

o. Introduction

- o.1 Estonia (EE) covers a territory of 45,226 sq km. It borders on the Russian Federation to the east and on Latvia to the south, while Finland lies only 48 miles to the north across the homonymous Gulf, which is also the north-eastern arm of the Baltic Sea. The territory of Estonia includes approx. 800 islands, of which Hiiumaa and Saaremaa are the largest (the latter is situated a few miles off the Curonian coast of Latvia). A considerable length of the eastern border with Russia is marked by the transboundary Lake Peipsi (or Lake Peipus) along its north-south extension. The main cities are Tallinn (the capital), Tartu, Pärnu, Kohtla-Järve, Narva. The population (67.4% urban and 32.6% rural) is slightly above 1.3 million, with a density of 30 inhabitants/km². The country is divided into 15 counties and 241 rural municipalities.



- o.2 The Republic of Estonia [*Eesti Vabariik*] has been a parliamentary democracy since 1991. The legislative power is vested in the [Riigikogu](#) (a term that cannot be officially translated), a single-chamber parliament composed of 101 members elected every four years. Following the transition to a new economic system, Estonia's gross domestic product (GDP) decreased in the post-independence years, but grew rapidly in 2000 (7.1%) through economic integration with EU Member States. Estonia mainly exports machinery and electrical equipment, wood and textile products (69% to EU Member states). Tourism and transit trade also make up a significant share of the economy. Finland and Sweden are amongst Estonia's biggest partners in business, investment and tourism. GDP/capita was 4,500 euro in 2001.

1. General aspects

- 1.1 Estonia was originally settled by Finno-Ugric tribes, who have lived in the territory for over 5,000 years. In the 12th-14th centuries the territory was colonised first by the Danes and later by the Order of Teutonic Knights, which formed a landowning élite also throughout the Swedish occupation (1561-1721) and during the subsequent Russian rule (1721-1918). Despite the numerical prevalence of Estonians, political and economic power was to remain with the Germans and Russians until 1918. Throughout this period, the ethnic composition of the territory remained comparatively stable, with Estonian and German as the main languages of communication. Estonian nationalism developed only in the late 19th century and eventually led to the establishment of the Republic of Estonia in 1918. The War of Independence lasted until 1920, when the first constitution was adopted. At that time the population was still relatively homogeneous (in 1922 there were 969,976 Estonians, 91,109 Russians, 18,319 Germans, 7,850 Swedes, 4,566 Jews and 14,508 of other nationalities). Following the Tartu Peace Treaty (1920), Estonian citizenship was granted to the whole population. In the interwar years the government promoted cultural autonomy for national minorities (\Rightarrow 3.2), also to mitigate the consequences of the land reform – that had expropriated the former élites. With the Soviet-German non-aggression Pact Estonia was first occupied and then incorporated by the USSR in 1940, to become the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Mass deportations of the local population began. The Soviet period was interrupted by German occupation (1941-1945): Jews were severely persecuted, while most Swedes left in 1943 (following a German-Swedish Treaty) and in 1944 another 70,000 Estonians left the country. After the War, the re-establishment of Russian rule involved further deportations (50,000 people between 1945 and 1949), which – combined with immigration from Russia – drastically reduced the number of Estonians: in the period 1945-1989 the percentage of non-Estonians grew from 2.7% to 38.5% of the total population. Such an intake was essentially due to the vast labour demand created by post-war industrialisation. The total number of immigrants during the Soviet period (mainly established in the north-east and Tallinn) was 1.4 million, and involved a “Russification” process in many spheres of life – government, administration, economy, education. However, the migration turnover was very high, with approx. seven out of eight immigrants emigrating at one time or another. In 1991 independence was declared and Estonian sovereignty re-established. A new constitution came into force in 1992, replacing the old one that had remained in force *de jure* also during the Soviet period. Since then Estonian society has remained ethnically divided, with marginal contacts between immigrants and the Estonian population – given the different workplaces, different cultural habits and a small number of mixed marriages.
- 1.2 After the restoration of independence, the Estonian government introduced a normalisation programme to facilitate repatriation and integrate minorities. Immigration was put under control with the Law on Immigration [*Eesti Vabariigi immigratsiooniseadus*] (1990) and the Law on Aliens [*Välismaalaste seadus*] (1993). A major issue in this context has been that of Estonian citizenship. Because this was based on the *ius sanguinis* principle, immigrants had to go through a naturalisation process, which also required a basic knowledge of Estonian. In 2000 a new state programme [Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007](#) was adopted, with the naturalisation process remaining a priority.
- 1.3 Because Estonia had very close ties with the former Soviet Union, the transition to a market economy was especially difficult. The north-east, in particular, heavily

depended on a few large-scale manufacturing enterprises and suffered a severe decline. In 2001 the percentage of non-Estonians employed in manufacturing was still 31.2%, as against 18.3% of Estonians in the same sector. Statistics from 2003 show another considerable difference in the electricity, gas and water supply sector – which accounts for 4.4% of non-Estonians but only 1.6% of Estonians. In 2001 the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (in % of Estonia average) was the following, broken down by main region: Northern Estonia 158.8%, Central Estonia 65.3%, North-Eastern Estonia 54.3%, Western Estonia 71.2%, Southern Estonia 63.3%. Differences between Estonians and non-Estonians also exist in the average personal net income of by main areas:

Area	Estonians	non-Estonians
Tallinn	3,854	2,904
Ida-Viru	2,296	2,445
Other regions	2,736	2,130

and in the income per family member (IFM):

IFM	Estonians	non-Estonians
Up to 100	19	20
1,001...1500	20	25
1,501...2000	23	27
2,001...3500	23	22
Over 3,500	15	6

- 1.4 Estonia has no state religion. The census taken in 2000 showed a comparatively high level of secularisation, 31.8% of respondents having declared to be followers of religious traditions. The Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church is the largest (14.8%), with 98% of the Lutheran congregations using the Estonian language. Next in size are the Estonian Apostolic-Orthodox Church (EAOC) and the Russian Orthodox Church (13.9% put together), which are subordinated to the Patriarch of Constantinople and Moscow respectively. This distinction within the Orthodox Church – which is also linguistically relevant – has been a matter of controversy, as in 1993 the Russian Orthodox Church was denied registration under the same name officially assigned to the EAOC. The issue was also dealt with in the monitoring process of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and eventually resolved in 2002 when official registration was granted.

2. Demographic data

- 2.1 According to the most recent official estimates (2003) Estonia has 1,356,045 inhabitants. Data from the 2000 and the 1989 censuses (by nationality/ethnicity) are compared in the table below:

National composition of the population

Nationality/ ethnicity	1989		2000	
	population	%	Population	%
Total	1,565,662	100.0	1,370,052	100.0
Estonians	963,281	61.5	930,219	67.9
Russians	474,834	30.3	351,178	25.6
Ukrainians	48,271	3.1	29,012	2.1
Belorussians	27,711	1.8	17,241	1.3

Finns	16,622	1.1	11,837	0.9
Tatars	4,058	0.2	2,582	0.2
Latvians	3,135	0.2	2,330	0.2
Poles	3,008	0.2	2,193	0.2
Jews	4,613	0.3	2,145	0.1
Lithuanians	2,568	0.2	2,116	0.1
Germans	3,466	0.2	1,870	0.1
other	14 088	0.9	9410	0.7
unknown	7	0.0	7 919	0.6

In the period between 1989-2000 the overall population decreased, but while the number of Estonians receded by only 3.4%, other nationalities have dropped considerably: Russians (-26%), Ukrainians (-39.9%), Belorussians (-37.8%), Finns (-28.8%) and all others (-35.2%). The general decrease in population was mainly caused by out-migration from Estonia, and in a lesser degree (21.5%) by negative natural increase. The table shows that in a decade, the gap between the Estonian ethnicity and the others has been reduced by almost 13%. However, the increase of the proportion of Estonians is not due to an increase in the number of Estonians, but to a decrease in the number of non-Estonians, some 80% of whom are Russians. The composition is still much more heterogeneous (142 nationalities in 2000, 121 in 1989) than during the first Republic: the 1934 census recorded 88% Estonians, 8% Russian, 1.5% German, 0.7% Swedes and 0.4% Jews.

- 2.2 Estonians account for less than 50% in Sillamäe (4.3%), Narva (4.9%), Narva-Jõesuu (15.2%), Kohtla-Järve (17.8%), Maardu (19.9%), Kallaste (21.1%), Paldiski (29.7%), Loksa (32.7%), Jõhvi (33.2%), Kiviõli (39.4%), Mustvee (40.7%) and Püssi (48.7%). In rural municipalities Estonians account for less than 50% in Peipsiääre (8.7%), Alajõe (14.1%), Piirissaare (17.3%), Vaivara (29.2%), Kasepää (39.6%), Vasalemma (43.7%) and Aseri (46.9%). The non-Estonian sector of the population is thus mainly concentrated in towns. In 1989 most non-Estonians were first-generation immigrants with social and family ties outside Estonia, and about 95% of them were 45 years old or younger; second-generation immigrants belonged almost exclusively to the Russian community.
- 2.3 The 2000 census in the tables below shows that out of 1,095,743 citizens 80% had Estonian citizenship, while Russian citizens account for 6.3% of the total. There were as many as 170,349 people (12.4%) with undetermined citizenship, the Russian nationality accounting for 78.3% of them; more recent figures (May 2004) show a decrease of persons with undetermined citizenship (160,270). Persons without Estonian citizenship live mainly in cities, while Estonian citizens account for over 95% in rural areas. In 1922 and 1934 the percentage of Estonian citizens was 97.7% and 98.8% respectively.

Population by citizenship and nationality, 2000

Nationality/ ethnicity	Citizens of Estonia	Citizens of Russia	Citizens of other countries	Persons with undetermined citizenship	Citizenship unknown
Total	1,095,743	86,067	8,941	170,349	8,952
Estonians	922,204	692	165	4,896	2,262
Russians	141,907	73,379	1,048	133,346	1,498
other	29,774	11,581	7,560	31,554	267
unknown	1,858	415	168	553	4,925
	%				
Estonians	84.2	0.8	1.8	2.9	25.3
Russians	12.9	85.3	11.7	78.3	16.7
other	2.7	13.4	84.6	18.5	3.0
unknown	0.2	0.5	1.9	0.3	55.0

Population by place of residence and citizenship, 2000

	Citizens of Estonia	Citizens of Russia	Citizens of other countries	Persons with undetermined citizenship	Citizenship unknown
Total	80.0	6.3	0.7	12.4	0.6
Total urban	72.6	8.9	0.8	16.9	0.8
Tartu	91.0	3.5	0.6	4.4	0.5
Pärnu	90.1	4.7	0.5	4.1	0.6
Tallinn	71.1	8.7	1.2	18.0	1.0
Kohtla-Järve	41.8	13.4	0.6	42.7	1.5
Narva	36.4	28.9	0.4	33.6	0.7
Total rural municipalities	95.2	0.9	0.2	3.3	0.4

Estonian citizens account for less than 50% in Sillamäe (21.3%), Narva (36.4%), Kohtla-Järve (41.8%), Maardu (43.2%), Paldiski (43.2%), Loksa (44.3%) and Narva-Jõesuu (47.2%) cities, as well as in Vaivara rural municipality (43.3%).

- 2.4 In the 2000 census 109 different languages were declared as mother tongues. The most frequent were:

Language	Number of Speakers	% of total population
Estonian	921,817	67.3%
Russian	406,755	29.7%
Ukrainian	12,299	0.9%
Belorussian	5,197	0.4%
Finnish	4,932	0.3%
Latvian	1,389	0.1%
Lithuanian	1,198	0.1%
Others	7,276	0.5%
Unknown	9,189	0.7%
Total	1,370,052	100%

The table shows that 97% of the population have Estonian or Russian as their mother tongue. Only little more than 2% of the population speak the other 107 languages. With regard to language use, 98.2% of the Russians and 97.9% of the Estonians speak their respective languages. Smaller nationalities appear to use their languages to a lesser degree. The majority of people who do not use their mother tongue speak Russian, with the exception of the Swedes, Finns, Ingrians, Roma and a few others – who prefer Estonian. In comparison with the 1989 census, a decrease in the use of their national language has been recorded for all ethnicities, i.e. language may have become less important as an identity marker. As far as the relationship between citizenship and language is concerned, 83.4% of Estonian citizens speak Estonian, 15.3% speak Russian and 1% other languages. The Estonian and non-Estonian speakers distribution pattern is quite similar to the distribution pattern by nationality.

- 2.5 The 2000 census also included questions on knowledge of foreign languages and of Estonian, as shown by the tables below:

Population by nationality and knowledge of foreign languages, 2000

Population		Estonians		Russians		Other nationalities	
<i>language</i>	%	<i>language</i>	%	<i>language</i>	%	<i>language</i>	%
Russian	49.2	Russian	68.2	Estonian	44.5	Russian	44.5
English	29.4	English	35.2	English	17.4	Estonian	44.1
Estonian	14.3	Finnish	16.6	German	5.4	national language	20.0
German	11.9	German	14.9	Finnish	1.6	English	16.3
Finnish	11.8	Estonian	1.6	Russian	1.4	German	6.4

Population by nationality and by command of the Estonian language, 1989, 2000

			% of population		% of respondents
	1989	2000	1989	2000	
Knowledge of Estonian as a mother tongue or the second language	1 055 159	1 102 133 ¹	67.4	80.4	84.4
Estonians	959 111	923 005	99.6	99.2	99.6
Russians	71 208	139 575	15.0	39.7	46.1
other nationalities	24 840	38 847	19.5	48.1	51.6

1) includes persons with unknown nationality

Russian is the most widely known foreign language (49.2% of the total population), scoring the highest percentage both among Estonians and among other nationalities. The share of people with command of Estonian has significantly increased.

3. Language policy

3.1 The Estonian language [*Eesti keel*] is the state and official language of Estonia. The autoglotonym *Eesti keel* is comparatively recent (late 19th century), and until then the language was designated as the “country language” [*maakeel*]. Estonian was an official language also during the first Republic (1920-1940), while during the Soviet period it remained a language of much of education as well as of administration. Estonian, written in the Roman alphabet, belongs to the Baltic-Finnic subgroup of the Finno-Ugric branch of the Uralic language family; it is thus related to Finnish, Livonian and Karelian among others and distinct from Slavonic languages – and therefore from Russian. There are two main dialect groups, the northern and the southern. Standard Estonian is mainly based on the northern dialect of Tallinn, which gained prestige with the translation of the Bible in 1739 to the detriment of the Tartu dialect. The first grammar of the language written in Estonian dates back to 1884, and the standard language was consolidated through the national movement. The southern Võro dialect stands out as the vernacular most distinct from standard Estonian, having retained many of its original features.

3.2 In 1925 the Estonian Parliament passed the Act on Cultural Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities, which gave to all ethnic groups of Estonia the right to preserve their ethnic identity, culture and religious affiliation. The Act, which was unique in the interwar years, entitled ethnic groups of more than 3,000 members to organise themselves into corporate bodies and run their own educational and cultural affairs. Russians and Swedes already had a rich cultural life in their native

languages (including schools and churches), but did not make use of their right to cultural self-government — unlike the German and Jewish communities, who established their respective autonomies in 1925 and 1926 respectively. The act was very extensive in scope, and allowed complete devolution of educational policy. After World War II, the Russian period introduced a separate network of Russian-language speakers as well as a full-scale separate Russian education system. There was no contact with the Estonian language, although this was maintained in Estonian schools (where the teaching of Russian was compulsory) and in everyday life. Other minorities were not allowed to use their language, and their education was mostly in Russian. The result was an unbalanced situation, with a divide between the two main linguistic communities and a severe decline of the Estonian language. In 1989 the Estonian SSR felt the need to declare Estonian as an official language, but it was with the creation of the new state that forceful measures were taken to upgrade its status. Work-related language requirements were introduced by the first Language Act (1989). In 1990 a National Language Board was established to monitor the usage of Estonian and carry out the language policy in accordance with the Language Act. Requirements for those applying for Estonian citizenship were introduced in 1993 by the Law on Estonian Language requirements for applicants for citizenship [*Kodakondsuse taotlejatele esitatavate eesti keele tundmise nõuete seadus*]. In 2000 the Estonian language examination for applicants for citizenship, the Estonian language proficiency examination and the Estonian language final examination in basic and upper secondary schools (where the language of instruction is not Estonian) were integrated.

3.3 According to Art. 6 of the 1992 [Constitution](#) [*Põhiseadus*] and to the [Language Act](#) [*Keeleseadus*] (1995), Estonian is the official language [*riigikeel*] of Estonia both at state and local government level. The Language Law defines any other language as a “foreign language” [*võõrkeel*], and the language of a “national minority” [*vähemusrahvuse keel*] as the foreign language that Estonian citizens of that minority have historically used as their mother tongue in Estonia. The Constitution (Artt. 51 and 52) specifies that in areas where at least half of the residents belong to a national minority people are entitled to receive answers from official authorities in their own language; also, in localities where the language of the majority of the population is different from Estonian, local government authorities may use that language for internal communication. Article 41 of the [Local Government Organisation Act](#) [*Kohaliku omavalitsuse korralduse seadus*] reiterates that the working language of local government bodies is Estonian. The right to use also the minority language as a working language at local government level is subject to the approval of the Government of the Republic. The Supreme Court has twice considered the legality of the requirement for proficiency in Estonian — which under the Language Act of 1995 applied to individuals running for the *Riigikogu* and local self-governments — and declared them invalid in 2001.

3.4 Ethnic minorities have the right to establish institutions of self-government in accordance with the [Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities](#) [*Vähemusrahvuse kultuuriautoomia seadus*] of 1993. In Art. 1 the Law further defines members of national minorities as citizens who:

- reside on the territory of Estonia;
- maintain longstanding, firm and lasting ties with Estonia;
- are distinct from Estonians on the basis of their ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic characteristics;
- are motivated by a concern to preserve together their cultural traditions, their religion or their language which constitute the basis of their common identity.

Such a definition also formed the official declaration of Estonia in the ratification process of the FCPNM. The same Act (Art. 2) states that such cultural autonomy may be established by persons belonging to German, Russian, Swedish and Jewish minorities and by persons belonging to national minorities having more than 3000 members. The notion of “national minority” thus appears to be more restricted than that of “ethnic minority” [*rahvusvähemus*], for it involves citizenship and the existence of long-standing ties. Such an interpretation excludes in principle immigrant groups. There are no governmental bodies dealing with minority language policy, and no cultural autonomies have been initiated so far – with the exception of the Ingrian Finns (⇒ Other languages, 2.3).

- 3.5 The Constitution (Art. 37) also provides that educational institutions for national minorities can choose the language of instruction. This possibility is subject to an application by a local government council to the Government of the Republic, following a proposal made by the board of trustees of an upper secondary school. The [Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act](#) [*Põhikooli- ja gümnaasiumiseadus*] (1993) specifies that the “language of instruction” is the language in which at least 60% of the teaching on the curriculum is provided. The same Act states that in schools where instruction is not given in Estonian, Estonian is compulsory from the first year on, and that at the upper secondary school stage the language of instruction must be Estonian. The latter provision has been controversial, although the scope of “language of instruction” makes bilingual education possible, at least in principle. The freedom of press and the right to freely obtain information disseminated for public use is protected under articles 44 and 45 of the Constitution. The Law on Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities (Art. 4) states that members of a national minority have the right to publish in their ethnic language as well as circulate and exchange information in their mother tongue. There are no specific broadcasting provisions for minorities: the media environment is mainly divided between Estonian-language and Russian-language media. On the basis of the Place Names Act (1997) public signs, signposts, announcements, notices and advertisements must be in Estonian. The [second report](#) submitted by Estonia within the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (July 2004) details the support given to national minorities associations, and provides comprehensive information in other language-related aspects.

4. The European dimension

- 4.1 The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was signed by Estonia in 1995, and has been in force since 1998. In 2001 the second EU Phare programme “The Social Integration and Language Training Programme for Ethnic Minorities in Estonia” (2001-2003) continued the first three-year EU Phare Estonian language training programme that had been completed in 2000. In 2002 the government approved the foreign aid project “Integrating Estonia 2002-2004” to strengthen cooperation between Estonians and non-Estonians. There are no bilateral agreements concerning regional or minority languages.