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Integration with EU – viewpoint of Russians in Estonia and in Russia

**Comments to Sir Roderic Lyne article
“Russia in the EU? We should never say never?”
in journal “Europe’s World” (Spring, 2006)**

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Introduction

Note: Sir Roderic Lyne as Ambassador of UK in Moscow in 2000-2004 published an article called “Russia in the EU? We should never say never“ as discussion article for new journal Europe’s World” for second volume of journal (Spring 2006). Our article where we expressed an opposite view to Lyne and wanted to discuss his arguments, was not include just some minutes before publishing this issue of the journal.

The question – will Russia be capable and justified to join European Union – is especially interesting for Russia’s neighbouring states who have experienced this neighbourhood for centuries. Estonia has an experience being included into the union of states named – Soviet Union. In 2006 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are celebrate 15th anniversary of getting free from this imposed cohabitation. This period is short enough to remember these years but long enough to have hard-headed look back.

Are the Russians Europeans?

Roderic Lyne asks: are the Russians Europeans? His answer is: indisputably. What are his main arguments? These are as follows:

1. Over three quarters of the population live to the west of the notional boundary between Europe and Asia.
2. Russia has ethnic minorities.
3. Slavic tribes have been linked to the development of European culture and civilisation.

4. After crash of Iron Curtain there are satellite broadcasting, the worldwide web, free trade, cultural fusion, travelling etc. indicators of global society in Russia.

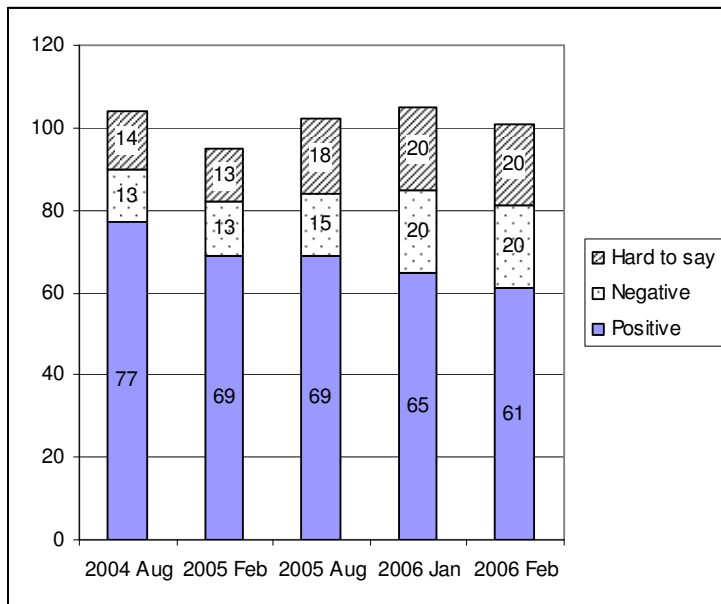
It is interesting question – what is or who is European? Although, here we try to limit our discussion and think about Russians ‘Europeaness’.

During the long period of his history Russia has been commuting between two alternatives: try to follow European way of reforms on one side, and looking for original and different way of development, from the other side. Indeed, lot of Russian people are more Europeans than probably those who live in states aspiring to be EU member states. Although, instead of making decision on the basis of people’s knowledge of Internet, or traditions of Russian classical music or paintings, one has to look at traditions of the Russian statehood, rule and power. Traditions of Russian centralised power, hierarchy, subordination are very vital and inappropriateness of European traditions into this society is quite obvious.

Boundary between Europe and Asia is indeed notional, but more cultural than geographical. Almost nobody has doubt that St Petersburg is European city. Although, lot of people think that population of most big cities (in Siberia, South-Russia) are on midway between Europe and Asia. Even more, Russia is not only a state of big cities. Russian provinces have had minimum contacts with Western world. Yes, contemporary Russian people have access and use the Internet. According to data (2006, October) at Levada-Centrum homepage we can see that in Moscow – 22% (while 33% have computer at home) and in other regions of Russia 7% (while 22% have computer at home). Also Russian travel to and study in other countries all over the World, they are a part of global community.

In general, in Russia people’s attitudes towards EU are positive, although negative disposition is growing today (Chart 1). But they have still quite different values, attitudes and preferences concerning the state power and civil society.

Chart 1. What is your attitude towards European Union in general?



Source: <http://www.levada.ru/>

Russians in Estonia as ex-immigrants

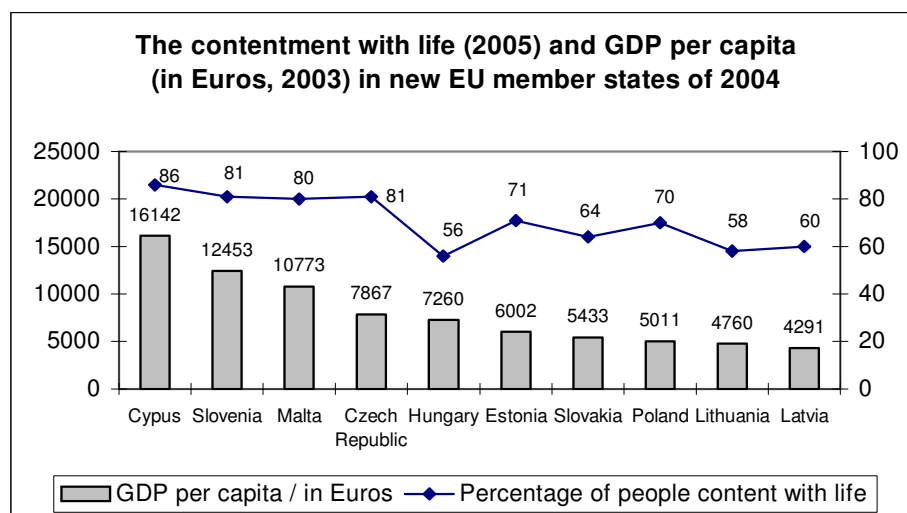
From May 1st 2004 on we can refer to Estonia's new identity as an EU member state. But may we say that due to the Estonia's EU membership the European dimension is also forming a part of Estonians' self-perception?

To illustrate Estonia's position in the EU we use here GDP (Gross Domestic Product) to measure economic activity in comparison with contentment with life among all new member states. Although the contentment with life is a subjective indicator about satisfaction of each person in the large process still both indicators display approximately the same tendency – achievement of societal wealth and welfare in the EU.

Before the accession in 2003 Estonia's indicators were among the lowest compared to the other new accession countries. However, during the last couple of years Estonia's position has improved significantly and country's GDP per capita exceeds already Poland, Slovakia when measured in Euros. It will exceed Hungary as well (forecast data about 2007 by Eurostat, GDP measured per capita in PPS). During last

three years the contentment with life in Estonia has also grown significantly: when in fall 2003 there were 53% of inhabitants content with their life (*CCEB 2003.4 Autumn 2003:15*), a follow-up survey (see Chart 2) of autumn 2005 gave the result where the same indicator had grown already to 71%. (*Eurobarometer 64: Annex*).

Chart 2. Estonia's total GDP per capita (2003) and contentment with life in 2005 compared with the same indicators of other EU new member states*



*data from Eurostat news release: 63/2006-18 May 2006 and *Eurobarometer 64* (Oct. 2005) Annex.

Estonians Russians in the EU: problems and challenges

It is evident that Estonia's accession to EU has bring not only reconciliation with the Western economic system and legal culture, but also the adoption of European values, European political culture etc. However, the population of Estonia cannot be treated as a carrier of single new national identity yet. The problem might arise with those social factors and mechanisms, which ought to assure the continuation of inner-state cultural (in the terms the formation of multi-cultural society) and national integration (in the terms of citizenship).

Will the young Russian-speaking population living in Estonia turn into multi-cultural ethnic group with significant Estonian linguistic and cultural background through school system in Estonia and would the Estonian and European identity become a significant value for them?

As you see from last result of Estonian Social Survey (Sept 2006) on Chart 3 and 4 in Estonia there is no disparity between Estonian and Russians young people's educational mobility and competences.

Chart 3. Mobility through school system in Estonia for Russians in 1986-2005

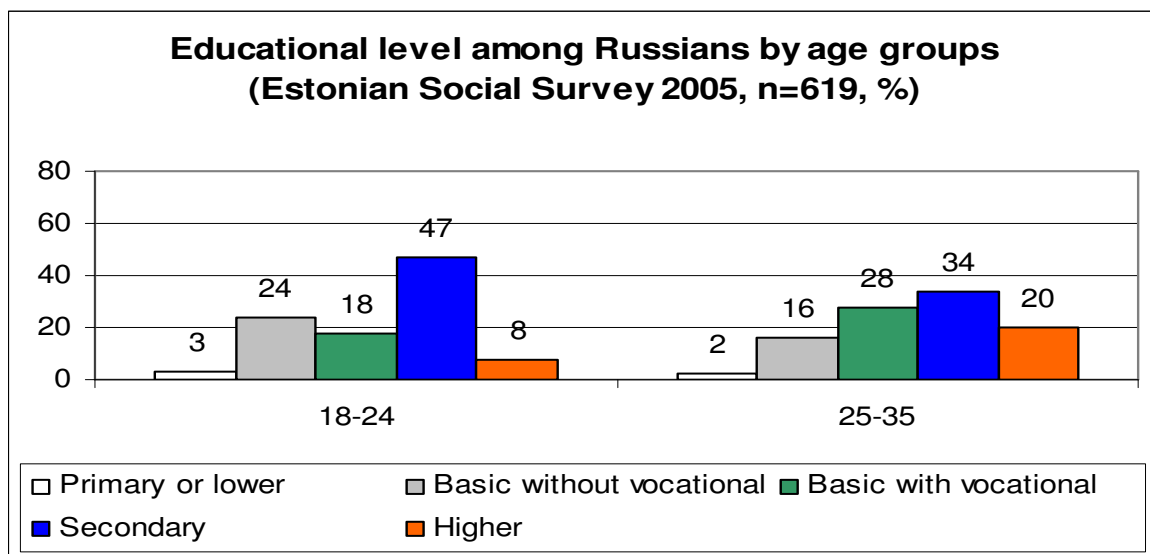
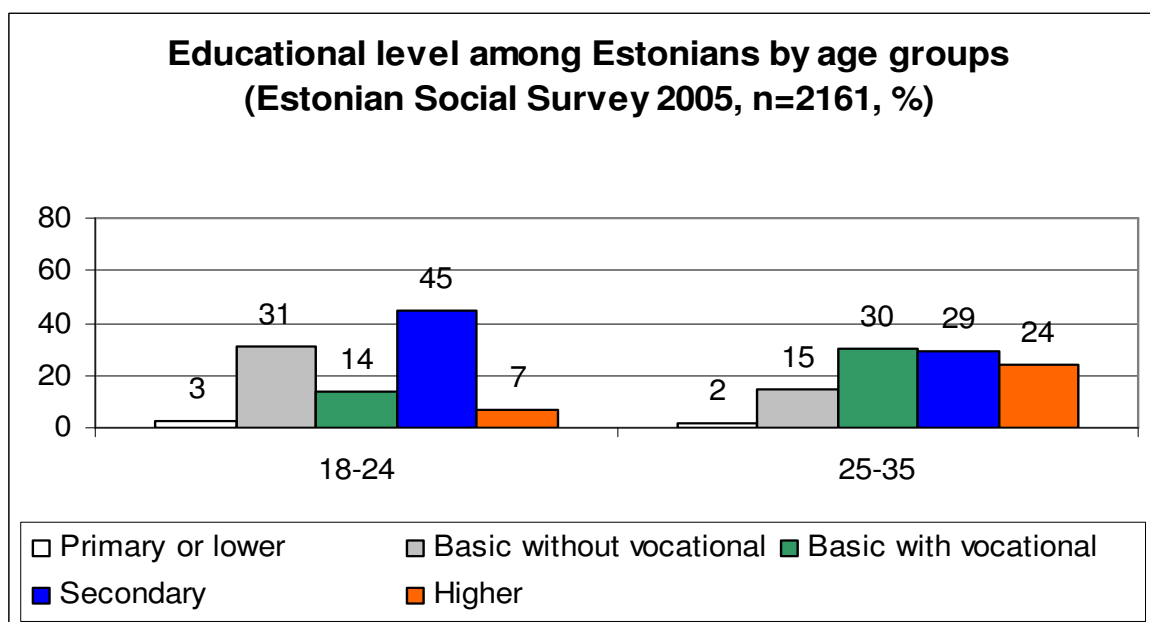


Chart 4. Mobility through school system in Estonia for Estonians in 1986-2005



In is inevitable that the close relations between economic processes and local cultural and political life compel the alien population (ex-immigrants) to become the citizens of their country of residence sooner or later.

Professor Sergei Issakov has expressed the opinion that Estonia has already gone on the way of significant integration. According to his views an interesting process of the formation of a new ethnic group and a new ethno-cultural community – Estonian Russians – is evidently underway. This is the group with their own subculture similar to French-speaking population in Canada or Swedish-speaking Finns. He says in one of his writings, “We remain Russians by our language, culture and self-consciousness. But, however, we are still not identical to Russians living in Russia or let’s say, to the Russians living in America” (Issakov 2003).

Therefore it is worth to note that there exists an interesting strategy for the integration of the Russians in Estonia elaborated in Moscow. One of the propagators of these ideas, Renald Simonjan claims in his book “Russia and the Baltic states” that in the consequence of ethnic processes among the Russians in Estonia a new sub-ethnic group with specific type of identity – “European Russians”- will be developed (Simonjan 2003 and 2005).

The mentioned concept of Russian sociologist is based on the pragmatic presumption that an economic bridge between Russia and European Union will be created, but it doesn’t take into consideration other important aspects, i.e. **the similarity of Estonia and the European cultural background**, which could constitute sufficient basis for single European identity and could constitute sufficient basis for **single Euro-Estonian identity for Russians in Estonia as in new homeland**.

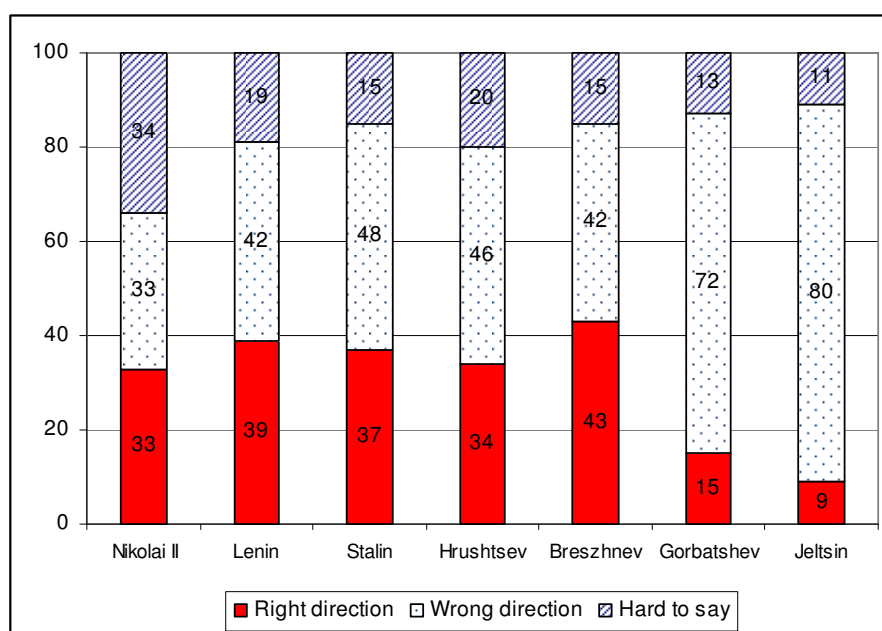
The status of European citizen should help **to form Euro-Estonian** identity as new **identity** of Estonian Russians and other ethnic groups. Probably just one cultural environment will be not replaced by another, but by essentially wider cultural space. A problem for Estonia can emerge in regard of those social factors and mechanisms, which should secure the continuation of Estonia's inner cultural and national integration.

Nostalgia in Russia

Roderic Lyne mentioned that the shock of the collapse of the Soviet Empire for Russians was great because people were not prepared for it. Sure, that people in

Russia didn't expect this collapse because most of them believed goals and values of communistic phraseology. Following chart 5 shows that even today there is nostalgia about Lenin's and Stalin's time, but especially yearning about Brezhnev era is impressive in Russia,.

Chart 5. Who of former leaders conducted the Russian state to right direction?



Source: http://www.wciom.ru/?pt_42&article=2331

Example of Russian tradition to exercise one's power in neighbouring countries is related to Ukraine last national elections. According to results of the public opinion poll carried out in Russia (http://www.wciom.ru/?pt_57&article=2353) that there are 2.5 times more Russian people who support former Ukrainian Prime Minister V. Janukovich than today's President V. Jushshenko (today V, Janukovich – Ukrainian Prime Minister).

Hidden political revenge is still often important argument for Russian policy than realistic economic business profit. For example, after Estonian secession from the former SU Russia in 1994 imposed double custom dues for Estonian export and this rule was denounced only after Estonia became a member of the European Union.

Conclusions

European tradition is also – to acknowledge the factual history. This is the best base for respectable relations between partners. For three Baltic States especially the Second World War recalls resentment. Russia can't be trustful neighbour for Baltic people before it admits fact of occupation the Baltic countries in 1940.

We agree with Roderic Lyne – we have to shift our thinking away from the concepts dictated by past. Therefore, Russia has to abandon the position of superpower and stand on the position of equal partner. Russia has to fulfil certain requirements to become a serious claimant for EU member state and not to demand exceptions concerning Russian position.

Let us think also about corruption in Russia, relations with ethnic minorities (including Chechen war) and brutal transportation of Georgian minority from Moscow in last October, and conclude that the focus of Russian development is very far from joining the EU.

Yes, Russian contemporary culture is linked to European cultural traditions. But it is linked to other traditions as well. We can't say 'never', but we can't say: yes! In this probable integration process very much depends on Russia itself. Let us see how European integration works in Ukraine then we are more aware to make detailed prognosis about Russia.