There are numerous ways to interpret the concept of Estonian state identity. The monitoring of integration construes the concept on the basis of supporting the principles of Estonia as a nation state on one hand, and a civic nation on the other. In the case of Estonian Russians, a strong state identity is referred to as a demonstration of support towards the symbols and principles of the Estonian nation state, whilst for Estonians, it is the readiness to include members of ethnic minorities into the Estonian society on equal basis.

The state identity of Estonian Russians was measured by whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the following statements and questions: I feel proud when I see the Estonian national flag being waved. The Estonian state is protecting my rights and offering public benefits. When you think of yourself as a representative of your ethnic group and as a representative of the Estonian nation then which group do you think you belong in?

The state identity of Estonians was measured by whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the following statements and questions: The involvement of non-Estonians to the governing of the Estonian state is beneficial for Estonia. The opinions of non-Estonians should be known and considered more than previously, because they are an important part of the Estonian society. When you think about yourself as a representative of your ethnic group, and as a representative of the Estonian nation then which group do you think you belong in?

Based on the evaluations and responses to the abovementioned statements and questions, summary indexes measuring the strength of state identity through one comprehensive indicator were then created for Estonian Russians and Estonians respectively.

In comparison to the 2015 monitoring, when a more in-depth research into the strength of the state identity was first done using this approach, the proportion of Estonian Russians and Estonians with weak state identity has reduced by 3–4 percent points, and stands at 20% for both groups.

Groups with intermediate state identity have remained almost at the same level, amounting to about a half of the population. Groups with strong state identity have increased by 3–4 percentage points amongst both Estonian Russians and Estonians, amounting to almost 40% among Estonian Russians and a little over 20% among Estonians.

Strong state identity does not preclude inter-ethnic disagreements

Analysis of the monitoring of integration shows that most of Estonians and Estonian Russians have a strong or intermediate state identity. This does not mean that there are no disagreements between the two language communities based on, for instance, the pros and cons of multiculturalism or the perception of social inequality between different ethnic groups.

For example, 60% of Estonians and 32% of Estonian Russians agreed with the statement: “When there are different nations living in the same country, inter-ethnic conflicts are inevitable”. At the same time, more than a half of Estonian Russians but only a sixth of Estonians agreed with the statement: “There should also be songs in Russian sung at the Estonian Song Festival, because Russian speaking population makes up a third of the Estonian population”.

Perceptions regarding the issues related to social equality also vary between the two groups. Whereas most of (80–90%) Russian speaking respondents perceive inter-ethnic inequalities within the areas of economy and politics, but also education and culture, the inequality is perceived by a third up to half of the Estonian respondents, depending on the subject field.

At the same time, our analysis reveals that a simplistic interpretation of such differences should be avoided, relating these only to mental phenomena such as stereotypes or lack of information. Such interpretation would be one-sided, and would suggest integration measures that are merely directed at changing individuals’ mind-sets. Rather, the differences of
The main conclusion of the analysis of state identity is that whilst there are many disagreements amongst Estonians and Estonian Russians regarding multiculturalism and inter-ethnic social inequalities, this has not prevented the relatively strong agreement towards supporting the foundations of the Estonian statehood in terms of a nation state and a civic state.

“Integration of Estonian Society: Monitoring 2017” final report and more information here: www.kul.ee/et/EIM2017