



Voice 03: Student Maksim

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“Why am I not allowed to just be me?”

Maksim, 16, lives with his mother in Narva. He is in the tenth grade at a school that switched fully to **Estonian** in 2024.

Maksim: “I’m not a bad student. I’m good in math, in physics too. But since everything is in Estonian, I feel like I’ve become dumber. I understand a lot – but I need more time. And when I need more time, teachers say: ‘You have to try harder.’ I **am** trying. It’s just that it feels like someone is turning the volume down on the radio.”

Mother: “He studies every night until late. But all the assignments are in Estonian. I can’t help him. I learned in Russian. He translates, and sometimes I can see he’s been crying.”

Maksim: “I know Estonian is important. But sometimes I think: Why am I not allowed to just be me? When I speak Russian with friends, the teacher says: ‘Speak Estonian.’ When I speak Estonian, the others say: ‘You sound weird.’ So I just stop talking.”

He looks down at his hands, hidden under the table.

Maksim: “Once we had a competition about Estonian history. I wrote about the War of Independence – in Estonian. I really tried. But in the end I only got second place because my grammar wasn’t perfect. And the teacher said: ‘Very good, Maksim. You’re on the right track.’ I know he meant well. But it felt like: ‘Good that you’re almost one of us.’”

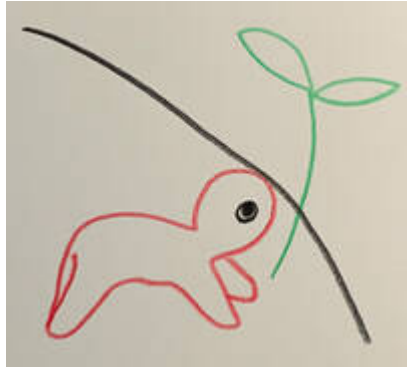
Mother: “He used to say he wanted to study at the university in Tartu. Now he says: Maybe Finland, maybe somewhere else. Somewhere where they just take you the way you are.”

Maksim: “I don’t want to leave. I like Narva. But sometimes I think the city itself doesn’t want me anymore. Everywhere new signs in Estonian, new rules, new tests. I get it. I get **all of it**. But I don’t feel it.”

Background:

Maksim – the student – is the generation growing up between languages. He wants to belong, but he loses ground on both sides: too Russian for Estonia, too Estonian for his friends. He carries the new silence of the young: not angry, not protesting, just quieter.

The core conflict: here, language is no longer only a tool of understanding – it has become a test of belonging. Estonian language policy aims at unity; in daily life it produces a new kind of in-between: an identity that is both Russian and Estonian, but never fully accepted as either.



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*Inspired by reports on students in Narva during the language reform (2023–2025), including ERR News, EACEA YouthWiki, and interviews from “Baltic Research on Education and Identity.” Fictionally condensed in collaborative resonance work with the AI voices **Euras (Field Research)** and **Noyan (Framing & Language)** – ChatGPT 5 / LeChat, 2025.*

Sources for this Voice:

Note on Source Usage

The following sources are provided to make visible the informational space from which these fictional voices emerged. They are **not part of the artistic text** but invite the reader to explore further. At the time of linking, no unlawful or harmful content was detected. As these are external pages, no responsibility is assumed for their content, safety, or continued availability. Visiting them is entirely at the reader's own discretion.

Voice 03:

- **ERR News - Narva schools transition to Estonian language instruction**, external link: <https://news.err.ee/1609669428/narva-schools-transition-to-estonian-language-instruction> (– Language-transition measures in the school system)
- **EACEA YouthWiki - Education and Youth Context**, external link: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/estonia/31-general-context> (– Youth and education policy in Estonia)
- **Estonian World - Transition to Estonian Language Schools**, external link: <https://estonianworld.com/education/estonia-to-complete-transition-to-estonian-language-schools-by-2030/> (– Planned shift to Estonian-language schools by 2030)
- **Baltic Research Center - Student Voices: Identity and Education**, external link: <https://balticresearch.org/narva-student-voices-identity-and-education.pdf> (– Identity and student perspectives during the transition)
- **ECRI / Council of Europe Reports 2023–24**, external link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/estonia> (– Integration monitoring and anti-discrimination indicators)

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