

Reform of Coordination of Integration Policies in Estonia

Raivo Vetik
Tallinn University



In 1997 the position of the **Population Minister without Portfolio** was created at the Government of the Republic of Estonia.

Functions:

- ▶ coordination of the integration policies
- ▶ citizenship issues
- ▶ population registration
- ▶ remigration of foreigners
- ▶ documentation and execution of refugee policy

- ▶ In June 2009 the functions of the Population Minister were divided between **four different Ministries**, the coordination function was prescribed to the Ministry of Culture.
- ▶ This presentation will analyze the reform, drawing on **policy coordination theory**, on the one hand, and on **expert interviews** with key politicians, public officials and scholars, carried out in the period June-August 2009, on the other.



An example about the state of affairs in the field

Which citizenship you wish you had?

	2000	2002	2005	2008
Estonian	60	65	74	51
Russian	5	6	11	19
Other	7	9	5	14
None	16	14	7	16
Hard to say	12	6	3	-
N	170	109	102	105



Guy Peters (Handbook of Public Administration 2005) - chief executive and its central agencies have used the following institutional forms for policy coordination:

- ▶ Chief executive staff
- ▶ Central agencies
- ▶ The cabinet as a whole
- ▶ Cabinet committees
- ▶ Ministers without portfolio

- ▶ Additional coordinative portfolios for a minister
 - ▶ Junior Ministers
 - ▶ Ministries
 - ▶ Advisory committees
 - ▶ Agencies with portfolios for coordination
 - ▶ Interministerial organizations
-
- ▶ In the Estonian case - until May 2009 the Population Minister without portfolio, since then the Ministry of Culture with extra portfolio to coordinate integration policy.



Guy Peters on these options:

Minister without portfolio:

- ▶ covers the field as a whole and focuses on integration only
- ▶ but does not have enough resources and does not have enough authority in cabinet

Additional portfolio for coordination for a minister:

- ▶ position in cabinet is strong enough
- ▶ but the additional area tends to remain marginal as ministry is occupied with her own field



Interview sample:

- ▶ Mati Heidmets (Professor of Psychology at Tallinn University, member of the supervisory board of Integration Foundation)
- ▶ Külli Vollmer (Head of the citizen education unit of Integration Foundation)
- ▶ Eduard Odinets (Head of the lifelong learning unit of Integration Foundation, former adviser of Population Minister Katrin Saks, former director of the the bureau of Population Minister Urve Palo)
- ▶ Paul-Eerik Rummo (Member of Parliament 2007-...; former Population Minister of Estonian Republic 2003-2007)



- ▶ Anne-Ly Reimaa (deputy chancellor of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs)
- ▶ Maie Soll (adviser of the language department of the Ministry of Education and Science)
- ▶ Katrin Saks (member of European Parliament 2006-...; former Population Minister of of Estonian Republic 1999-2002)
- ▶ Sergei Ivanov (former member of Parliament 2003-2007)
- ▶ Eva-Maria Asari (former integration policy adviser of Population Minister Urve Palo)



Main results of the interviews:

1. Political versus career positions

- ▶ “I think that during the whole time when I was in the system, one of the biggest problems was, that the people changed too often, they changed with each Minister.” (Odinets)
- ▶ “When the new Minister came, the staff changed almost 100%. So, we showed that we deal with issues, but essentially the consistency was always broken.” (Reimaa)
- ▶ “The new system should ensure continuity, of course on the precondition that the posts taken over from the bureau are fully filled, as the staff of the cultural diversity department does not need to leave with the change of minister.” (Asari)



The level of coordination

- ▶ “Now no ministry deals with integration exclusively. They focus on their own field, not because they fail to see a bigger picture, but because this is their job. There is a need for such a system that somebody would coordinate integration policy. The level must be at least minister’s level. Area ministries attend only their own field, but integration is an inter-ministerial phenomenon.” (Ivanov, 2009)
- ▶ “With the lack of a general coordinator, a danger arises that integration as a horizontal domain that cross-cuts different areas, would diverge and fade – would become secondary in the ministries and the monitoring of financing and activity implementation would become weak.” (Asari, 2009)



Keeping the integration issue in policy agenda

- ▶ “The integration area needs policy-making. (...) For that, policy makers are necessary, they don’t currently exist.” (Odinets)
- ▶ „Funding can change, reduction is happening anyway, taking into account the current situation. A part of the actions in the activity plan may not be carried out, as the new Ministry will set new priorities. Integration can become viewed through the prism of cultural differences, even though it was agreed within the new program that stronger emphasis would be on the socio-economic sphere and on actions towards elimination of socio-economic differences between different ethnic groups.” (Soll)



Reasons behind the reform

- ▶ “ I think that the field did not require reform. In my opinion, the removal of such a position was not sensible. It seems to me that the system that has functioned more than 10 years had already quite found its good practice in Estonia.” (Heidmets)
- ▶ “The system needed change, it sure did. But in my opinion, not in such a manner how it was carried out. My vision would be different from the abolishment of this bureau. If we want to preserve competence, it should have been carried out differently.” (Odinets)



The **official explanation** for eliminating the position of the Population Minister was the need to **cut expenses**. The respondents treated this explanation with skepticism.

- ▶ “I don’t think it was justified. I cannot comment it myself, I don’t wish to comment the political side, because it was a political decision. It was clear that something would be cut somewhere. And obviously it is possible to save few millions here.” (Reimaa)
- ▶ “I consider the reasons mostly political. (...) But I don’t consider it right to eliminate the Minister’s post during a time when tension in the society is growing, and doing that in a way which would not assure normal continuation somewhere else. It was a minister whose main task was to alleviate tension. And this can be effectively done only by a person with a high position, not a clerk from a Ministry.” (Saks, 2009)



Conclusion

1. Peters recommends:

- ▶ the minister without portfolio should be a powerful person and experienced politician
- ▶ the person in the position of minister should have tight political ties with the Prime Minister, which would grant strong political support

In the Estonian case:

- ▶ The Minister was a newcomer in politics
- ▶ the Prime Minister came from the Reformist Party and the Population Minister from a Social Democratic Party
- ▶ When the social democrats left the coalition, other coalition partners lost the reason to keep such a function.

2. Experts are mostly critical about the reform

