups on ethnicity-related issues, two options are available to the Estonian political parties: to pursue a pattern of ethnic exclusivity, targeting the expectations of a more exclusively-minded part of the ethnic majority electorate, or to adopt a civic approach, appealing both to the moderate part of the ethnic majority community and to ethnic minority electorate. The political practice of the major Estonian parties proves that the right-wing Estonian parties (IRL and RE) opted for the first approach, de facto acting as ethnic majority parties and recurring to ethnic mobilization tactics vis-à-vis the majority electorate, whereas the KE framed its electoral appeal in civic terms. Therefore, the major political parties in Estonia gave proof of having polarized ethnic credentials, where ethnicity acts as a significant component of party labels.

In turn, polarized political preferences determine the uniformity of electoral preferences within the ethnic groups, to a considerable extent fitting the "ethnic census" description. In this situation, the minority electorate is influenced by the logic of "strategic voting", i.e. voting for the party that combines positive prospects of access to government with inclusivity towards minorities in an attempt to prevent the victory of minority-exclusive parties.

Thus, the internal political layout in Estonia is unfavorable to creating incentives for addressing relevant minority policies and for creating overarching civically-framed nation-wide spaces for social and political participation. In turn, the limited proneness of nation-wide parties to pursue minority policies has important implications for social, political and economic development of the ethnic minority community. As the strategies of equalizing ethnically-based social and economic

differences in party program documents are still in their embryonic stadium, ethno-social stratification remains an inherent feature of Estonia's development. Ethnicity-based inequality in the spheres of political representation, economics, and social life continues to structure interests and their perceptions along ethnic lines: in Estonia, ethnicity still operates as an informational shortcut which serves to indicate to voters where their interests should lie.

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