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Political Engagement of the Russian Speakers in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland, like many other immigrants in the world, are reluctant to express their opinions on politics. They do not consider themselves competent enough to have the right to make a judgment in a situation in which they have not taken part and which they cannot view completely on their own. Gradually, immigrants who were born in various countries are becoming increasingly aware of their place in their new society, but they still feel they cannot fully trust their leaders. This article examines the attitude of Russian speakers to the Finnish elections and the ongoing war in Ukraine as presented in media and social media, interviews, and essays. It is not easy to compare whether they are less involved than the young Finns, or it is a generational thing. The conclusion points out the difficulties in adapting to a different political system than in the country of origin and illustrates the spectrum of opinions among the immigrants of the first and second generation who live in Finland and use Russian among other languages in their everyday life. Russian-language media continue to have a significant influence on Russian speakers, even though second-generation representatives rely less on these sources of information.

Keywords: *Russian-speaking diaspora, immigrants in Finland, bilingual and bicultural identities, TV and FB discussions, immigrant participation in elections, Russian war in Ukraine*

Introduction

The situation with Russian-speaking immigrants throughout the world seems to be ambiguous. On the one hand, they are loyal toward their new countries, especially if their skills and values are recognized and appreciated. On the other hand, they feel they should also support their countries of origin, mostly the former Soviet Union, now the independent states. When troubles between these countries emerge, immigrants feel they should take and defend a position. The question raised is what is the new political experience of Russian speakers in a democratic republic like Finland? Are they fully aware of the new opportunities that they have now, or are they still dependent on the views they were brought up with in the USSR and Russia? Do they realize what the political rights are that they have acquired together with their residence permit or citizenship?

Researchers usually agree that immigrants should be incorporated into the economic, social, and political life of their new countries because this provides a more solid feeling of citizenship and mobilizes new identities (Brettell & Reed-Danahay, 2008). There are special ways to engage immigrants in activism and public service (Ramakrishnan & Bloemraad, 2008). Generally,

immigrants in the United States have a low rate of registration and voting, limiting their political power, whereas some NGOs use multiple political techniques to improve immigrant voter turnout (Brown, 2017). Community engagement seems to be very important in this process; individual characteristics and resources, social capital, and political possibilities all influence migrant civic integration (Giugni & Morales Diez de Ulzurrun, 2011). Diasporas are globally involved in transnational networks bonded by a common language and culture, experiencing sometimes exclusion or inclusion, and revealing regularities and disconnections (Pattanaik & Sahoo, 2014).

Because of disparities in socioeconomic background and familial political socialization, Riniolo and Ortensi (2020) have argued that Italian natives are more likely to be interested in politics than their first- and second-generation migrant contemporaries. Young people from migrant backgrounds are more likely to engage in activities that reflect a general interest in politics, such as discussing politics, seeking information on Italian politics, and listening to political debates, than their native counterparts, who, if restrictions do not exist, are likely to attend political meetings, demonstrations, or join a political association.

In the 1990s, the vast majority of émigrés belonged to ethnically privileged groups that are also referred to as “returning diaspora” in migration studies. As a consequence that those groups have not very tough ties with their respective countries of origin, only the network size in home country was positively and co-ethnic identification negatively associated to transnational travel frequency (Iarmolenko et al., 2016). Political repression in the nation of origin, as well as living in countries with a significant number of immigrant peers, have a negative impact on immigrants’ health (Huijts, Kraaykamp, 2012).

Several studies are dedicated to Russian-speaking immigrants’ political engagement. Simon et al. (2013, 2015) have shown that in Germany, the two largest immigrant groups behave differently. Turkish migrants’ political engagement has grown as a result of their dual identity. Russian migrants, in contrast, have had no significant grievances, and dual identity has had a detrimental impact on their subsequent political activity. When component identifications are incompatible, it can lead to problematic or even destructive types of political mobilization, such as radicalism. According to Morgunova and Byford (2018), post-Soviet Russian-speaking migrants in the United Kingdom hold an intrinsically transnational position at the crossroads of numerous polities. Their mobilization as a culturally defined minority migrant community has been aided by the special opportunity structures for mobilization, which encouraged them to join a global network of Russian “compatriots.” In the early 2010s, a new opportunity structure evolved in the form of a multinational protest movement in Russia against government corruption. Thereafter, since the Russian government has implemented policies that have resulted in a growing disenfranchisement of Russians living abroad from political

developments in Russia, many Russians in the United Kingdom have begun to seek new methods to participate. For them, the politics of Brexit have created a new opportunity framework.

Fomina (2021) has argued that political emigration from Russia is no longer a secure process. Involved in social remittances, the new dissidents from Putin's Russia send these remittances directly to Russian society, as well as indirectly to the Russian diaspora, political leaders, and society in recipient nations. The key concerns are free and fair elections, human rights and civil liberties, fighting corruption, environmental conservation, anti-war actions, countering Russian propaganda, and the "hybrid war." Haj (2015) writes that in Israel, characterized as a deeply divided society, Russian speakers (analyzed 10 and 20 years after immigration) demonstrate fluid voting behavior. They are influenced primarily by their perceptions of and sentiments toward domestic issues rather than regional issues, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Over time, their sophisticated political mobilization strategies have shifted from the development of "ethnic" parties in their first decade to the formation of "hybrid-ethnic" parties in the second decade. This has allowed flexibility in terms of support, recruitment, and coalition building, preventing ethnic exclusion, optimizing Russian immigrants' gains, and reducing the cost of ethnic mobilization. Davydova-Minguet (2022) claims that the festivities commemorating WWII, particularly the Immortal Regiment march in May, which is commemorated in Russia as Victory Day, are intertwined with a web of intricate relationships between Russian speakers, Russian mediascapes, and pro-Russian activists in Finland.

I will now look at the participation of Russian speakers in elections and then present the opinions of Russian speakers in Finland concerning the Ukrainian war. The methods used are critical discourse analysis, thematic analysis, document analysis, and triangulation. Materials consist of off-line and on-line discussions and written essays.

'I am thankful when anybody needs my opinion': Discussions upon Participation in Politics among Russian-Speaking Voters in Finland

Immigrant integration occurs in a variety of contexts, including the labor market, but also in the political sphere. Immigrants' participation in host-country politics, including the ability to understand and influence political processes as well as an interest in what is going on in society, facilitates their societal inclusion. The presence of immigrants in decision-making bodies is one of the important factors that supports their political engagement. According to Sippinen (2021), the foreign-speaking residents of Finland vote significantly less actively in municipal elections than the majority population. Only 53% of immigrants with a Somalian background vote in these elections; 50% of Germans, and about a third of those who speak English, Kurdish, or Spanish. Russian speakers exercise their right to vote less frequently than many other groups of migrants, and only

one-fifth of Russian speakers who are eligible to vote in municipal elections go to the polls. Estonians are even less active, because they often live in both countries, Estonia and Finland, traveling between them and not feeling at home in Finland. Many factors contribute to the low turnout. Those who seek political participation must feel that they belong here, have sufficient language skills, understand the political system, be interested in political life, and believe in political institutions. The candidates must have strong personal support and a favorable context. The nomination of immigrant-origin candidates allows parties to reach out to immigrant-origin voters who might otherwise go unnoticed by native-origin candidates. When a party runs a large number of candidates, including candidates of immigrant background on the ballot, this does not pose a genuine danger of losing support. On the contrary, every candidate brings in votes from his or her own network, even if they are not particularly experienced. Sippinen argues that politically active Russian speakers are sometimes reproached for their critical judgments about Finnish politics. Russian women vote more actively than Russian men because when they marry a native Finnish speaker who understands the reality of the nation and politics, they may follow in his footsteps. A lack of faith in politics, politicians, and the political system is also a significant impediment to immigrant participation. If a person is accustomed to being skeptical about elections in their native country, they might apply these concerns to the Finnish system. Russian speakers are represented proportionally in all parties, and this would suggest they vote more for a party than for a person (*ibid.*).

Dakash (2017), who has studied the construction of identity positions in the blogs of Finnish politicians with an immigrant background (although not from Russia), has discovered that their positions are concerned with minority-majority relations, immigrant belonging and participation. They also generally base their positions on humanistic, collectivistic, and individualistic values. Immigrant politicians talk about success stories, moral human beings, decent citizens, and making a contribution. Although they can position themselves as autonomous decision-makers who possess additional trump cards, they often choose a rhetoric in which they present themselves as second-class citizens, ordinary people, and victims. As far as we can see, this is not the stance of Russian speakers, who define themselves in public debates as a special group rather than as victims.

The “Old Russians” in Finland have traditionally desired to be recognized as a linguistic minority, suggesting that they wished to some extent to be seen as separate from the majority population. By the end of the twentieth century, the heads of the Russian associations in Finland were Kirill Glushkov, Igor Kurkimies, Eugen Novitsky, and Rostislav Holthoer. Journalist Eilina Gusatinsky and lawyer Anna Leskinen once fought for the same cause because it seemed to them that everyone who emigrated to Finland set out with the goal of assimilating, becoming a part of Finnish society,

establishing roots, and instilling in their children a sense of belonging to Finland. Now, Gusatinsky confesses that they mislead society in some part by suggesting that Russian speakers are committed to integration, which, as she can see, is not often the case. The debate about whether Russians wished to integrate or not into Finnish society had been initiated in 2020 on FB. Gusatinsky said that she is disappointed about their past illusions and mentions one expert who claims that many people migrate physically to more comfortable conditions but otherwise live parallel to or perpendicular to the new society. In other words, they moved to the refrigerator but remained seated in front of the television. (In the current Russian debate, ‘refrigerator’ means economic conditions of life, possibility to eat. ‘Television’ means ideology, Russia’s state propaganda. Usually, the citizens of Russia suppose that in the Western countries, the level of life is good but the *duhovnost* ‘spirituality’ is low.) Andrei Monikainen contradicts her, remembering the fact that when individual people are not socially active this is completely natural, and it is not an argument for depriving a statistically significant section of the country’s population the exercise of its legal rights. Moreover, as Leskinen once pointed out in her articles, reports and speeches, to confirm the linguistic minority status, no changes in the current legislation are required: All the Finnish legislation and international obligations have been in force for decades. What is needed is an active initiative group of community representatives who will carry out the work that will result in the consideration of this issue by Parliament. But this is not a question of an election. Simply, all candidates begin their program with the phrase “I will defend the interests of Russian speakers,” and no one can formulate a single interest of Russian-speakers that would be exclusively different from the interests of other citizens and groups.

In a discussions on FB, one participant, SM, said that gardening, cooking, beauty salons, and concert events are among the common interests of the Russian-speaking people. But what are the commonalities? AM answered that these are language and culture. SM replied that culture is defined by one’s interests: “Concerts, performances, exhibitions, musical events, and clubs for Russian-speaking children are already in full swing, and this is more than enough. Those who do not have enough should travel to Russia by train, which takes two hours. The Russian language is not greatly respected in Finland. For more than 30 years, the diaspora has been growing here, and everyone is on their own. There is no community because there is no unification. Many people, by the way, do not want any associations because everything ends in disassembly and gossip. Almost everyone has heard of this. People only unite in their own close groups—through kinship, work, neighborhood, child friendships, acquaintance at courses, or acquaintance prior to moving to Finland. And the same thing happens in any country with a Russian-speaking population—this has already become a byword. Language and culture, no matter how hard Russian speakers try, do not become a unifying factor abroad. This is a commonly occurring phenomenon.” NG suggests that many people struggle

with various bureaucracies, filling out paperwork, knowing the laws, and dealing with crisis situations: “Helping with just these issues would be a good start. And getting funding for this is both possible and necessary. Funding is needed in schools, for junior classes as well as *valu-luokat* (preparatory classes for immigrants), and for Russian-speaking assistants in schools.” SM objects, arguing that these difficulties can be overcome: “There are already numerous Russian-speaking societies where people are always willing to assist with filling out paperwork and dealing with crisis situations. There are also numerous Finnish organizations that can and do assist. Many people have difficulties in most cases because of language barriers, but there are translators available for free. If you say that ‘Russian speakers should have the same rights as other immigrant groups. We have the legal right to request service in Russian,’ this provokes a negative reaction, because Russian-speakers already have equal legal rights in this country. If this law is broken, it is necessary to take this matter to court. Furthermore, there are so many people who understand Russian everywhere, including shops, stores, libraries, preschools, schools, polyclinics, and social agencies, and you have the choice to pick, so voting for a Russian-speaking candidate is not necessary.” SM agrees about Russian-speaking assistants at school: “I agree that it would be beneficial. And they are frequently required when a child arrives who does not speak a word of Finnish. However, this is only necessary during the first stage, and the sooner the youngster adapts to a foreign-language environment and does not rely on the ‘Russian aunt,’ the better. We were all there with our children during this time, and no one was gravely hurt. It would be beneficial to have at least a few helpers who speak different languages in each school. However, the schools should be interested in this and request such assistants from the ministry. It is easier for the Russian-speaking parents to speak with Russian educators, and it is easier for them to demand special care for their child, fill in paperwork (which is always numerous) and make requests (which are always needed). The Finnish approach to education is very distinct and communication happens in an entirely different way.”

Some immigrants do not believe that their vote could influence the results. On Facebook, 14 June 2021, AV (first married to a Finn, later divorced, with two children) reflects upon her attitude: “I did not vote in the elections. That’s a negative thing. The bad news is that I don’t believe I have a moral obligation to engage in them. I’m now referring to the recent local elections held throughout Finland. What is the reason behind this? What exactly is a moral right? Let’s just say that I used to try with ardent zeal to become a part of Finnish society, even voting in elections a couple of times, because I believe that this is the duty of a responsible citizen. But, after years of trying, I realized that no matter what, I’m only a visitor here, and becoming a part of society is far more difficult than it appears. And now, when the spirit of change is in the air, any elections are certainly crucial, and it is not for me to decide which way this country should go. Is it, after all, the wrong place for me and my

children to live? Possibly. Please keep in mind that these are solely my private sentiments, affecting solely and only me. I'm sure that after some time I'll alter my mind. In the meanwhile, I am utterly disconnected from Finland's political scene. To be honest, I have no idea how the parties vary in their stances, and I don't attempt to find out. Until I have a complete understanding of how everything works and interacts here (the economy, the social sector, EU, foreign policy, etc.) this would be pointless knowledge. Furthermore, after years of actual experience here, I've concluded that the Finns REALLY know how and what should operate in their society. Many will disagree with me, but everything works! Their systems are operational! As a result, it functions better on aggregate than in many other nations. My viewpoint is that you should not go into someone else's monastery with your own rules; you will only do harm. A lion is depicted as the emblem of Finnish sovereignty. The constitution is under his grasp. So far, I regard it with respect, albeit from afar." A friend asked her why she did not feel that she was a member of Finnish society, and she answered that she respects Finns but does not know exactly. "Probably, first and foremost, the language barrier, which is only just taking hold; the more I learn Finnish, the farther away and more difficult it gets for me, and the more I realize that the ice between us will not thaw if it hasn't thawed in 7 years. Furthermore, I am now in the position of taking unemployment benefits, which I despise, and yet at the same time I am compelled to work. If you don't work, you don't contribute to society—you're not part of the pack. Yes, I accept benefits with a tranquil heart, since God knows I completely deserve them after my years of hard work. However, part-time work, and the difficulties and seeming refusal of society to let you in 'on a regular basis,' all appear to indicate that you are not from here. In theory, that is correct. And, of course, there is the cultural component: the more I submerged myself and grew closer to people, the more I realized that this is not my surroundings, this is not my culture, and it would never be mine." These feelings are difficult to bear, and the personality and character of the author influence the results of her reflections.

The discussions in focus groups with young bilinguals and Russian speakers in Finland confirm the notion that politics is uninteresting to most of them. According to them, the majority votes for the Green Party because many are ecologically minded and they ignore the party's other decisions, even though other parties have climate change on their agenda as well. We also collected some essays on the topic of politics among bilingual youngsters. One 20-year-old participant believes that "words are worth considering before pronouncing them aloud, and even after they have been thoroughly considered, it is better (just in case) to soften them and express yourself carefully so that no one can hurt you. This is particularly true of Finnish politicians. Furthermore, Finns try not to draw undue attention to themselves, and they usually avoid dancing, singing, and any other performance in which they might disgrace themselves." We think that nevertheless, they read political news and are mostly

well-informed about questions that speak to their heart. Among young participants, some even want to become politicians themselves:

Politics, particularly foreign policy, has always piqued my interest. Of course, I keep up with Finnish politics because, well, how can you not? Why is politics interesting, and even necessary, in my opinion? Well, because many political decisions have an impact on our everyday lives. By voting in elections, we have the ability to influence who makes these decisions. Everyone, it appears to me, should vote in the elections. If you do not participate in politics, even in a minor way, you should not complain about bad decisions made by state officials. Evidently, if all of the candidates appear to be bad, you should still try to find the candidate who is closest to your way of thinking. In the future, I hope to spend as much time as possible working in politics. Obviously, I do not see myself as a professional politician or delegate, but it would be fascinating to work in a ministry or even as a diplomat. In the future, I hope to combine my knowledge of Russian language and culture with politics.

Another bilingual respondent had this disappointed reaction: “For many years, the Finnish people have been proud of their ranking as the most uncorrupted country in the world. Finland has been in first place for a long time, but it has now dropped several places in the rankings. It’s difficult to say whether Finnish corruption was previously limited to ‘special relationships between friends and relatives,’ or whether bribes between politicians and business owners have always existed but have only recently come to light. Anyway, even Finland cannot exist without corruption.” Another respondent appeared to be both skeptical and a dreamer at the same time:

Politics is a difficult topic to discuss right now because it divides many people’s opinions. People lose control of their emotions, thoughts, and words when discussing this subject. Furthermore, many people are unable to stop in time, and this topic acts as a drug for them. In the Internet, you can see people read only the title of an article, add it to their page, and start a discussion about it, even though they haven’t read the article and have no idea what ideas it contains. There are those who follow politics, become acquainted with the topics discussed in government, and try to learn about the work of various political parties and their election programs during the election campaign. There is also an opposing group of people who do not follow politics at all and instead vote for the most attractive promises. If I were the president of X-country, I would provide affordable and free education for all citizens, as well as high-quality health care and employment for all. For this system to be feasible many workers would be needed, as many people would need to be taught. This will reduce the number of unemployed. In my country, there would be no class distinctions, no poor and no rich; all people would be treated equally. Finally, I’d like to emphasize that political life and politics are entirely personal choices.

One respondent was very reflective and wrote this essay:

Our lives are structured in such a way that they cannot exist without the centuries-old tradition of politics, because it is difficult to imagine what would happen if there were no politicians at all. Politicians are a part of the governance system of the state. Sometimes they make the right decisions, and at other times they are duped. Do you ever wonder if politicians are truly necessary? Advertisement campaigns are always launched prior to elections, and politicians are frequently invited to various discussion programs on TV. On one side, it appears that politicians are nothing without their constituents. On the other, even if a voter stays at home and does not vote for anyone, someone is still in power at the end of the day. Of course, it is too late and pointless to chastise the politicians; after all, it's people who ignore elections. In many countries, particularly in Europe, voter turnout is frequently less than 50%. In fact, such an occurrence is a dreadful trend. People are apathetic; they do not believe that voting for someone will bring about change or solve a problem. Unfortunately, there is frequently no one to choose from a long list of candidates. Even if there is a politician whose views on social structure issues are similar to yours, the party's line is always prioritized. Party outfits are frameworks that, on the one hand, make it easier for a group of people who are supposed to have similar political opinions to work together. This makes it easier for them to band together and accomplish something. On the other hand, the party spends a lot of money on its image, and their values must be updated on a regular basis. For example, what the Finnish parties fought for at the turn of the twentieth century is no longer a significant issue. Many parties must "clean up" their records and change their names. Politicians are difficult to like. They constantly bombard us with promises, but they appear to do nothing. One example of demagoguery. Occasionally, heinous stories about corruption or official wrongdoing emerge. After all, in any country, it's always if you scratch my back I'll scratch yours. The names of ostensibly "incorruptible" Finnish politicians also make the evening news. Politicians, however, are still people. They must accept a great deal of responsibility as well as accepting responsibility for their mistakes. Despite the fact that the public quickly forgets (and forgives) incidents, a political career can end in an instant. Anyone who enters politics must be brave and self-assured. Without politicians, our lives would be dull and unbalanced. Who will be featured in the same newspapers? Who will be chastised and debated? The speeches of Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, for example, raise the ratings of any TV program. Nobody is unaffected by his speeches. Politics can appear boring to young people, but in reality it is a fast-paced world where something is always happening.

There was another balanced opinion:

It is now very difficult to understand what true politics entails and who the powerful politicians are. What does politics imply and what benefits does it provide? People seem to focus less and less

on politics year after year. Fewer and fewer people vote, and they are less and less interested in when the elections are held, for example. Today, almost all politicians have the same opinion, the same thoughts, and, most likely, the same style. This style is similar to the general concept, general criteria, and general framework. Politicians and personalities such as Kekkonen, Reagan, and Churchill are no longer present. Now is a changing time, politicians are changing, people are changing... And perhaps there will be no need for politics in the future if interest in it dwindles completely. Is it possible that the Internet will eventually supplant politics? After all, there are no borders in Europe..., and if you are a “European,” you can freely travel throughout the continent. You do not require a visa. Of course, people have always been fascinated by and desirous of power. People became interested in power even when they were no longer interested in money. Authority is a great power, and the fact that power governs people is even more influential. Power is politics, and power is authority. And as long as this life goes on, there will be people who must be managed, and who can only be managed with the help of politics.

These individuals are familiar with the situations in various Russian-speaking countries and can compare them. Young people are sensitive as far as justice is concerned. One respondent stated: “The European Union is campaigning for the abolition of the death penalty. This struggle is part of the common European values, as well as one of the EU’s human rights policy objectives. Despite this, there is one and only country in Europe that still executes people in the name of justice: Belarus.” Young respondents wanted to stimulate a better social policy in Russia: “Problems include illiberal policies and low population activity and passivity in the system (the client does not demand the type of service that he requires). Furthermore, preliminary social work is not yet at an adequate level. There is currently no effective social service, but it is also critical to collaborate with other countries.” Respondents evaluate Russian family policy, though it may be naive to believe that they bear responsibility for the shift toward better decisions. They want to have a positive impact on the situation.

The election debates on Finnish television (Yle Debaty 2021) brought together nine candidates from nine parties from various municipalities. They speak Russian and Finnish at varying levels and have varying amounts of experience participating in public life. In total, over 130 Russian-speaking candidates were nominated in more than 50 municipalities around Finland (Yle Kandidaty 2021). The issue of the lack of recognition of Russian diplomas among psychiatrists, psychologists, and speech therapists was raised, and it was pointed out that it is critical that patients receive services in their native (Russian) language. The municipality candidates discussed the need for anonymous recruiting so that the workforce would be hired based on their professionalism rather than their last name. There was also talk of Russian-language services for immigrants, such as the purchase of

home-based care for the elderly and the right to choose one's own doctor. Many participants named their political party in Finnish or in two languages. To clarify the term 'interpellation', the moderator first called it *интерпелляция* in Russian, then *välikysumys* in Finnish. Several Finnish terms were employed in the debate on political concerns, and some candidates did not know how to phrase it in Russian, in which case they were guided by the moderators and other participants. Among such terms were *kotoutumislaki* 'integration law,' *oppisopimus* 'training contract,' integrating education and job, *julkinen* 'social, public,' *terveyskeskus* 'health center, polyclinic,' *perushoito* 'supply of basic medical services,' *hoitaja* 'caregiver's assistant,' *omaishoitaja* 'a person caring for a close relative,' *sote* 'social health,' *kunta* 'municipality,' and *valtionosuudet* 'public money, state support.' It was underlined that if language courses were conducted remotely and all of the materials were in Finnish, it would be considerably more difficult for recent immigrants to adapt to life in Finland during the coronavirus pandemic. Municipalities should encourage and collaborate with Russian-speaking public organizations and reinforce home language teaching.

Fedorov (2021) has summarized the results of the municipal elections, in which anyone over the age of 18 who has lived in Finland for at least two years is eligible to vote. He reports that candidates who speak Russian received over eleven and a half thousand votes, with thirteen of them receiving sufficient votes to be elected to local city councils. Every party presented at least brief information about their programs in Russian.

However, the question of which groups are supported and by whom emerges. For a long time, the Finnish government's task was to entice Russian-speaking residents to participate in social and political life, such as voting, local government. Initiatives were also made to reorganize existing associations and strengthen the composition of old organizations that had existed since the tsarist era or since the White Emigration. It is a legacy of the Soviet Union and modern-day Russia that people do not believe in politics in general, and in Russian-speaking politicians in particular; they do not like Russian-speaking candidates, and they do not accept that fact that while voting, you implement your right to have a representative in the administration. Many people are irritated by politically active Russian-speaking citizens, especially when they say platitudes in poor Finnish in disputes with Finnish native speakers. However, Russian speakers are becoming increasingly noticeable in politics, and a new multilingual generation is assuming leadership roles, including representing Finland's youth at the United Nations (Juri Birjulin, Green party).

The Finnish authorities are attempting to acquire influence in immigrant communities and to attract diverse age and socioeconomic strata among Russian-speaking groups in order that immigrant groups understand the requirements of the host society, especially through publications in Russian. In practice, all political parties attract people from all ethnic communities to their ranks in order for

these parties to have a true view of things and to influence the relevant groups by encouraging them to vote for the “appropriate” candidates. The voices of individuals who have not assimilated, who do not share the majority’s viewpoint, are also heard. There seem to be local attempts to draw Russian speakers into social and political life alongside of Finns, however participation in civil activities and elections by this section of the population remains low. Forums, organizations, and circles formed at the request of immigrants emphasize the need for more instruction in Russian, as well as the maintenance of traditions brought from the motherland, such as child rearing and schooling. In general, the second generation of immigrants need fewer services than the first.

Attitudes toward the Ukrainian war

Like in many other countries with a significant number of Russian speakers, attitudes toward the Ukrainian war have divided people and even families. In April–May, an economic research commissioned by Yle, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, conducted a survey among 501 Russian-born, Russian-speaking residents in Finland, questioning them about Finnish membership in NATO (Luotonen 2022). The result was that they were more negative about NATO membership than the rest of the country (76% approved joining NATO). Many believed in the possibility of building good neighborly relations with Russia, even despite membership in the alliance. A total of 55% of the respondents were against NATO membership. Those who had Russian passports were slightly more negative about joining than those with dual citizenship who, in their turn, were slightly more negative than those with Finnish passports only. 20% supported joining the alliance, one fourth found it difficult to answer the question. 33% of respondents believed that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was an attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and 19% did not know or did not want to know what was happening there. 15% viewed Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a “special military operation,” meaning that they supported Putin’s policy, while one third provided no response. According to the results of the survey, Russian-speaking residents in Finland do not trust the Russian media. 39% of respondents said they regularly follow the news in Russian through Yle News services. 46% trust Finnish media, 39% do not know what to say, and 16% do not trust them. The analogical results for Russian media are 13%, 69%, and 18% respectively. About 32% of respondents answered that the attitudes of Finns toward Russians worsened after the beginning of the war, 54% thought that there was no difference, and only 2% suggested that it became better. In the summer 2022, the Cultura-foundation collected opinions of the Russian speakers in Finland about the war in Ukraine. They found out that 82% of the target group did not experience negative attitudes caused by the war. 64% do not approve of the war, again, the anti-war results were higher with the younger generations, which are not under the influence of the Russian propaganda (Cultura-säätiö,

2022).

Vuortama (2022) asked four interviewees to answer some questions connected to Finland's proposed NATO membership, which has been a topic of conversation in Finnish society for years (Zimmermanová et al., 2020) and had now become a hot topic. LS, who has lived in Finland for six years, moved there for political reasons because she wanted her children to grow up without militarist and nationalist propaganda. She is neutral toward NATO. She likes the idea of a common defense but is afraid that Finland might lose its national identity, although the alternatives are worse. It might well worsen the relationships between Russia, whose government, she says, is composed of war criminals, and Finland. Good neighborhood relations may come when freedom and democracy triumph, although now poverty, corruption, and tolerance of daily violence are constant problems. AK, who moved to Finland at the age of 12, immediately supported NATO. She thinks that membership in this organization guarantees safety for all who live between Russia and Europe. She is satisfied, although border crossing, she says, will not be so easy anymore; she has relatives both in Russia and Ukraine. For her, politicians have their part to play in what is happening now. LS works in Finland as an economist. She is against war and against military unions, however, NATO membership, she thinks, may be on the way to resolve the threatening situation. She believes that many Russian authorities are insane, but possibly in a few years' time the situation might change. HZ, a poet who has lived in Finland for more than 20 years, remembers the Soviet anti-NATO propaganda and has supported Finland's membership in this organization since Crimea's annexation in 2014. Before, he agreed with Finland's independent position, but then he understood that Finland is an easy goal for Russian aggression and wanted to enter the Finnish military reserve independently of the fact that he had not served in the Finnish army. He is ready to protect his country (Finland). He is sure that there are some 10 or 20 people in Finland who could go through the streets holding posters with the slogan "Help us, Putin!" He believes Russia will not exist in the same mode as before after some years.

Discussing this publication on Facebook, the comments made were different. Many participants said that they were happy not to be Russian and that recently they had changed their mother tongue in official registers from Russian to Uzbek and Karelian. VR writes: "I feel shame and pain about what is happening, but changing the language somewhere does not change anything. I very much want to disown any identification with Russia. Now I can say that I am Ukrainian, I have nothing to do with Russia, but then what? – go to sleep in peace? My mother's passport [=nationality] is Finnish; my father is Ukrainian. I was born and raised in Karelia. As a child, I spent every summer with my grandmother in Odessa. I don't want to exaggerate things, but I feel it's good that my granny and father did not live to see this. And who am I now? We have absorbed into ourselves the country and

culture where we were born and lived. To what extent are we responsible for what is happening, and what are we ready to do in this current situation is another question. Everyone should decide and work things out for themselves. Now, only help is important, whether it is an expression of a position, or anything else for what a person has resources.”

The politics of the use of the Russian language abroad, the attractiveness of the Russian world as proclaimed by the Russian government and the Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate implies special behavior by those who adhere to Russian culture (e.g., Mustajoki et al., 2020, 2021). At a time when ties between Russia and the West were deteriorating, the language about the protection of “comrades” was contextual and turned into geopolitical boundary-making (Feklyunina, 2016; Kazharski, 2019, Pieper, 2020, Kosienkowski, 2021). The concept of the Russian world was again discredited after Russia started the war in Ukraine.

Conclusion

Political engagement is not easy for people with multiple identities. One way to avoid it is to declare oneself to be an outsider. Another is to remain with those who are distrusted, rejected, and declared bad people. The third way is to help those who suffer and are in need. The fourth is to support those who seem to be most fair. Yet, the loyalty toward one’s country of citizenship is an important factor, especially if relatives and friends are involved, and if people have two citizenships, their consciousness may be divided.

The self-perception of Russian speakers in Finland depends on their social status, involvement in work and local life, social activity, and the presence of a wide network of contacts among the indigenous population. For those who arrived as adults and did not go through the Finnish school system, who did not study social science and do not know how this democratic society works, what parties it has, and what pitfalls there are in politics, it is difficult to realize that their voice can mean anything in the elections. Among young people who are first- and second-generation immigrants, there are increasingly more individuals who understand what is behind political engagement.

Being involved in political debate means strengthening one’s place in society, finding platforms for expression, encountering like-minded people to help implement their projects, and taking a more prominent, or salient, place in society. For those who grew up in the Soviet Union, these ambitions were marked as hypocritical and treacherous for honest people, because these objectives were associated with Communist ideology. Very few people are prepared to be in the public eye and to take advantage of this social visibility. Opinions about what is happening differ between the generations. However, upward mobility is not always interesting for young people who want to enjoy the privileges of youth (cf. Krivonos, 2019). When watching activists who are now mostly under 40

discussing current Finnish problems, it is exciting to see how the public discussion takes place in Russian with similar arguments to those presented in big TV debates before Finnish elections. Representatives of all parties present their opinions, publicly underlining also the special situation of the Russian-speaking minority.

Taking this into account, one can observe that Russian speakers in Finland can follow programs like Eurovision and other direct reportage with a Russian commentator. These Russian speakers have their own news in Russian about developments in Ukraine and the current state of affairs in Finland. They receive information about the past and present lives of Russian speakers in Finland. For these reasons, news from Finland in Russian is forbidden on Russian territory.

The heavy legacy inherited from the Soviet and Russian past puts pressure on the self-consciousness of Russian speakers and does not allow them to feel completely independent of the language and culture of the country they come from. Being in the information field, in which different actors with different agendas operate, Russian speakers can either not believe in anyone and consider that the truth is somewhere in the middle, or take sides in the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, while realizing that “the conditional West” (a Russian propaganda term; cf. also Krivonos & Näre, 2019) is also not united and does not express a consolidated opinion on all issues.

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