

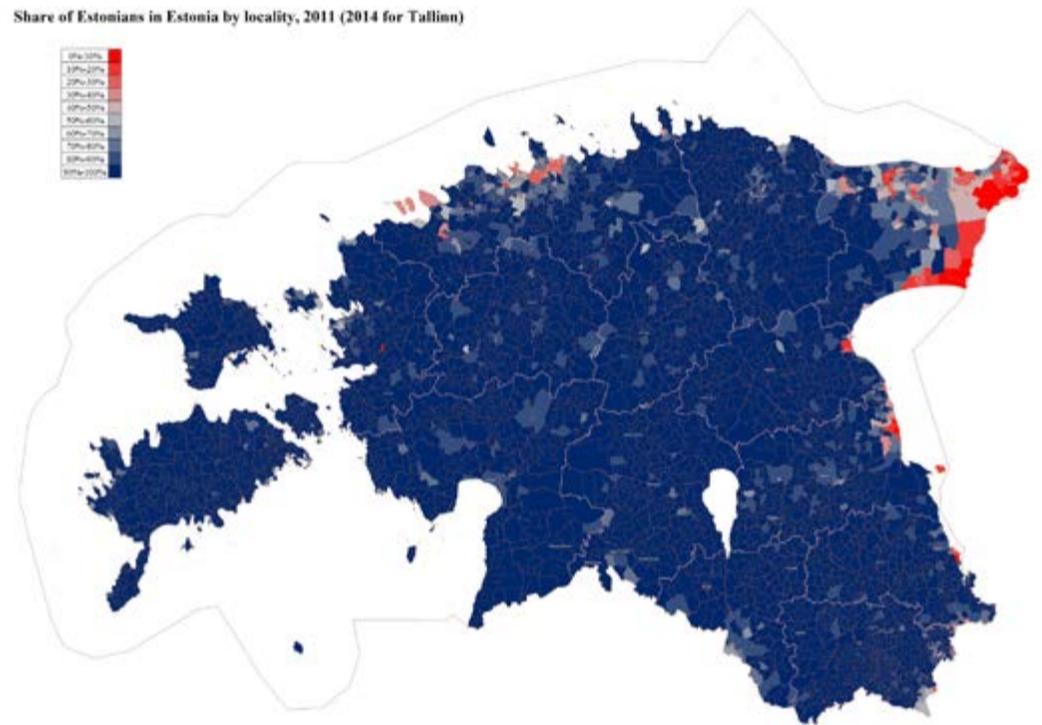


Campaign Sparks Division Between Ethnic Russians and Estonians

OE Watch Commentary: As the parliamentary elections in Estonia draw near, a campaign ad for a new party has drawn attention and criticism for its reference to the division between ethnic Russians and Estonians. The poster appeared at a tram station in Tallinn and featured two sides, one which said in Estonian “Only Estonians here” and another in Russian that read “Only Russians here.” Underneath these statements, a phone number was given with the invitation to call if there were any questions. The accompanying excerpted article from *Komsomolskaya Pravda* gives the perspective of the head of the party (Estonia 200) responsible for the poster, who explains why they decided to stoke the already tense relationship between Estonians and Russians, the latter of which make up approximately 25 percent of the population.



Logo for Estonia 200 reading “Estonia 200 Long Plan for Estonia”
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/44/Eesti_200_logo.png



Share of ethnic Estonians by every populated place.
Source: H2ppyme [CC BY-SA 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)], https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Share_of_Estonians.png.

“...In our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian ‘rooms’ and this starts in kindergarten....”

Source: Maria Berk, “В Эстонии появились провокационные плакаты, разделяющие русских и эстонцев на остановке,” [In Estonia there appeared provocative posters differentiating Russians and Estonians at a tram stop] *Комсомольская Правда*, 8 January 2019. <https://www.perm.kp.ru/daily/26927.3/3976850/>

“What is the point in a poster showing us the divisions in society? Estonian residents have put a mirror up to society... Let’s once and for all stop living in parallel worlds in a society with different opportunities. We will create one kindergarten and school for all children in Estonia,” stated the leader of the party Kistina Kallas. In her words, the provocative billboard was needed to bring attention to the problem of differences in opportunity between Russians and Estonians....

“In our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian “rooms” and this starts in kindergarten,” explained Kallas.

Now social media users have spread new posters, hung around the city for the Estonia 200 party. On them is written the following: “Estonians and Russians together in one school,” “Estonians and Russians together in one party.” This party is trying to urge the government to create a single system of education.

“We have seen that this subject (the subject of integration and relations between Russia and Estonians) is hard. Painful roots of this problem run very deep,” explained the head of the party Kristina Kallas. Russians feel this problem every day. Of course these posters were hurtful to them. I sincerely apologize to those whom we have caused harm yesterday. But it is important because all of society flinched and thought: what is really our most serious problem.”

The article quotes Kristina Kallas, the chairwoman of Estonia 200, saying “what is the point in a poster showing us the divisions in society? Estonian residents have put a mirror up to society... Let’s once and for all stop living in parallel worlds in a society with different opportunities.” Kallas explains that the goal of the ad campaign was to point out that the differences between Estonian and Estonian-Russian societies are still very prominent, adding that “in our society there is still a disparity between Estonian and Estonian-Russian ‘rooms’ and this starts in kindergarten.” The separation in schools by language creates and maintains a divide between Estonians and Russians, a weakness that has been exploited by Russia to incite protests and violence in the past through fake news campaigns. Because of the persistent issues in Estonia fueled by this separation, one of Estonia 200’s primary goals is to close the gap between these two societies by working toward more integrated schools.

The posters did not go over very well with Russians or Estonians and the party received a good deal of backlash over the incident. Kallas addressed the outrage by stating, “we have seen that this subject (the subject of integration and relations between Russians and Estonians) is hard. Painful roots of this problem run very deep. Russians feel this problem every day. Of course these posters were hurtful to them.” Since then, new posters have appeared with a message intended to better promote unity, saying “Estonians and Russian together in one school, Estonians and Russians together in one party.” **End OE Watch Commentary (Dimmick)**