

# *The Creation of a Contemporary Estonian Identity: Multilateral Organizations as an Advocate for Ethnic Minorities*

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**Abstract** — With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, and subsequent independence of Estonia, the power-holding ethnic Russians suddenly found themselves as outcast minorities within the borders of this Baltic country. Various legal and social measures taken by Estonia to reassert its cultural history and political power marginalized c in the country. In creating a modern state, Estonia's interest to identify with the European community prompted its effort to join the European Union. Such motivation pushed the nation toward multilateral negotiations to comply with requirements of international standards for the fair treatment of minorities. In this paper, an analysis of the implications of historical narratives in identity formation and minority marginalization offers a lens to examine the power of multilateral organizations in providing oversight and incentives to newly independent states. This oversight can be perceived to be in humanitarian interest, but should also be considered for its economic and geopolitical interests. Estonia's citizenship laws, European identity, and stateless persons provide a case study for such historical analysis.

**Keywords:** Identity politics; ethnic minorities; nation building; multilateral organizations.

**Résumé** — Avec la chute de l'Union soviétique en 1991 et l'indépendance subséquente de l'Estonie, les Russes ethniques qui détenaient le pouvoir se sont soudainement retrouvés comme des minorités marginalisées à l'intérieur des frontières de ce pays balte. Les diverses mesures juridiques et sociales prises par l'Estonie pour réaffirmer son histoire culturelle et son pouvoir politique ont marginalisé les personnes d'origine russe dans le pays. En créant un État moderne, l'intérêt de l'Estonie à s'identifier à la communauté européenne a incité ses efforts à adhérer à l'Union européenne. Cette motivation a poussé l'Estonie vers des négociations multilatérales pour se conformer aux exigences des normes internationales relatives au traitement équitable des minorités. Dans cet article, une analyse des implications des récits historiques sur la formation de l'identité et sur la marginalisation des minorités permet d'examiner le pouvoir des organisations multilatérales en matière de surveillance et d'incitation des États nouvellement indépendants. Cette surveillance peut être perçue comme un intérêt humanitaire, mais doit également être prise en compte pour ses intérêts économiques et géopolitiques. La législation sur la citoyenneté de l'Estonie, l'identité européenne et les apatrides constituent une étude de cas pour une telle analyse historique.

**Mots-clés :** Politique d'identité; minorités ethniques; construction de nation; organisations multilatérales.

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The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a radical change in national and political dynamics of Eastern Europe. Newly independent nations formed as states reemerged and reestablished their borders. These divisions were rooted in cultural, political, and historical differences. Upon the drawing of new boundaries, it became possible for previously cohesive ethnic groups to become a minority group in a new state. This was demonstrated most vividly in the case of Estonia, as it reestablished its eastern border with Russia along the city of Narva. Ethnic Russians who had established a home in Soviet Estonia, effectively became aliens with the arrival of Estonian independence. During this shift, they became marginalized and excluded from social, political, and economic institutions of the country. The creation of modern Estonia was preempted by the reestablishment of Estonian political and cultural order. This opportunity to reclaim its identity also offered Estonia the chance to reaffirm itself as a European nation. Through the creation of historical narratives, states wield great power in establishing national identity and status within their borders. Such nationalistic narratives and their resulting policies hold the potential of creating an irreparable cultural divide. When this occurs, multilateral international organizations are able to provide a voice for discriminated minority groups. In the case of Estonia, the period following its independence provides an example of minority group abuses and how the collective historical record influenced that outcome. This paper provides historical analysis necessary in establishing solid understanding of contemporary Baltic history, while a subsequent examination of influence held by the European Union suggests that multilateral organizations can utilize incentives to encourage the protection of minorities.

In introducing the complexities and effects of shifting borders on a population, Narva and Ivangorod provide a unique opportunity to examine the region along the reestablished Estonian and Russian border. The cities of Narva and Ivangorod, Estonian and Russian cities respectively, continue to be the hub of ethnic Estonian and ethnic Russian relations. Once united under the Soviet Union, the two cities have been divided since 1991 by the reemergence of the border. It was during the occupation by the Soviet Union that Narva underwent militaristic attacks, killing or exiling many Estonian residents (Laitin, 1998, p. 3). The city's infrastructure was rebuilt and it became a Russian-speaking metropolitan center. During the Soviet Era, Ivangorod and Narva created a single labour market. Their connectedness was exacerbated by the fact that both cities shared a water collection and purification system, and its citizens worked, lived, attended school, shopped, and went about daily chores by commuting between the two communities (Windows, 2007). The two towns had a technical administrative border, but it was usually ignored, as both were part of the Soviet Union, and had no internal legal borders. Despite this historical exchange, the two cities remain culturally divided. Even with a lack of significant difference, there was a perception of cultural barriers between the city's Estonian and Russian inhabitants (Windows, 2007). Perceptions of cultural distance are not only limited to Narva and Ivangorod. Since Estonia's independence, the perceptions of cultural difference were amplified and the inhabitants of the two cities were no longer the sister cities they were before. Under two distinct governments today, the inhabitants of each city are socialized differently, and both Russians and Estonians remain their own version of history created by each state's national narrative.

Nationalism is cultivated in a carefully designed national narrative. A historical perspective of the "story of our nation" incites the perceptions and frameworks of nationalism. In a recently independent state, establishing a national framework is a natural first step. Outlining the standards of who belongs and who does not is fundamental to the imagined political community (Anderson, 1991, pp. 5–7). A form of socialization, the national narrative is a culturally accepted story of how the state came to be and is an important construct to the national culture. From nationalism, a collective national identity emerges. This identity is rooted in similar interpretations of a historical, political, cultural, and economic reality (Made, 2003). Nationalism is a powerful social force that can equally unite as it can divide. In order to understand the roots of the Estonian national narrative, it is essential to be familiar with Estonian history to understand how the nation's contemporary narrative came to be.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, early markets established trading villages at ports circling the Baltic Sea included the land of modern day Estonia. In the 14th century, participation in the Hanseatic League, or Hansa, trade guild evoked a membership to a proto-state institution (Mandeville, 1990, pp. 26–27). The Hansa legacy was crafted by the establishment of interdependent towns and villages along the Baltic coast for maritime trade (Davies, 1996). The reciprocity and kinship of the League served to develop the first origins of a Baltic identity. Even today though, the collective identity in the Baltic Sea region can be referred to as New Hansa. With a prideful legacy, identifying as Hanseatic evokes sentiments of belonging to a multinational community based on shared values and priorities

from the Northern Atlantic to the Gulf of Finland (Davies, 1996). Based on relatively similar history, culture, and languages, New Hansa is a prevalent theme across northeastern Europe. However, it can lead to supranational narratives of history, marginalizing some historical disputes in the region (Hackman, 2003). This connection to the medieval Hanseatic League was once a source of European identity and later became a foundational basis for the interest to move to European Union membership, augmenting Estonia's ties to a common European identity. This historical participation in European exchange and commerce was also used as a justification for membership in the European Union, NATO, and Western Alliance.

Narrowing the historical focus to Estonia proper, the small northern nation faced an oppressing series of events in the 20th century, which lead to the development of its contemporary national narrative. In modern history, the state has been stricken by conquest and exploitation until later espoused by triumph. The interplay between an Estonian, European, Baltic, and Russian culture have shaped a complicated identity that itself changes from region to region of this small country. While the history of conquest leaves a legacy of heritage in the eyes of some, it is also arguably a plague on traditional Estonian customs to others. Today, Estonian officials continue to walk a fine line between outright condemnation of previous occupations versus embracing their influences. The national narrative of recent history is the product of a nationalistic agenda with international concerns. With interest in embracing its European identity and fortifying its eastern border with Russia, Estonia has embraced a European-centric identity in its interpretation of the 20th century history.

The history of oppression and occupation in Estonia begins with its subjugation by the Swedish and Russian Empires since the 17th and 18th centuries respectively. Its unstoppable flow has continued towards the end of World War I, when the occupying German empire subjugated the entire northeastern Baltic region under its control. By the interwar period, Estonia underwent significant change. Having ousted the German empire occupants, Estonian culture experienced a transformation in the 1930s. One example of the shift from German influence is seen in the text material published throughout the country. Estonian literature began to be translated from and for English, French, and Nordic languages rather than German (Made, 2003). While Germany left traces and memories of occupation for many Estonians, the Soviet Union in the east was expanding its sphere of influence. The year 1940 was characterized by the rising domination of the Soviets. Enacting mutual assistance pacts under coercion, the Soviet Union secured the rights to establish military bases in Estonia and the neighbouring Baltic states (Gerner & Stefan, 1993). By the summer of 1940, the government of Estonia had been ousted, and the President imprisoned in Siberia while the Soviet military took power in Estonia (Petrov, 2008). During the same time the Red Army carried out mass repressions and an all-out occupation was underway in Estonia. From one occupation to the next, an overwhelming majority of Estonians opposed to the occupying powers. While today, the German heritage and its link to Hanseatic trade is celebrated in Estonian history, the legacy of the Soviet Union has not been remembered fondly despite both nation's role in occupying Estonia (Made, 2003).

In contrast to the German legacy, Estonians have worked to build a stringent divide between Russia and Estonia (Made, 2003). Sitting at the crossroads between Europe and Russia, Estonia has economically utilized both trade from the west and the east, however it has not been so open culturally. Estonia has benefitted from maintaining a healthy relationship in both directions, but despite this, the Russian legacy has been pushed to the fringes. Estonians have used historical, cultural, and even genetic evidence to support their claim for a wholesome European identification as opposed to Russians (Schwartz, 2006, p. 10). Others have used Samuel Huntington's theory of the "clash of civilizations" as a framework to establish Estonia as squarely within the Western Christian region, emphasizing the border between them and the Orthodox region to the east (Schwartz, 2006, p. 10). This difference in religious beliefs, despite Estonia not being an especially religious state, was one form of Russophobia that persisted, with ancient relics of Russia's occupation being termed as scars of religious occupation.

Another form of Estonian resistance to Russian heritage is the disapproval of popular Russian Orthodox religion in the country. Despite the centuries-old influence of the Russian Orthodox Church prior to European occupations, Estonia was historically a Protestant country. the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn symbolizes one such example of the opposition to Russification. Considered a centerpiece in the skyline of the city and promoted for tourism today, the cathedral faced proposals for demolition in the twentieth century because of the perception that it represented religious occupation by Russia (Plan to pull down the Orthodox Cathedral, n.d.).

Originally built in 1890 during the occupation of the Russian Empire, the church sits at the centre of Toompea hill in Tallinn, the location of many of modern Estonian government buildings. In 1928, a bill for its demolition was proposed by four members of the Estonian government and expected to pass relatively quickly and easily. However, many national minorities, Orthodox religious groups, architects, artists, and academics opposed the bill, resulting in the bill's failure and the preservation of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral to this day (Plan to pull down the Orthodox Cathedral, n.d.). As relics of the past were under debate, political and social boundaries continued to be challenged as well.

The 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact alienated much of the Estonian elite from the country while encouraging the immigration of Russians towards the Baltic coast, determining that the Baltics fell within the sphere of influence of Russia (Kirby, 1996). Enticed by new industrial work and administrative jobs, the Soviet Russian population responded enthusiastically. With an influx of Russian migrants, the hegemony of the ethnic Estonian population diminished. While in 1934, the ethnic Estonian population proportion hovered at 88%, it soon reduced to 61.5% (Bernier, 2001). Not only had Estonian statehood been squandered, but the population's strength in numbers was declining with the rapid increase of ethnic Russians in the area. With this new and growing demographic of Soviet citizens the use of the Estonian language was discouraged and replaced by the Russian language. Though many Estonians continued to use their native tongue, the linguistic Russification was prevalent in the public sphere. It became required to know Russian to hold most jobs. The combination of quick immigration and permeation of the Russian language led to an imbalanced linguistic community in Estonia. There was a high level of bilingualism in the native population and an unwavering unilingualism in the ethnic Russian population (Bernier, 2001). Though quickly reversed after independence, the proliferation of the Russian language in Estonia is still visible and audible today. The effects of the migration and imbalance of language remain as a source of conflict in Estonia. In the celebration of independence in 1991, the newly independent country was quick to embrace Estonian culture and in turn ignored ethnic Russian minorities, with language serving an important function in the formation of the contemporary Estonian identity.

After many decades of oppression, the Estonian people were able to reassert the strength of their traditional language, culture, and political values in the process of creating their contemporary society. Nationalizing efforts were demonstrated in a variety of mediums. Perhaps the two of the most critical ones were the definitions and official use of the Estonian language; and of the legal status of citizenship. Unlike several other post-Soviet states such as Armenia, Lithuania, and Slovenia where the ethnic population was largely homogenous, Estonian demographics were of a much more mixed heritage (Bernier, 2001). The measures taken by the Estonian government in the early 1990s were negligent to its prevalent ethnic Russian population.

The years of occupation have been perceived in Estonia as a historical injustice. Upon achieving its independence in 1991, the country steadily began to reverse Russian influence within its borders. Estonia's new government was motivated to reclaim its national narrative and wrest control of the state after decades of Russian imposition and violation. This motivation stirred emotional debate among the population as interests competed to protect national heritage and restore justice while the perceived traces of Russian occupation continued to live on in the country (Greene, 2010). By deciding to adopt restrictive citizenship policies and strict language requirements, the Estonian government alienated a large portion of its Russian population. Estonia reenacted its Citizenship Act of 1938, which granted citizenship and legal Estonian identity to those with pre-Soviet Estonian heritage and their descendants a legal Estonian identity. However, for any citizen who did not fall into this category, their legal identity became those of "undetermined citizenship," a term that remains unclearly defined in law (Nelson, 2015). In some cases, this alienated group of predominantly ethnic Russians now found themselves as foreigners on land that they may have called home for the past 50 years. The citizenship policies enacted by Estonia were unlike any other laws adopted by newly independent Eastern European nations, an important aspect that led to the marginalization of ethnic Russians in Estonia today. For those who did not meet the citizenship criteria, which at the time was about one third of the population, Estonia offered a naturalization process (Bernier, 2001).

The naturalization process consisted of several parts and evolved over the post-independence years. In 1995, Estonia introduced language and civics exams (Laitin, 1998, p. 6). To obtain citizenship, a fluent understanding of the Estonian language was critical. This made it incredibly difficult for ethnic Russians to acquire Estonian

citizenship. The strict requirements of Estonian language translated to “cultural capital,” which can be presented in many forms, but perhaps the most powerful is that of linguistic capital. This language capital, defined as fluency in a language which is used by groups who possess economic, social, cultural, and political power, gave Estonians a strong advantage over ethnic Russians (Craith, 2007). These early laws resulted in a largely homogenous, officially recognized citizenry which was not an accurate reflection of the real Estonian population (Bernier, 2001).

The inability to acquire legal recognition was damaging to the minority group’s status. Ethnic Russians could not hold a political status without citizenship. Furthermore, they were severed from social and economic benefits granted by the government. In the parliamentary elections of 1992, ethnic Russians did not occupy a single seat despite accounting for 30% of the population. Three years later, only six of 101 parliamentary seats were held by the minority group (Bernier, 2001). Estonians asserted control through the legal parameters established in the distribution of work. Non-citizens specifically could not hold certain state or public service jobs. In addition to limiting the government and economic opportunities, non-citizens did not have claims to large land redistribution measures that occurred after independence. In distributing property and land, even ethnic Russians who achieved naturalized citizenship faced continued discrimination (Bernier, 2001). Investigations conducted by groups such as Amnesty International found that linguistic minorities experienced considerable discrimination within Estonia (Siegel, 2017). Ethnic Russians were effectively foreigners without the means to communicate or bolster representation. However, the effects of new Estonian law did not go unnoticed by the international community.

Numerous multilateral organizations were aware of Estonia’s nation building agenda. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Council of Europe, and the European Union took note of the changes occurring within Estonia. Russian representatives to these organizations persistently raised the issue of human rights violations occurring in the newly independent Baltic states, with significant attention on Estonia given its high proportion of ethnic Russian population (Koort, 2014). As Estonia joined the OSCE, a body committed to preventing conflicts in majority and minority relationships, the High Commissioner reported on the minority abuses of Estonia within two years of its declaration of independence. It was concluded that the majority group had taken measures to ensure a “privileged position” in society (Bernier, 2001). Such measures were not only disruptive to the internal organization in Estonia, but also potentially dangerous for Estonia’s relationship with Russia. The discriminatory measures contributed to poverty, powerlessness, and ultimately resentment of the party in power (Gurr, 2000). The repression by the Estonian government had the potential to ignite ethnopolitical conflict. It was suggested that Estonia make improvements to the status of its ethnic Russians to promote a peaceful, cohesive state. Records show that the High Commissioner was reflective of the historical significance of this relationship in Estonia and made suggestions to Estonian government that outlined a plan to integrate noncitizens by their demonstration of commitment to Estonian society. Prompting more lenient requirements of Estonian language and other measures to make citizenship acquisition possible for many minorities, the High Commissioner held that citizenship should be a matter of inclusion rather than exclusion of those who would otherwise be stateless individuals (Bernier, 2001).

From the perspective of ethnic Russians, the framework for citizenship established by post-Soviet Estonia was challenging to their livelihood in the country. In an interview, a woman who had lived in Estonia since 1985 described:

In the political life of the country, I do not have any voice; on the labour market — only low-paid jobs. In order to fill out documents and communicate with public administration, I need to turn to a translator and pay fees.... As a stateless person, I do not feel like a full-fledged member of society. As a stateless person, I have difficulties related to travel. (Evas, 2016)

In describing her aspirations to participate in Estonian society, she stated:

I consider Estonia my home and want to live in this country, I also want to speak Estonian fluently ... [Stateless] people living in this country for more than 20 years have a close link and permanent connection with this country and society ... I really wanted to become an Estonian citizen and applied twice, but language courses are very expensive and the chance of passing the language exam is zero. I think that with the legislation and requirements today, I will never be able

to receive Estonian citizenship. If I had had a right to receive Estonian citizenship in the 1990s and escape my current status of stateless, I would have been able to achieve more in my life. I think, even now, if I could acquire Estonian citizenship, my life in Estonia would improve. (Evas, 2016)

Today, most stateless persons in Estonia describe aspirations to join Estonian society, but struggle with the requirements to do so. The ability to speak Estonian has been a frequently cited reason for the inability to naturalize. In another interview, a respondent who had been living in Estonia for more than 50 years stated:

We [stateless individuals born in Estonia] have proved with our lives [working, paying taxes, contributing to the development of society] that we are part of this society. I have intensively tried to pass the Estonian citizenship exam. I try every two years or so to make a new application and try to pass the language exam ... I have passed the citizenship exam, but I repeatedly fail to pass the language test. (Evas, 2016)

Stateless persons in Estonia have frequently expressed sentiments surrounding powerlessness and hopelessness. Furthermore, the vast majority of those who participated in the survey conducted by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees indicated a strong interest to participate more fully in Estonian society. In another survey studying stateless individual's interest in integration within Estonian society, an Assimilation Index was created as a means to measure the minority's attitudes. Controlling for social factors, the study found Estonian-living Russians expressed significant interest in assimilation, scoring with one the greatest openness to assimilation scores. Interestingly, it was found that Estonian-living ethnic Russians have a 13% greater chance than neighbouring Latvian-living ethnic Russians to express willingness to assimilate (Laitin, 1998, pp. 201–216). With international organizations alerted of the situation, pressure from the European community has become persistent.

Nevertheless the interests in ameliorating the treatment of ethnic Russians in Estonia may not have been entirely rooted in humanitarian causes. Since 1985, President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors of France, envisioned the reunification of Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain (Davies, 1996). He presented the Single European Act (SEA), with a focus on abolishing the barriers to trade and mobility on the continent. The SEA prompted further legislation to unify Europe financially, politically, and socially. A unified European identity was beginning to form after the previously war-torn, conquered, and divided nations began to integrate, with Western Europe paving the way. The agenda of the SEA enabled the effective work of the European Economic Commission, which began to confer membership to several European states and extended an associate status to Estonia by 1991 (Davies, 1996). Its integrated nature confronted new and distinct challenges. "Euroregions" began to form in an effort to adapt to these challenges, to include the region of the Baltics. These regions included groups such as the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic-Baltic Eight, and the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The Scandinavian countries also took initiative in launching discussions on economic co-operation between the Baltic Sea states to build mutually beneficial economic ties (Davies, 1996). While improving the mistreatment of minorities in Estonia may be an admirable initiative, multilateral institutions also had economic and geopolitical interest in integrating Estonia. Therefore, the involvement of multilateral organizations in Estonia is not solely humanitarian or uniquely for the benefit of Estonia.

With an enticing economic opportunity in joining the newly formed European Union after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty 1993, Estonia's mistreatment of its minorities became an issue to the greater EU community. Estonia began to face mounting pressure to comply with European and international standards. As established by the Maastricht Treaty, not only was a common economic policy required, but standard security, justice, immigration, and foreign policies also had to align with European Union standards (Davies, 1996). In addition to the framework it exalted, the Treaty also officially recognized the three Baltic nations, signalling a symbolic gesture in terms of Estonia's European identity. While the revamped European Union sought to integrate Europe, the citizens of Estonia were impressed by the recovery of economic prosperity in Western Europe and found an interest in identifying with a collective Europe (Davies, 1996). To unite the European continent, including former Soviet republics, served to assert the dominance of capitalism, democracy, and Western institutions in the eyes of the West after the decades long battle with communism and the Soviet Union. As a result, the integration of Estonia into Europe was an objective pursued with a specific geopolitical interest.

Moving forward with European integration, the Council of Europe, an organization focused on human rights issues and the establishment of fair democracy in Europe, started to voice concern with Estonia's early actions of exclusion of its Russian minority. Considering that no country has ever joined the European Union without first joining the Council of Europe, this added an additional layer of international pressure for the Estonian government. In particular, the Council of Europe was concerned with the country's citizenship laws. Their report indicated that since 1992, Estonia had made improvements to the landscape of their naturalization process, but that it still presented concerns. These concerns were rooted in various obstacles, such as language, civics tests, and cost, which continued to create difficulty for non-ethnic Estonians to naturalize (Bernier, 2001). Estonia was advised to accelerate the incorporation of Russian minorities into the citizenry. The concerns of the Council of Europe were echoed by the European Union. However, by 1997 the European Union invited Estonia to the accession negotiations despite lingering social inequality issues (Bungs, 1998).

Given the international pressure applied by European institutions, Estonia took steps to ease the naturalization process. By 1998 not only were the civic and language tests made easier to pass, they also dismissed the written language requirement for those born before January 1, 1930 (Bernier, 2001). Language training was increased and the cost of naturalization was reduced. Continually reminded by the incentives of EU membership, Estonia continued to make minor improvements to the citizenship acquisition process for its ethnic Russian minority. By 2000, Estonian President Lennart Meri was arguing in favour of the requirements asserted by the European Union (Bernier, 2001). The desire of Euro-integration presented yet another opportunity for the reconfiguration of Estonian identity. Despite modifications to the citizenship requirements, many Russians have stated that their ability to integrate into Estonian society has worsened since the 1990s as the effort to reduce the use of the Russian language has continued (Greene, 2010).

Public opinion indicates some of the cultural barriers that still exist in Estonia. In a 2016 survey conducted by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), 61% of respondents indicated that they had some degree of a negative perception of "persons with undetermined citizenship." To this same point, 38% reported a neutral perception, while 0% indicated any degree of a positive perception (Evas, 2016). This opinion is detrimental to the stateless population, as either statistic indicates unfavourable, or at best, apathetic attitudes towards the Russian minority. While this perception exists, the Estonian population indicates a favourable interest in solving the issue. In responding to the question of responsibility for the issue of statelessness, the UNHCR survey indicated that 93% of respondents judged it to be a problem of the whole Estonian society and that the state must take on more active measures to solve the situation. Furthermore, 93% of respondents indicated that the problem of statelessness in Estonia is a situation that cannot be solved without more active involvement of international organizations (Evas, 2016).

Today, the issue of statelessness persons in Estonia persists. This has led Estonia to further relax its citizenship laws in 2015, offering automatic citizenship to children born to stateless parents in Estonia (Griffiths, 2017). In their review of Estonian human rights abuses, the U.S. Department of State reported that 77,926 stateless residents remained in the country as of 2017 (U.S. Department of State, 2017). Despite this, the State Department maintained that there are no major human rights abuses within the country, minimizing the experiences of the Russian minority group. Furthermore, the former President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, stated in an interview that he doesn't "see what people are complaining about." He continued by describing the treatment of ethnic Russians in contrast to the treatment of Estonians deported to Siberia and enforcement of Russian language laws on Estonians during the years of Soviet occupation (Greene, 2010). From another Estonian perspective, the membership to the United Nations since 1991 and ratification of the principals of the UN human rights conventions signalled the country's commitment to human rights. Furthermore, the state attests to its position as an observer in the UN Human Rights Council (Republic of Estonia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Most recently, Estonia has adopted the Estonia 2020 initiative, to compliment the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. This economic, social, and political vision is determined to improve on aspects of Estonia's state. In addressing inclusivity and minorities, ethnic Russians were not specifically referenced for fear that identifying them specifically would marginalize other groups. Rather, the effort to meet this group's interests fell into the EU's requirement to improve "social inclusion," while Estonian officials have opposed any special effort to aid the group specifically (Lesley, 2014, p. 4).

Although the cultural differences between ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians remain prominent, the barriers built after the fall of the Soviet Union have eroded from where they once reached. With accession to the Europe Union in 2004, Estonia improved upon its treatment of the country's minority groups in an effort to meet demands of the European community. The case of Estonia provides an example of a state's ability to foster an identity that draws from history, language, and geopolitical interests. However, such a process may result in the marginalization of minority groups who express aspirations to assimilate into the new state. Under the current system, stateless persons in Estonia express sentiments of powerlessness, while their legal status limits their economic, political, and social opportunities to assimilate. While multilateral institutions such as the European Union have applied pressure on Estonia to improve upon its treatment of minorities, these international actors also exhibited motivation by political and economic incentives. Incorporating into the broader European community was not solely in the interest of Estonia, nor was advocating for the Russian minority solely in the interest of the Russian minority. Rather, coalescing the identity of a unified, humane European community after the decades of war, occupations, and injustices served to reform the European continent's image. This case of history provides an example of the importance of oversight by multilateral organizations and proposes an awareness of the factors that motivate international intervention.



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