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Coping with Displacement

The Multiple Identities and Strategies of the Russian-Speaking Population in Estonia

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INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEMATIC SITUATION OF THE RUSSIAN SPEAKERS IN ESTONIA

In August 1991, in the midst of the failed coup in Moscow, the Estonian Soviet Republic declared its independence after four years of political struggle. The new state restored the Estonian Republic as it existed between the world wars, and great emphasis was put on this continuity. But the Soviet period had brought enormous changes that could not be ignored, perhaps the most important being the fate of the large proportion of non-Estonians living in the country. Most of this minority use Russian as their primary means of communication, and as a group, the non-Estonians are generally referred to as Russian speakers both by Estonians and themselves. In the first free elections in independent Estonia, no parties represented the Russian speakers, and in the 101-member parliament elected in September 1992 there were no Russian-speaking representatives. In the second parliamentary elections, held in March 1995, two parties representing the Russian-speaking population formed a joint list, and gained six seats. Thus, a third of the population was not represented in the first parliament, and seriously underrepresented in the second.

The new situation challenged the inhabitants of the new state with important questions: Which nationality do I belong to? Which state do I owe my allegiance to? What are my political goals, and how shall I try to attain them? For ethnic Estonians the answers to the first questions were simple, and support for the new state was close to unanimous. For the non-Estonian, mainly Russian-speaking group, the questions were more problematic. Should they accept and adapt to the new situation, learn Estonian and integrate into Estonian society, or should they resist instead, keeping their own language and culture and offering their allegiance to the new Russian state? These are the questions that guide the present article, in which I will try to cast light on the Russian speakers' problems concerning identity. In addition, I will discuss the connection between identity and strategies: What kind of goals did the Russian speakers set for themselves, and how have they tried to achieve them? The underlying assumption is that clear and unproblematic identities may provide a strong basis for the formulation of clear goals and focused strategies, while multiple, uncertain, or ambiguous identities correlate with unclear or divided goals and strategies. In the limited space of this article, my focus is narrowed down to *organized political action*, although some other tendencies will be commented on.

The article consists of three main parts: the first outlines the social and political situation of the Russian speakers; the second grapples with the question of identity; and the third is devoted to the Russian speakers' choice of political strategies.

WHO ARE THEY? THE RUSSIAN SPEAKERS IN ESTONIA

Estonia is situated between Russia, Latvia and the Finnish Bay. During this millennium, it has been dominated in turn by Denmark, Sweden, the Teutonic (German) knights, Poland, and Russia. After the First World War, independence was won from a collapsing Russian Empire. It was to last, however, only for two decades, as Estonia was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940. Fifty years of Soviet rule came to an end when Estonia declared its independence in August 1991, thus restoring the former Estonian Republic.

The Second World War and the forced integration into the Soviet Union led to vast demographic changes in Estonia. In 1934, the population stood at 1.25 million, 88.2 percent of which were Estonians. Russians made up 8.2 percent, Germans 1.5 percent and Jews, Swedes, and Finns the remaining 2.1 percent. The war led to extermination of the Jews as an ethnic minority, and most of the Germans and Swedes left the country, along with a large number of Estonians. Soviet power brought massive immigration, and in 1989 the population stood at 1.57 million, of which Estonians made up 61.5 percent. Russians formed 30.3 percent, Ukrainians 3.1 percent, and Belarussians 1.8 percent. The remaining 4.3 percent were made up of a mix of nationalities, mostly from other parts of the Soviet Union (Raun 1991: 246–47). Some of these people integrated into Estonian society, while others had closer ties with the Slavic nationalities, using Russian as their main means of communication. Thus, the people who are now grouped as Russian speakers encompass a great variety of ethnic backgrounds, including both historic minorities and people who arrived in three different waves of immigration (Vetik 1995).

The first wave of immigrants came in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, when industrial workers and Soviet administrative personnel were sent to Estonia. These were mostly from neighboring regions in Russia. The second wave, in the 1960s and 1970s, consisted mostly of people from more distant parts of the Russian republic. The third wave, from the end of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s, brought immigrants from all parts of the Soviet empire. The immigration was generally resented by the Estonians, who saw it as an attempt at Russification. These immigrations, combined with memories of World War II and the extensive deportations during the Stalinist period, served to instill in most Estonians a deep resentment towards Russia and Russians.

During Soviet times, both Estonian and Russian were official languages, Russian being a *lingua franca* which could be used anywhere. This did not encourage the immigrants from other parts of the Soviet Union enough to learn Estonian or to acquaint themselves with the local culture, and thus Estonians and Russian speakers had little interaction. Most Estonians share a dislike of Russians and 'Russian culture' and are eager to emphasize the differences between themselves and the settlers (Kolstø 1996). Few Estonians have Russian friends, and vice versa. Estonian children go to Estonian schools, and Russian and most other non-Estonian children to Russian-language schools. Before independence, "the whole life career of Estonians and Russians went ahead separately: schools and universities worked separately in Estonian and Russian languages, professional education was targeted towards different sectors of the economy, mono-national working units prevailed, and so on" (Helemäe and Saar 1995: 133). There were and are clear differences between Estonians and Russian speakers in

terms of place of residence and type of employment. The Russian speakers mostly came to Estonia to work in the industry, public service or the military forces, and they are largely urbanized, with more than 90 percent living in cities or towns (Rose 1995a). They make up half the population in Tallinn, the capital, and form a solid majority in the industrial cities in the north-east. Estonians, who dominated the agricultural and service sectors during Soviet times, are in a clear majority in the countryside, and the Southern and Western parts of the country.

In the political struggle leading up to independence, the main frontlines ran between Estonian organizations advocating autonomy and later independence, and organizations claiming to represent the Russian speakers and fighting for a political continuity with the Soviet Union. While the struggle for independence united the Estonian people, it split the Russian-speaking part of the population. The enthusiasm and dedication that drove the Estonian grass-roots movement was missing on the anti-independence side, which was largely organized by party officials and industrial leaders. As the struggle wore on, a growing number of Russian speakers supported the move toward liberalization, autonomy, and ultimately independence. In the referendum on Estonian independence, held in March 1991, close to a third of them supported independence. However, even though the declaration of independence in August 1991 was supported by a solid number of Russian speakers, their situation deteriorated during and after the struggle for independence. For many Russian speakers who had not grasped the latent conflict, Estonian hostility came as a surprise.

Following the independence, the Russian speakers, formerly representatives of the dominant culture in one of the world's two superpowers, became a minority in one of Europe's smallest countries. After having partially dominated society, they suddenly found themselves without political representation in a parliament that passed laws against their interests. They became an underprivileged minority overnight, in a small country with a hostile majority.

When independence was declared, only a sixth of the Russian speakers living in Estonia received Estonian citizenship automatically. These were former citizens of the first republic or their descendants. The remaining Russian speakers were defined as aliens, they suddenly faced the choice of whether or not to apply for citizenship or residence permit. In order to obtain citizenship, the applicant has had to live in Estonia a minimum of five years,¹ take exams on Estonian history and the Estonian constitution in the Estonian language, and swear allegiance to the Estonian state. Many Russian speakers experienced these demands as humiliating, and more found the practical difficulties in learning the language and taking the exams insurmountable. As obtaining *Russian* citizenship also required application, a great number of Russian speakers in effect became stateless, and a majority of them have remained so. Only Estonian citizens can vote and run in parliamentary elections. Non-citizen residents can register to vote in local elections, but only citizens can be elected. As a result, no parties seeking to represent Russian speakers were registered for the 1992 parliamentary elections, and thus no Russian speakers were elected. The Russian speakers had practically no say in the formulation of the new legal system, and many of the decisions made and laws passed were against their interests (Andersen 1997).

The language law of 1989 made Estonian the sole official language in Estonia. Subsequent legislation introduced language proficiency tests which have to be passed to obtain citizenship, or to fill positions in public service. Further, people already working for the state are required to pass tests showing specified levels of proficiency within

¹ From 1992 to 1995, the period of residence required was two years.

stipulated deadlines in order to keep their jobs. The language of communication with state agencies is Estonian, and people who need the help of interpreters have to pay for their service (Pettai 1996). 'Estonianization' policies have been imperfectly implemented, however, partly because they would have left Russian-dominated cities without essential staff. As a language, Russian has no special legal status, and is officially considered a minority language along with Ukrainian, Swedish, and Finnish. The only concession by the state authorities is that one can communicate with the authorities in Russian in areas where Russian speakers make up more than half the population.

In Soviet Estonia, Russian speakers usually had better access to apartments and jobs in the well-paid industry sector than Estonians (Helemäe and Saar 1995). In independent Estonia they lost all such special privileges. The new laws on privatization restored land and buildings to the former owners or their descendants, who were almost exclusively Estonians. All inhabitants received privatization coupons depending on how long they had worked in Estonia, but since only citizens could buy land, most Russian speakers could spend their coupons only on buying the flats they lived in, or buying shares in privatized state enterprises (Andersen 1997).

In the new economy, heavy industry, employing a large share of the Russian speakers, was hit particularly hard by recession. While Tallinn saw quick economic growth and the creation of new jobs, the Russian-dominated industrial towns in the north-east experienced stagnation and a massive loss of jobs. In Narva, lying on the Estonian-Russian border, only around half of the working-age population have steady jobs (Boerefijn 1995). The Russian speakers are much more prone to unemployment than the Estonians; lack of other skills and proficiency in Estonian have closed opportunities for finding new work (Rose and Maley 1994, Rose 1995a, Eamets 1995).

Before the independence, Russian speakers tended to be more prosperous than Estonians but this has been reversed since 1991. In addition to decreasing wages and more limited access to the labor market, the Russian-speaking population has a diminished arsenal of defensive economic means like savings (mostly wiped out by the inflation in 1990–1992), aid from family networks, or plots of land to grow food (Rose 1995b). As a result, the average Russian speaker has seen his or her economic situation worsen compared to the average Estonian. In making classifications according to sources of income, benefits and other resources, Richard Rose found that half of the Russian speakers fall into the categories *vulnerable*² or *marginal*,³ while only a fourth of the Estonians are classified so (Rose 1995a).

The period after independence has brought many changes, and although both Estonians and Russian speakers have experienced the positive and negative sides of the new system (Estonia is now considered to have the most solid economy of the former Soviet republics), the Russian speakers have been at a clear disadvantage.

THE RUSSIAN SPEAKERS' IDENTITY

The non-Estonian or Russian-speaking identity has no clear content, and is therefore difficult to refer to. The group is bound together by two factors: the first is a negation, the fact that they are not ethnic Estonians, and the second is their common acceptance and use of the Russian language. Although the Russian speakers include people of a

² *Vulnerable*: Income is limited to earnings from regular jobs, benefits at place of work, or pension.

³ *Marginal*: Income-producing economic activities are limited to growing food, repairing family houses, and using 'connections' through the help of friends and relatives.

number of nationalities, Russian is their common language, and many of them, especially the Ukrainians and Belarussians, have become Russified. However, the denomination 'Russian speakers' includes a large group of different peoples who share only the use of Russian – far from being the ideal material on which a strong sense of identity can be based.

Many of the Russian speakers were born in Estonia, and more than ninety percent have lived in the country for more than ten years (Rose 1995a). The ties to Estonia are stronger among the Russians than among the other immigrant nationalities, as the non-Russian immigrants started to come at a later stage. At the same time the Russian speakers are being forced to adapt to a new Estonian society, the contact with Russia is diminishing. Traffic over the border has been declining, in part because of the trouble and expense of obtaining a visa to cross the border, and the Russian speakers in Estonia are slowly losing touch with everyday life in Russia. If this tendency continues, personal ties with Russia will weaken. In the long term, the loss of regular contact with Russia combined with increased interaction with Estonians may contribute to the formation of a separate Russian or Russian-speaking identity in Estonia.

Ethnic background is one of the most important bases for identity-building and "an extremely powerful mode of subjectivization" (Wæver 1993: 22), often the core around which a person builds his or her identity. It is also the major basis for state-building, and has the political advantage of reproducing the sense of identity across generations in a more or less automatic fashion (Wæver 1993: 22). Also, "in crises involving a perceived threat to the unity of an ethnic group, identity affirmation resolves internal stresses resulting from political and social degradation of the group" (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1995: 357). It has been shown above that the Russian-speaking population has experienced political and social degradation, which likely leads to a cultural revival of their Russian identity. This assumption, however, collides with two major obstacles – the ethnic heterogeneity of the Russian speakers, and the de-ethnicizing effect of the previous Soviet regime. Several writers contend that the settlers were not used to thinking in terms of ethnicity – that the principal element of their identity was Soviet. As Nikolai Rudensky writes, "[m]any Russians outside Russia never perceived themselves as minority groups: just the opposite, they considered themselves representatives of the dominant nation in a multinational state. Thus, they displayed national loyalty neither to the republic of their permanent residence nor to Russia, but to the Soviet state as a whole" (Rudensky 1994: 63). According to Neil Melvin, "the core of the migrant population was drawn from those sections of the Soviet population most closely tied to the successes of the regime – industrial workers and members of the military and security apparatus. They were largely rootless in an ethno-cultural sense. Their migration to the Baltic region was thus not Russian colonization in a new guise but Sovietization by a Russian-speaking, de-ethnicized immigrant population" (Melvin 1996: 31). In a 1986 survey, 78 percent of the Russian speakers identified with the whole Soviet Union. Only 14 percent felt close to Russia and eight percent identified with the Estonian republic (Melvin 1996: 36). When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the main source of identification disappeared, and new sources had to be found.

As mentioned, the Russian-speaking group is not a homogeneous body in terms of ethnicity. Thus, Russian-speaking political leaders trying to mobilize the Russian speakers face the problem of appealing either to a Russian identity and, by this, risking to lose support of those who do not feel totally Russian; or to the whole Russian-speaking group, but without being able to make use of nationalist rhetoric. In addition, 'Russian identity', or the idea of what it means to be Russian and who is included or excluded from the group, is fairly unclear. Russian identity has never had clear

geographic or ethnic boundaries. The expansionist Russian state sought to incorporate the peoples of newly conquered areas by spreading Russian culture all over the empire. Tsarist and Soviet nationalities policies created little sense of a well-defined ethnic or civic Russian nation. When the Soviet Union collapsed, some 25 million Russians lived outside the Russian Federation, and there were large non-Russian minorities within its borders. In the words of Rudensky: "the largest European nation, with a record of imperial domination, suddenly became a divided people with vulnerable peripheral groups" (Rudensky 1994: 58). The first years of the Russian Federation's existence was marred by sharp conflict over Russian identity and foreign policy. Nationalists and communists saw Russian ethnicity and the old borders as the foundations for Russian identity and foreign policy, while more Western-oriented groups presented Russian national identity primarily in civic terms (Melvin 1996). Gradually, some sort of a compromise was reached: the ethnic and civic definitions were fused together in an ambiguous relationship. It has now become an uncontested principle of Russian policy that the Russian communities are part of the Russian nation and that the Russian state has a basic responsibility for their well-being. For policy-makers in Moscow, the Russian diaspora also includes Russified groups all over the former Soviet Union. "Russian ethnicity and national identity have therefore been defined in terms of an admixture of sociological, political, cultural-linguistic, and genealogical definitions" (Melvin 1996: 22). Russia offers citizenship to all former citizens of the Soviet Union. It is the only legal alternative for the diaspora groups to express political allegiance, as neither the Ukraine nor Belarus has shown inclination to support their own diaspora.

Since the independence, Russian speakers have been much less organized than the Estonian population (Ruutsoo 1993). During the Soviet period, Russian speakers were mostly organized through the state, directly or indirectly. When the Soviet state collapsed, so did many of the organizations. Of those that survived, like the trade unions, most have seen a massive drop in their membership. Of the organizations that are active, many are remnants of the Soviet patterns of organization – veterans' unions, trade unions, cultural associations. Although the Russian speakers in Estonia are better organized than in most other post-Soviet states (Kolstø 1996), they have had difficulties in building up powerful new associations that can represent them and provide them with clear alternatives. Membership in the various associations is generally low, and out of three political parties organized during the autumn of 1994, only two managed to secure the 200 signatures needed to register.

This organizational weakness can be interpreted in various ways. It might be due to a lack of leaders who can mobilize people, it may be the result of a disbelief in the efficacy of organizational effort or an uncertainty as to which organizations represent the Russian-speaking population. Melvin sums up a number of factors that make new organizations and collective efforts problematic, some of which have already been mentioned.⁴ First, the immigrants were marked by a high level of mobility, and accordingly, a weak sense of rootedness. They have difficulties in engaging in local community discussion. Second, there have been continual waves of immigration, breaking up traditional social networks. Third, the migrants are an ethnically mixed group, consisting of not only Russians, but also Ukrainians, Belarussians, Tartars, Jews, etc., which complicates the setting up of organizations based on ethnicity. The migrants settled mostly in urbanized areas, which increased their atomization and made it difficult

4 Listed by Neil Melvin, London School of Economics, at the conference *Russians Outside Russia* at the Central European University, Budapest, 14–15 April 1996.

to build up social networks; and because they are geographically dispersed, they have different regional characteristics and interests. A last point is that in uncertain circumstances, the first priority is usually economic security, not political action. This signals a tendency towards atomization and individualization which makes collective efforts – so important in the construction and maintenance of identity – problematic. Whichever way one chooses to see it, the construction of a common identity proves to be difficult under the circumstances.

Social surveys, though, do reveal certain tendencies in the development of identities in Estonia. While in 1986 most Russian speakers said that the Soviet Union was their primary source of identification, eight years later the picture was radically different. When asked in 1994 about how they think of themselves, 52 percent of the Russian speakers said they first and foremost identified with their city or locality, while 32 percent mentioned Russia. Only six percent chose the region or Estonia, and two percent the Soviet Union. Ukraine and Belarus (potential 'homelands' to more than 12 percent of the Russian speakers) were mentioned by three percent. When asked about a second priority, 33 percent mentioned city or locality, and 41 percent said Russia (Rose 1995a: 44). As a contrast, Estonians first and foremost thought of themselves as Estonians, which indicates a less problematic self-image. In a 1993 survey, 86 percent of the Russian-speaking respondents thought that Estonia was very important to them, while two thirds said the same about an indivisible Russian state (Rose and Maley 1994: 47). Thus, the general impression is that while Estonians have a clear grasp of their identity and state loyalty, the Russian speakers have a more ambiguous understanding of themselves and their situation. Having lost the Soviet Union, it seems that most Russian speakers retreat to localism for their primary source of identification, with the new Russia coming in second. This may indicate that ethnicity is not as important in this case as place of residence, although the low degree of identification with Russia is not a well-founded basis on which any solid conclusions can be drawn.

Russian cultural identity, or the feeling of belonging to Russian culture, seems fairly strong among most Russian speakers. The educational divide into Estonian and Russian schools is still predominant, and it should be noted that proposed legislation to remove Russian-language secondary schools has served to unite the Russian speakers in protest. Even so, the Estonian authorities' decision to allow the establishment of a Ukrainian-language school in place of a Russian-language one in 1996 caused serious concerns among Russian-speaking politicians and the Russian speakers of different nationalities.

The role of religion should also be commented on. As a group, the Russian speakers are more religious than the Estonians (Rose and Maley 1994, Rose 1995a), and the majority (55 percent) consider themselves orthodox (this also applies to seven percent of the Estonians). For many, religious loyalty turned into a source of ethnic conflict in the autumn of 1993, when a faction of the orthodox church, dominated by Estonians, registered itself under the name of the Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church, and claimed to revert to the jurisdiction of Constantinople instead of Moscow.⁵ This caused a split in the church, as the remaining Russian-dominated part, under archbishop Cornelius, refused to register under any other name, and the failure of registration caused problems when former church property was reverted to the church. The Russian-speaking population generally supported Cornelius, as was shown by the participation

5 The Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church lay under Constantinople's jurisdiction from 1923 until the Soviet occupation. The leadership of the church fled to Sweden in 1944, and maintained its organization.

of some 10,000 Russian speakers, the largest group mobilized since the independence struggle, in a procession marching through the old city of Tallinn.

Let us turn to political allegiance and support for political regimes. When questioned about their evaluation of the past and present regimes, Russian speakers generally hold positive opinion of both the past Soviet regime and the present Estonian state, but are strongly critical of the present government in Russia (cf. Rose 1995a). Thus, most Russian speakers express a preference for the Estonian government. Although they may have misgivings about Estonia and its political leadership, Russia is not a positive alternative for the majority of Russian speakers. During the last three years of the Soviet Union, the Russian-speaking population showed increasing support for Estonian independence. Between April 1989 and September 1991, the proportion of Russian speakers supporting independence rose from five to 55 percent (EMOR-polls) and at present very few Russian speakers oppose the existence of the Estonian state.

In addition to preferring the Estonian political system to the Russian, most Russian speakers wish to be included in the new state. In a 1994 survey made by an advisor to Boris Yeltsin, a majority (58.3 percent) of Russian speakers that are not Estonian citizens said they wished to obtain Estonian citizenship. This indicates a willingness to transfer their political allegiance and limit their identification with Russia to an ethnocultural level. In the same survey, 13.5 percent said they preferred dual citizenship, something the Estonian constitution does not allow. Only 3.9 percent claimed they wanted to apply for Russian citizenship (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995). This corresponds with other surveys that indicate that most Russian speakers want Estonian citizenship. However, the number of people going through the naturalization process has remained low because of the difficult requirements. Russian citizenship, on the other hand, can be obtained through a simple procedure. As a result, the political loyalties of the Russian-speaking population, as they are expressed through citizenship, seem confused. Around a fourth of the Russian speakers now hold Estonian citizenship, and roughly a fourth have become Russian citizens. This leaves more than half in limbo, in the position of being 'stateless'. As shown above, acquiring Russian citizenship does not necessarily imply close affinity to the Russian state, nor does it necessarily entail a wish for reunification with Russia. For most the decision was made out of a desire for the security that citizenship offers, and it was easier to get Russian citizenship than going through the ordeal of applying for the Estonian. This assumption is supported by the fact that most of those who chose Russian citizenship are elderly people living in the north-east region (Vihalemm 1996). As such, Russian citizenship for many was a choice of convenience, and not necessarily a statement of political allegiance.

As could be expected, the majority of Russian speakers feel connected to Russia, but they also hold high opinion of the Estonians, a feeling that is not reciprocal. Sixty-nine percent of the Russian speakers say they have a lot in common with Russians while only five percent of Estonians say the same. Twenty-eight percent of Russian speakers say they have much in common with Estonians, 46 percent say they have some things in common, and only eight percent say they have nothing in common (Rose 1995a: 30). Most Russian speakers give clear indications that they are attached to Estonia, and think of it as their homeland. Around a third of them were born in Estonia, and most have lived in Estonia for more than 20 years. To break up and go somewhere else would be a major step, and only a small minority is contemplating such a move.

The Baltic republics were among the better functioning areas of the Soviet Union, and Russians tend to think of Baltic peoples as organized and hard-working. In the words of Kolstø: "The Baltics are probably the only region in the former Soviet Union where many local Russians are apt to see the indigenous civilization as equal or even superior

to their own" (Kolstø 1996: 625). This positive evaluation should make it easier for the Russian speakers in Estonia to accept their demotion from the top position in the ethnic hierarchy than it is for Russian settlers in Kazakhstan or other former Soviet republics. Although Estonians are generally eager to point out the differences between them and the Russian speakers, according to recent social surveys, the two groups are surprisingly alike in terms of values and opinions held. There are systematic differences between them, as Russian speakers have more positive feelings toward the old regime, they are more leftist in their political views and more critical to the laws and regulations that relate to citizenship and language. Still, the differences are minimal: in average, two-thirds of both groups hold similar views on most political issues, except citizenship (Rose and Maley 1994, Rose 1995a).

Estonian sociologists Kirch, Kirch, and Tuisk focus on the rootlessness of the Russian speakers, saying that these people simultaneously consider themselves as representatives of Estonian, Soviet and world culture (Kirch, Kirch, and Tuisk 1992: 15), which indicates a weakness in the Russian part of their identity. They argue that the local Russian-speaking community is too scattered to become a source of social identification, and conclude that the most significant basis for social identification is the denomination 'Baltic Russians'. This assumption is supported by my personal experiences and various interviews with Russian speakers. Although most of them make it clear that they feel Russian, they also say that they feel different from 'Russian Russians'. They have taken up many 'Baltic' traits, especially in terms of work ethic and the belief in organized society, and often speak of Russians in Russia as being lazy, disorganized and arrogant. Most seem to think that they would find it problematic to adapt to Russian society. In the words of Melvin, they have become 'Balticized'.

It is difficult to make any definite conclusion based on the material at hand. What seems clear is that the Russian speakers have lost their major source of identification, the Soviet Union, and, as a group, they have not made a definite choice about what will replace it. Although the Soviet legacy was to a large extent connected to Russian culture and language, this does not mean that the Russian Federation is the automatic successor as an identification source. Melvin sums it up: "At present most Russian speakers have great difficulty identifying themselves with any particular culture. Multiple and often competing identities are therefore found among the settlers. The minorities tend to view themselves as being simultaneously representatives of overlapping Baltic, Soviet, Russian, and world cultures. In terms of self-identification, the settler communities are not as yet ethnic-based minorities. Being a Russian speaker continues to form the main substance of their identity" (Melvin 1996: 27).

GOALS AND STRATEGIES: THE EXPRESSION OF IDENTITY?

Given the problematic identity of the Russian speakers, it is interesting to look into the political strategies they follow. Are they united in their political preferences? The term strategy is here used in the sense of patterns of actions taken and plans made in order to achieve a certain goal. Strategies can be followed by both individuals and groups, but they are politically relevant only when they are represented by a large number of people. These patterns can be organized around a central leadership, or disorganized, due to the spontaneous actions of many individuals.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, evaluations of the economic future is also of importance in the forging of political strategies. Since 1991, the economic situation has been uncertain for a great number of Russian speakers and, as mentioned above, the economic development has been disadvantageous to the Russians-speakers as a group.

Even so, most Russian speakers are optimistic about the future, and it is fairly predictable that their economic situation will be better in five years time (Rose 1995a). At the same time, evaluations of the situation in Russia are negative, and most Russian speakers doubt whether they could find work and a place to live in Russia. Most believe it to be to their personal advantage to stay in Estonia, and therefore to adapt to the new circumstances. Most respondents believe that there is no alternative to a market economy, and that Estonia is on its way toward economic growth. It seems safe to assume that economic prospects play an important role in people's evaluation of the situation, and that their decision to remain in Estonia and adapt to Estonian society is based on the belief that in the long run, it will be to their personal advantage. This may have an effect on their sense of belonging, as time spent in a place contributes to a perception of rootedness. On the other hand, such an economically based complacency may turn out to be problematic if the Estonian economy does not live up to what it seems to promise.

The strategies listed below⁶ form the most obvious alternatives for the individual Russian speakers and organizations representing them:

- a) *Emigration – leaving Estonia,*
- b) *Irredentism or separatism – illegal confrontation with the Estonian state,*
- c) *Confrontation within the Estonian state apparatus – protesting with the limits of the law,*
- d) *Cooperation within the Estonian state apparatus,*
- e) *Integration into Estonian society,*
- f) *No action.*

Support for the different strategies has been measured through actions, like leaving the country, taking Russian or Estonian citizenship or taking part in demonstrations; through voting, both in Russian and Estonian elections; through social surveys; and through the general development as described in the press and other publications.

A. Emigration

Since 1989, the Estonian proportion of the total population has increased, as a net immigration turned to net emigration, and a significant number of Russian speakers left the country. Between 1989 and 1995, the number of Russian speakers sank by 12 percent. Combined with extremely low birthrates, this meant the number of total inhabitants sank by 4.7 percent. Most observers assume that those who left were the least integrated into Estonian society, thus leaving those best prepared to adapt to the new reality. This exodus reached its peak in 1992, when more than 30,000 people left the country. There was little organized activity supporting the migration among the Russian speakers, but nationalist Estonians set up an organization for decolonization, aiding Russian speakers who wanted to leave the country. There was also some organized activity in Russia offering aid to the immigrants. Since 1995, the outward flow has reduced to a trickle, and surveys indicate that most of the remaining Russian speakers plan to stay in Estonia.

There are clear differences between the nationalities in terms of emigration. Between 1989 and 1995, the number of Jews and Germans sank drastically (by 38 percent and 50 percent, respectively), as they moved to Israel or Germany. The remaining nationalities did not have such attractive 'homelands'. Eighteen percent of the Ukrainians left, and

⁶ The list is inspired by Triin Vihalemm's paper, and a later conversation with her at a conference on minorities in the Baltics, in Bergen, Norway, August 1996.

17 percent of the Belarussians. At the same time, the number of Russians declined by only ten percent, indicating that the Russians are more rooted in Estonia than the other nationalities. On average, Russians have lived longer in Estonia, and the number of second and third-generation settlers is higher than among the other nationalities. In addition, the larger number of Russians may diminish the sense of isolation felt by the members of smaller groups.

B. Irredentism or Separatism

Irredentism, or the wish to join the national 'homeland', has not been strong among the Russian speakers in Estonia, but there is a vociferous minority that does not accept Estonian statehood. In addition, Estonia has played an important part in Russian domestic politics, as several political groups refuse to accept, or are hostile toward Estonian independence. Most parties have accused Estonia of violating the Russian speakers' human rights, and the Russian Duma has repeatedly called for economic sanctions against Estonia. A number of leading Russian politicians have expressed hostility towards the Estonian state as such,⁷ and Russian irredentists or separatists in Estonia have a strong support within the Russian state. Inside Estonia, the main political forces among the Russian speakers, the Joint Council of Working Collectives and the Interfront, were opposed to Estonian independence until the bitter end. They were both prohibited after the failed coup of August 1991, together with the Communist Party. The anti-independence forces never regained their power after this, and within the Russian-speaking population, the support for Estonian independence grew steadily.

Although in present-day Estonia it is difficult to run organizations that oppose Estonian independence, there are several ones on the borderline of doing so. The most important is the Russian Citizens' Rights Movement, founded by Yuri Mishin. The organization is strongest in Narva, the largest Russian-dominated industrial town in the north-east. It has worked to convince Russian speakers to take Russian citizenship and organized demonstrations and other anti-Estonian actions. Mishin himself claims to have 35,000 supporters, although the Russian Consul General in Narva contradicts him, saying that the supporters are few and mostly old veterans. The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates that five percent of the Russian speakers hold extremist views (*The Baltic Times* 1996).

The city council of Narva, with more than 90 percent Russian speakers, have several times declared its autonomy within the Estonian state. In July 1993, it organized an unauthorized referendum on local autonomy, which was supported by 97 percent of the voters. The turnout was low (54 percent), however, and the Estonian authorities claimed that there were irregularities. The failed putsch in Moscow in October the same year robbed the city council of support from Russia. In addition, the law on local elections states that only Estonian citizens can be elected to local councils. The number of

⁷ During the run-up to the presidential elections in 1996, Gennady Zyuganov, the presidential candidate of the Communist party said in an interview with *Newsweek*: "The Baltics received nothing from God, neither natural resources, nor good forests, except sand and the sea. Everything they have now, they got from Russia." Alexander Lebed, another important candidate warned that "Russia will take immediate military action, should NATO expand to the territory of the former Soviet Union. Estonia will have no future [if it joins NATO]." In an interview with *Postimees*, Estonia's largest newspaper, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the leader of the extreme nationalist Liberal Democratic Party was quoted as saying: "I'm telling you honestly that I'm doing everything to liquidate the Baltic States" (all citations from Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1996).

citizens was very low, and included none of the incumbent city councilors. Using a special paragraph in the law on citizenship, the Estonian government awarded citizenship to moderate Russian-speaking leaders, ensuring that there was some political alternative. As could be expected, moderate forces took over after the elections, and the quest for autonomy in the north-east region ended.

Since 1992, Russian speakers have been able to take Russian citizenship, and thus take part in Russian politics (the votes cast in Estonia are counted as being part of the Vsevolozhsky area in the St. Petersburg region). The electoral turnout in Russian elections has been low among the Russian citizens in Estonia, indicating that only a part of those who have taken Russian citizenship are genuinely interested in politics. In the 1993 elections, Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic party was the most popular, but the turnout was low and the number of Russian citizens limited (less than 40,000). In the 1995 elections, the turnout was also low: 22 percent. Of those who voted, more than 60 percent supported parties that were skeptical to Estonia's right of existence. The Communist Party received 30.5 percent, Russian Communities (Lebed) received 22 percent, and Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party 8.6 percent (*The Baltic Independent* 1995).

As it is today, very few Russian speakers oppose Estonian independence, and the quest for local autonomy has lost support.⁸ Most Russian speakers think that they are much better off living in Estonia than they would be in Russia (Rose 1995a). Thus, the basis for Russian nationalism and consequent irredentism or separatism is limited to nationalist fervor and a nostalgia for the past, and is contrary to pragmatic actions to improve the lot of ordinary Russian speakers.

C. Confrontation within the System

The possibilities for confrontational actions within the system are limited, as only citizens can vote in parliamentary elections, and citizens have to swear allegiance to the Estonian state (except those that received citizenship automatically). Most potential supporters for parties advocating a confrontational line will not obtain Estonian citizenship, and are therefore limited to express their political opinion in local elections, where all residents can register to vote, but only citizens can be elected. The confrontational line has been represented by the Russian Council, set up in 1993. It is a Russian nationalist organization, claiming to protect the cultural rights of the Russian minority. It has close connections with the Russian-Orthodox Church in Estonia, and although it claims to support other nationalities as well, it is purely Russian nationalist in its rhetoric. In the local elections in 1993, the Russian Council's list in Tallinn, *Revel*,⁹ won 10 out of 64 seats in the city council. Towards the end of 1994, the Russian Party in Estonia (RPE) was organized to take part in the parliamentary elections. Together with the United People's Party (UPP, see below) it formed an election list which won 5.86 percent of the votes (around half the Russian-speaking voters), and six seats. In the local elections in

8 The already cited report from Emil Pain, an Advisor to Boris Yeltsin, stated that 66.3 percent of the Russian-speakers in Estonia did not wish to see the Soviet Union restored, and 74.6 percent were opposed to the idea of Estonia or parts of Estonia being subjugated to Moscow. 3.5 percent wanted a restoration of the Soviet Union, and 18 percent thought that a union with Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union would be the most favorable future for Estonia. 59.4 percent thought that independence was preferable, and 9.1 percent supported union with Western Europe (Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995).

9 The old Russian name for Tallinn.

1996, RPE's list won 11 seats in Tallinn. Although the confrontational line is represented in parliament and in local councils, its political impact has been very limited, as no Estonian parties cooperate with them (Daatland 1997). Thus, the idea of confrontation within the system has severe limitations, as Russian nationalists and radicals are unlikely to acquire Estonian citizenship, and have the possibility to vote. Confrontational parties may win support in the local elections, but as the Estonian parties show no inclination towards cooperation, their political impact will continue to be negligible.

D. Cooperation within the System

Russian moderates were active in the Estonian independence movement, and set up the Russian Democratic Movement (RDM). This, in turn, organized the Representative Assembly, a parliament-like construction that was to represent the Russian-speaking minority. However, Russian nationalists refused to join, and instead set up the Russian Council (see above). In 1993, RDM organized the election list *Our Choice*, which won 17 seats in the Tallinn City Council. The RDM later formed the basis for the United People's Party (UPP), a moderate left-wing party devoid of the nationalist rhetoric characteristic of the RPE. The two parties together won six seats in parliament in 1995. In the 1996 local elections the UPP fared badly, and won only five seats in the Tallinn City Council, indicating waning support for the moderate Russian organization.

Like the more confrontational line, the cooperational line has also failed to score any major concessions from the Estonian authorities, and the Estonian parties refuse to cooperate with their representatives. This strategy has also achieved little. Estonian concessions are few, and generally the result of international pressure rather than the work of the Russian parties. As a political movement, it only attracts a small part of the Russian-speaking population.

E. Integration into Estonian Society

Those who accept the Estonian state and its policies, may choose to integrate into society, to learn the Estonian language, and assimilate to Estonian culture. These people tend to act within Estonian parties and organizations and support integrative measures.

A number of Russian speakers took active part in the independence movement, and many more supported it. A third of the Russian speakers voted for Estonian independence in the referendum in 1991. In the parliamentary elections of 1992, no Russian parties took part, and the Russian speakers who had a right to vote were left with a choice between Estonian parties. They mainly gave their support to leftist or centrist parties that advocated a moderate approach to the question of nationality. The first Estonian parliament had only one Russian-speaking delegate, a substitute MP for the Social Democratic Party. In the parliamentary elections of 1995, around half the Russian-speaking voters supported Russian parties, while the rest gave their votes to Estonian parties (assuming that the turnout of the Russian speakers approximated the average turnout). Russian names appeared on several party-lists, but no Russian speakers were elected for any of the Estonian parties.

In opinion polls, most Russian speakers agree that it is important to learn Estonian (Rose 1995a), but after a peak in 1992, attendance at language schools has decreased (Pettai 1996). As pointed out above, most Russian speakers feel that they have a lot in common with the Estonians, and show a clear intention to adapt, but Estonians in turn have shown few signs of welcoming them. Thus, integration is problematic. Younger Russian speakers, however, tend to adapt more easily to the new situation: they learn

Estonian in school, and since their school exams count as language exams, acquiring Estonian citizenship becomes much easier for them (Daatland 1997).

F. *No action*

More than half the Russian-speaking population have no citizenship. Although a fair number of people indicate that they would like to take Estonian citizenship, few take any action to achieve it. In most social surveys the Russian speakers are markedly less decided on any issue than the Estonians. The ratio of people who answer "don't know," or take up a neutral position is consistently higher among the Russian-speaking respondents than among Estonians. The Russian speakers are also reluctant to organize themselves. In 1994, the two Russian parties only slightly passed the 200-member limit necessary for registration.

Most experts comment on the Russian speakers' lack of action. Only a small majority engage in political and organizational activities, while the large majority seem to be content with living their lives and letting Estonian society develop in its own way. The *no action* strategy seems to be the most appealing, which can be an indication that people are content with the situation, or that they do not feel they have any political efficacy. Judging from the Russian parties' lack of political success, the difficulties in obtaining Estonian citizenship, and the general development of post-Soviet Estonia, it seems clear that the lack of political initiative is largely due to the limited possibilities for real political action. The problems listed above also deserve repetition: the Russian speakers' high level of mobility and weak sense of rootedness; their weak social networks, due to continual waves of immigration; their ethnic and social heterogeneity; their urbanization; their geographical dispersion; and last, but not least, the priority given to economic security instead of political action in uncertain circumstances. In addition, several of the strategies listed above contradict each other. The relationships between the leaders of the Russian-speaking community have been far from amicable, which splits those who engage in political activities. The Russian nationalists, both irredentists and confrontationalists, have often gone as far as calling those advocating cooperation or integration traitors, and cooperationists and integrationists have responded in a similar manner. All these factors combine to make organized political activity problematic, especially as the Estonian authorities have given little attention to the integration of the Russian speakers. Although the majority of Russian speakers seem to have chosen *no action*, this is partly due to the failure of the other possible strategies, and partly to the large number of factors that impede organized political action.

In addition to the discussion of the various strategies, some further tendencies should be commented on. In a 1992 survey, Kirch, Kirch and Tuisk found notable differences between the degree of adaptation of Russian speakers living in different regions (Kirch, Kirch and Tuisk 1992). Using a combination of responses given in the survey, they constructed an index of integration in Estonian society, finding that Russian speakers adapt and integrate the most easily to Estonian society in areas where they are in a clear minority. The least integrated was the population in the almost purely Russian-speaking north-east.

There are also clear differences between the age groups. There is a strong tendency among young Russian speakers to feel more at home in Estonia, while the elderly feel more uncomfortable. Only a tenth of those between eighteen and twenty-nine have taken Russian citizenship, as opposed to a fourth of the total Russian-speaking population. While half of the Russian speakers over sixty had no knowledge of

Estonian, this only applies to a tenth of the young. Three quarters of the young say they regard Estonia as their country, while only a fourth of the elderly claimed the same. Forty-two percent of the Russian citizens are pensioners over the age of sixty, and the great majority of the Russian citizens admitted that they asked for Russian citizenship because they did not want to be without citizenship, and Estonian citizenship is more difficult to get. Two thirds of the young say they want to apply for Estonian citizenship (Baltic News Service 1996).

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS: UNCLEAR IDENTITIES, DIFFERING STRATEGIES, AND POLITICAL IMPOTENCE

The Russians-speaking minority has not chosen a single path based on a common identity and a unitary interpretation of their situation. Instead, there are deep splits within the Russian-speaking group in terms of their interpretation of the situation, their national and political identity, and the strategies followed. Around a sixth of the non-Estonian population in 1989 have left the country. Of the remaining, a fourth have taken Russian citizenship, and another fourth are Estonian citizens. The rest seem to have adopted an attitude of wait-and-see. This has split the political forces of the non-Estonian population, and the result is political impotence. Although they make up a third of the population, Russian speakers do not have a say in Estonian politics, and the failure to forge a common strategy makes it doubtful that they will have considerable impact in the near future.

As a group, the Russian speakers show willingness to adapt to Estonian society, and to live by the new rules. Their intentions, however do not correspond with their possibilities and capabilities. While most Russian speakers think it is important to learn and speak Estonian, it is only the younger generation that is actually doing so. This is probably also due to practical difficulties, as it is very problematic for middle-aged and elderly monolingual non-academicians to learn a new language. The younger generation study Estonian in school, and are generally more adaptive, indicating that an improvement of the situation will come. In general, the contact between Russian speakers and Estonians is very limited. This is not only due to intransigence on the side of the Russian speakers. Estonian authorities have done little to encourage or help those who wish to adapt, and Estonians show little interest in integrating the Russian speakers into Estonian society.¹⁰

The future development, in terms of identity and political strategies, is uncertain. Most Russian speakers share a sense of Russian-ness, although it is unclear what this entails, and what kind of political consequences it will have. Writing about the Russian speakers in Latvia, Pål Kolstø says that: "Whether in time [the Russian speakers] should come to regard themselves as Latvians of Russian extraction or as Russians who happen to be living in Latvia will clearly influence political relations both within and among the Soviet successor states." (Kolstø 1996: 609). This applies equally to the Russian speakers of Estonia, but this article has shown that it is far from certain that they will

10 Having lived in Estonia for a year, teaching at the University of Tartu, I found that very few of my Estonian friends and acquaintances have friends among the Russian speakers, and vice versa. While my Russian friends generally spoke of Estonians positively, the Estonians were mostly negative when talking about Russian speakers. Of course, Estonians have all reasons to resent the Soviet occupation, of which the immigration of Russian speakers was an important part.

eventually form a single and uniform idea of who they are and what they should do. Rather, it seems probable that the Russian speakers will remain divided, forming various identities and corresponding strategies.

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Identities in Transition

East Germany
from the 1980s
to the Present

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INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall collapsed under the pressure of a popular protest movement in East Germany. Less than a year later, on October 3, 1990, Germany was reunited and a gigantic transformation project was launched which was intended to bring the former German Democratic Republic to West German standards within a short period of time. The political and legal aspects of this transformation worked out rather smoothly, yet economically the five new federal states are still lagging behind. However, what has given rise to a heated public debate about the success or failure of German unification is the alleged persistence of a distinct East German identity which is said to manifest itself in a 'clinging on' to values of the former collectivist socialist system which are incompatible with the new individualistic, democratic,

and social market economy of the united Germany. I will argue in the following that what is often referred to as 'Ostalgie', namely the seemingly nostalgic glorification of the former East German society, is in fact one way chosen by many former East Germans to come to terms with, and to provide a certain continuity to, their individual and collective identities vis-à-vis of their socialization in the German Democratic Republic. However, as this happens in the light of the experiences they have had since unification, the attempts to acquire a new social competence appropriate for the conditions of the unified Germany express the claim of the former citizens of East Germany to be entitled to create these conditions alongside and together with West Germans.

POLITICAL IDENTITY AS AN ANALYTICAL CONCEPT

Identity is a closely knit set of values, norms, ideals, and interests which actors consciously share and from which they derive their course of action. Identity is a product of collective as well as individual historic and current experience and, as such, it is equally rooted in public events and private experiences and has to be re-constructed constantly according to such past and present experiences and their interpretation. Identity provides controlling guidelines for social behavior and it ensures behavioral coherence by systematically structuring values and rational considerations (Pye 1965: 7).