

INTEGRATION IN THE ESTONIAN MEDIA 1999 - 2003

At the beginning of the social and political changes that took place during the 1990s, a very complicated situation had developed in the area of the relations between the national groups in Estonia. The Estonians' sense of injustice, their loss of statehood, incorporation into the Soviet Union and the massive immigration of Russian-speakers had led to a situation in which there was almost no positive scenario for mutual co-existence between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations. Interethnic relations was long a topic that could only be treated from the point of view of the desired departure of non-Estonians.

The development of the nation-state and familiarisation with the principles of a democratic society somewhat helped to alleviate this tension, and in the mid-1990s the possibility of peaceful co-existence within one country began to receive serious consideration. Social scientists and experts analysed the possible paths for the development of interethnic relations, and saw a need to use state resources to regulate the processes taking place in this area. The state programme "Integration in Estonian society 2000-2007" was approved by the Government of the Republic on 14 March 2000. Despite the fact that the programme has been the target of much criticism, it must be agreed that the absence of such a strategy would have led to much more troubled and tense relations between the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking populations at the present time.

On the one hand, the programme has served the purpose of providing awareness of existing problems, and has helped towards the establishment of clear objectives concerning the nature of the desired future society. In response to the frequent accusations that the integration of non-Estonians has thus become a state project and is not a 'naturally' occurring process, one may argue that projects are one means through which to create a foundation for long-term changes or spontaneous processes in society.

In the context of the present-day knowledge-based society, towards which Estonia too is striving, it would be necessary for political decisions to be based on a thoroughly analysed and well-reasoned social reality. It should also be noted that information about society can only be obtained by querying public opinion or analysing the media. Why, however, should one 'monitor' the media, if the public have been surveyed and it appears clear what they think of integration? There are several reasons for media analysis, from the point of view of both the individual and society as a whole.

One cannot underestimate the importance of the media in shaping or guiding processes taking place in contemporary society. Through its selection of topics, descriptions of particular circumstances and assessments, it not only reflects but also creates our everyday reality – i.e. influences the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of readers, viewers and listeners. On the level of the individual, of course, the media's influence is not immediately visible. One may, however, presume that impressions received from the media find fertile ground when the topic under consideration is abstract and people lack personal experience with the area in question. For instance, in the case of Estonians who do not come into contact with the Russian-speaking population on an everyday basis, the media intermediates information and opinions about non-Estonians..

Another reason for media analysis arises from the mutual relations between the media and society. It is generally believed that in a democratic country the media should not be subject to any control. Media researchers argue against this, however, contending that a certain amount of feedback is necessary – media analysis forces newspapers, television and radio to self-regulation. They are guided by the motto "You journalists know that we media researchers know ... That you prefer black tones to white, the blue cow to the red, and the

large state to the small.” The aim of media analysis is to reveal the media’s apparent and also more concealed preferences. To observe the media means to render it transparent, which is one of the cornerstones of the effective functioning of democracy (Galtung, 1999: 23). Thus media researchers have the same objective as the mass media – a democratic society with an open forum.

These two reasons have formed the basis for the media monitoring of integration, which began in 1999. After following the media for a longer period, one can see the changes and developments that have taken place in matters involving minorities. On the other hand, however, considering the media’s influence on the auditorium’s knowledge and attitudes, we can also conjecture them. We could, for instance, ask whether integration processes can take place if the Estonian-speaking population sees problems of inter-ethnic relations as lying mainly in the area of language and culture, while the Russian-speaking population is most concerned about matters of law and justice (Media Monitoring of Integration 1999). The implementer of textual analysis, Norman Fairclough (1995) has referred to media texts as “the barometer of social and cultural changes”, and as a result they provide valuable material for the analysis of changes actually taking place in society.

The information this “socio-cultural barometer” provides us about the development of Estonian society and inter-ethnic relations has been briefly presented in the chapters of this collection of articles. In the articles we have sought to name the most significant changes that have taken place in newspapers in the treatment of matters connected with inter-ethnic relations and integration over a five-year period (1999-2003).

The material analysed in the media monitoring of integration included all articles published in the Estonian or Russian languages in Estonia. A list of key words consisting of at least 100 words was used in the selection of suitable newspaper articles, and on this basis corresponding news and opinion stories, reporting, editorials and readers’ letters were photocopied every day. In the first year analysed, the selection of articles was limited to six larger newspapers (*Eesti Päevaleht*, *Postimees*, *SL Õhtuleht*, *Molodjož Estonji*, *Estonija*, *Den za Dnem*), although in the second year of analysis, the selection was broadened, and county papers and other periodical publications were examined.

A standardised codification guideline containing both a quantitative (formalised) and a qualitative (textual) component was developed for the analysis of the newspaper articles. In these it was noted, for instance, in which publications integration-related topics were treated, what types of articles appeared and who the journalists used as sources for their articles, as well as what problems were noted in connection with integration, which institutions were mentioned and which integration projects and events attracted the attention of the public. Since the codification guideline did not change significantly over the course of the years analysed, and only individual topics that had arisen on the public agenda were added, the results over the years in questions are suitable for the ascertainment of trends. The composition of the research group has also remained unchanged over the five years. The analysis was carried out by media researchers from the University of Tartu and the Baltic Association for Media Research.

During the course of the media monitoring research, analyses of radio and television programmes were also undertaken. These were not done annually, and the results were published elsewhere (Integration in Estonian Society; Monitoring 2000, The Estonian Media on Integration: Media Monitoring 1999-2001 and 2002).

On the basis of the results of the analyses performed both by us and by other Estonian media researchers, however, one can argue that over the five years a significant shift has taken place in the way integration is treated in both the Estonian-language and Russian-language

media. We have moved from two clearly separated informational spheres to a plurality of spheres of information, in which the line of separation no longer concerns the language spoken by one group or another, but rather lifestyle features are those that separate groups. In this respect, the shared element between Estonians and non-Estonians is sufficient that one cannot argue that the two communities live in “two separate worlds”.

Main Conclusions of Media Monitoring of Integration Processes, 1999-2003

This collection summarises the results of an analysis of the media's reporting of the integration processes that have taken place over the above-mentioned five-year period. One can draw both optimistic and pessimistic conclusions on the basis of the media monitoring that has been performed. Below is a systematisation of the results of the analysis, based on the main objectives specified in the state programme "Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007", as well as linguistic-communicative, legal-political and socio-economic integration processes.

In the linguistic-communicative sphere

- As a result of the intensive communication of integration as a topic in 2000-2001, the definition of the concept of integration has become the same in both the Estonian-language and Russian-language media – in both, the main component of the process is the teaching of the official language, the creation of a common cultural space and topics of citizenship and loyalty.
- In the Estonian-language and Russian-language press, the treatment of integration has become more positive in comparison with the initial period, and integration as such and the projects created for its implementation receive assessments that are predominantly commendatory. In public discussions, the state policy is no longer questioned, and it is recognised as an area with which the Estonian state has dealt systematically, in order to lay the groundwork for the further development of "natural" processes in society.
- It appears that the mutual reflection between the Estonian-language and Russian-language press has increased, and the Russian-speaking population, which looks to the local Russian-language media, lives in a relatively similar informational space to that of Estonians. Similar topics are examined with a similar attitude in the Russian-language media, and the opinions of Estonians are also often referred to.
- The Estonian media has a similar openness towards the opinion of representatives of the Russian-speaking population in the area of integration and inter-ethnic relations. In at least 40 percent of cases, non-Estonians are the source of information. One may, however, deduce that this is related to the nature of the topic, and there is less evidence of a similar openness in the treatment of other areas. The media monitoring does not, however, enable one to verify this latter conjecture.
- There are, however, significant differences between the views of members of the Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities concerning non-Estonians and their identity. Both Estonian politicians and foreign experts continue to hold a stereotypical position, describing the Russian-speaking population as passive, unmotivated and negative. The Russian-speaking population's self-identity differs from this, and more positive traits form the core of their identity structure; the existence of groups with different socio-economic interests and characteristics within the Russian-speaking population is cited. Both views are represented in both the Estonian-language and Russian-language media.
- There is no clear evidence of the influence of Estonia's accession to the European Union on media discourse during the period under analysis.

In the legal-political sphere

- Hopeful developments in the growth of the reflexivity and positivity of the media are, however, overshadowed by methods of argumentation that have survived "in the real world". In political texts (especially pre-election arguments), for instance, the symbols

and claims used have not changed much, and have remained just as protective and as firmly based on the Estonian language and culture as before.

- Non-Estonians are not offered the possibility to participate in political decision-making, and they remain an object concerning which and about which decisions are made. The idea of non-Estonians' greater participation in society remains unpopular, however, both in public opinion surveys and media discourse.
- Estonia's accession to the European Union raised the legal-political aspect of the process to prime position from the point of view of the Russian-speaking population. Whereas the judicial status of the Russian-speaking population is not associated with great problems in the discourse of Estonian politicians and foreign experts, in the opinion of non-Estonians not all of their rights are guaranteed.
- Whereas the discourse of Estonian politicians and foreign experts identify no great problems in the area of the Russian-speaking population's judicial status, in the opinion of non-Estonians, not all rights are guaranteed to them. Their lack of citizenship prevents them from communicating with the European Union on the same level as Estonians who possess citizenship.

In the socio-economic sphere

- There is little awareness of problems in the socio-economic sphere, or these are not considered important, and in the integration-related literature this area is not treated in a manner that recognises its importance for the entire process. Since problems of employment and business are especially acute in Russian-speaking Ida-Viru County, the newspapers that represent the opinions of the Russian-speaking minority also devote somewhat greater attention to socio-economic integration.
- The research group for the media monitoring of integration surmises that the "hidden hand" of the market, to which socio-economic problems have been left in Estonian politics, is not sufficient to solve the socio-economic problems connected with integration. Apparently as a reaction to the laissez-faire economic ideology, non-politicians expect more of the state in the regulation of this area.
- In public discussion, the socio-political position of the non-Estonians is still connected primarily with lower status and income, and solutions for the improvement of this situation are not actively being sought.
- Non-Estonians are not invited to participate more and assume a more prominent role in deciding their own fate, but the Estonian-language media has begun to ask why educated Russian-speakers wish to leave Estonia (Why don't they like it here?). This question will most likely soon lead to the realisation that there is a shortage of human resources, and there is a real and unavoidable need to involve the non-Estonian population. This view is not now prevalent in the media discourse.

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