Information about interviewee:

Serebrov Yegorovich is ethnic Russian Estonian. Interview conducted via Skype with interviewee in Narva, Estonia.

R= Respondent – Serebrov Yegorovich

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

I: When did you receive your Russian citizenship?

R: About 25 years ago. When these passports were almost dropped off from a helicopter. [Joke]

I: Where was this process conducted?

R: In Tallinn. It was organized as follows. The passport issuing office was open at the Tallinn Officers' house, you had just to submit an application form on a sheet of paper, and a passport was issued in a matter of days.

I: Who initiated the first contact when you realised you were eligible to receive Russian citizenship?

R: It went like that: On the one hand , Mart Laar was at that time in the government — and we remembered all too well how he stood next to Toompea with a poster, that we (*Russians*) should not be allowed to obtain Estonian [citizenship] ”no strings attached”. On the other hand, then, it seemed, the rules for obtaining Estonian citizenship were very difficult, or so it was so declared. Russian citizenship was provided very simply. It was enough to submit an application form right in the house of the officers, the current Russian cultural center. There were tables. Pensioners worked behind them, in queues of 3 or 4 streams, passports were issued at a breakneck pace. At that time it was a very simple decision, (*people*) then were afraid of being stateless. We all then were citizens of the former USSR, (*people*) were in the race to grab what they (*countries*) gave us.

I: Do you feel a greater connection to Estonia or Russia?

R: To Estonia.

I: Has this changed since you received your citizenship for either Russia or Estonia?

R: This has changed, to the Estonian side.

I: Do you receive any state benefits from Russia?

## R: No

I: Are you ever contacted by the Russian government?

R: I got a call from the Russian embassy once when I lost my passport. Someone found it and brought it to embassy, so they found me and returned my passport back. Two times I went to vote, when there were presidential elections with the candidate "Against all". But no one contacted me personally, and there was no directed communication.

## I: Do you believe the Russian government does enough for the Russian community in Estonia?

## R: My point is it would be better if the influence of the Russian government were smaller. Or at least someone asked me if I want be protected or not, and how to do it.

## I: Do you believe the Estonian government does enough for the Russian community in Estonia?

## R: I think that in Estonia is a very simple citizenship exam. I did this exam and passed it, just didn’t change the passport. It looks like this: you have a computer, questions about the constitution, the computer has the same constitution with the search function in Estonian and Russian, and, if I'm not mistaken, even in English. On the table is the same constitution. I was preparing for this exam for 10 minutes, I didn’t know anything about the Estonian constitution, and I passed it. People who claim that the exam is too difficult are wrong, my guess is they just didn't try to pass this exam. Anyone who graduated from a Russian school in Estonia - if there is a passed state exam in the Estonian language, at least for grade 2, that is enough. I studied in both Estonian and Russian schools. Despite the fact that I graduated from Russian school, I had three primary classes of Estonian as proof of my knowledge of the language. If there is some different grade from 1 in the report card from the Russian school, this is enough. For young people who studied in Russian schools, even without knowing the language, it is possible to pass this exam, and the majority of it is passed if they have completed 9 classes. The citizenship test is not so difficult for 20 years already. And people, most likely, get information in the wrong places, ask friends, use rumors, maybe they are afraid to communicate or something like that. Most likely, the lack of information plays a role. Many people who have a primary education find it difficult for them to read legal texts and laws, in principle, all these long sentences. The only thing I don’t understand in the Estonian language and citizenship politics. We all deal with Russian schools, for 30 years they promise to us teach children Estonian - but they don’t teach. I know this because I studied in both schools, Russian and Estonian. We have constitution clause — anyone has the right to Estonian-language education. I don’t understand where the activities like "Bring a child to Estonian basic school"? Estonian education is quite effective when it comes to teaching language to kids. I don’t understand why is this not promoted? If basic schools were “strictly Estonian”, then the question of choosing which school to go to would be the same for everyone (both for *Russians and Estonians*). Perhaps, then the problem with education would have been decided much simpler - not due to the fact that (*now*) children cannot be sent to another school, except Russian, but due to the fact that there would be a choice, and the intensity of emotions would be less around this issue. If it were unequivocally made to understand that getting education in Estonian and generally being in an Estonian-language educational institution is the constitutional right of any citizen of Estonia, people would not be afraid to send their children to Estonian basic schools. In fact, such basic schools are bilingual, I know this because my daughter just recently went to this one. Russian basic schools (in Estonia) are not bilingual. Estonians are. Typically, there is a Russian-speaking teacher assistant for two Estonian teachers in one group of kids. While children are very young, they communicate in two languages. By the second year, everyone already speaks Estonian. My point is — yes, enough has been done by Estonian government for Russian community. What they don’t do is not call us to themselves. They help some alternatives, but in fact encouraging the segregation of society at very many levels. For example, professional special education, where you can learn somewhere in Kiviõli to a miner in Russian - where to go next after it? Just stay there. Working resources are kept in one place. I don’t know if it’s done for purpose or not. But I am, who have lived and worked with Estonians all my life, would most likely have been waiting for call (*from Estonians to Russians*) - «come to us learn and work together». There may be readiness for this, but I don’t see it.

I: How many people do you know with Russian citizenship in Estonia?

R: I think the total number is about 150-200 thousand at this moment. I can’t remember anyone specifically.

I: Do you believe the Estonian government considers the Russian speaking population in Estonia to be a threat?

## R: Yes, I think so, any nation perceives naturally as a threat another nation living with it, but speaking in a different language. Especially, if it’s small population of Estonia, who are very sensitive about their culture. To make this clear to any citizen of Russia, it’s enough to ask him if he would hire a person who does not speak Russian? There are a lot of them, for example, in St. Petersburg, they are cheap workers. So please give them work - despite the fact that they can neither read nor write in Russian. Help them (*labor migrants*) solve their problem - how many Russians will rush to solve this problems? The same goes for the residents of Ukraine, who work massively in Russia - how much do they see support? This is universal situation with self-defense of culture. Estonians, of course, perceive this as a certain threat, especially if you look at the recent political actions of the Russian Federation.

## I: Do you plan on living in Russia in the future?

## R: No, I don’t plan this.

## I: Do you wish the Russian speaking population in Estonia had greater autonomy? If so, what form would this take?

## R: No, I don’t want this. I have already spoken about segregation before. (*Autonomy -*) This will be a division, and the social elevator in this case will work even less. To see how this works, just look at people living somewhere in Maardu or Sillamäe, where they work, what they do for living, etc.