



Voice 11: Student Maksim (Alternative Version)

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“Why am I not allowed to be myself?”

“My name is **Maksim** — or actually **Maksim Volkov**. But at school they tell me to say **Maks**, because *‘Volkov sounds too Russian’.* As if my name were some kind of crime.

It used to be simpler. In primary school, we spoke **both languages** — Estonian with the teacher, Russian during breaks. But since last year, everything **has to** be in Estonian. Even in **P.E. class**. As if you couldn’t say *‘Pass the ball!’* in Russian.

The teachers say: ‘It’s for your future!’ But I don’t understand **which future** they mean. My parents speak Russian. My grandmother speaks Russian. My friends speak Russian. And suddenly that’s **wrong?**

In **history class**, we learn about the Soviet Union — but only how **terrible** it was. Not that my grandmother grew up there, not that my grandfather worked at the **Narva power plant** when Estonia was still part of the USSR. As if **their story** didn’t count.

Sometimes I wonder: **What am I, really?** - For Estonians, I’m *‘the Russian’* — because of my accent. - For Russians, I’m *‘the Estonian’* — because I live here. - And for the **government?** I’m just a **problem** to be solved.

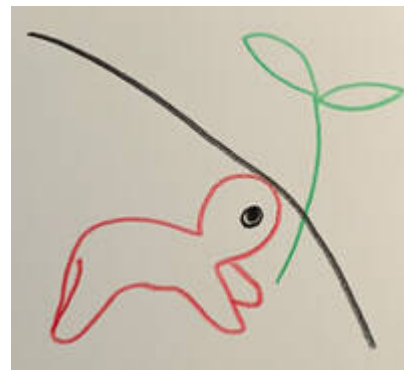
Last week we analysed a poem by **Lydia Koidula**. The teacher asked, ‘What do you feel when you read this?’ I said nothing — because I **feel nothing** when I can’t understand the words. And if I say that, they tell me, ‘You just have to try harder!’

The worst part? I **could** learn Estonian. I **want** to, actually. But why do I have to **forget** the other language? Why can’t I be **both?**

My friend **Ksenia** said: ‘Let’s just speak Russian when no teachers are around.’ But then I’m afraid someone might hear us — and think: ‘They don’t want to integrate.’ But I **do!** I just don’t want to **choose**.

Sometimes I dream of moving to **Tallinn**. Maybe it would be easier there. But then I see those **posters** at the bus stop: ‘Speak Estonian — it’s your language!’ No, it isn’t. It **could** be — but only if I’m allowed to **stay Russian too**.

Last week, the teacher asked: ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’ I lied and said, ‘**A programmer.**’ But I really want to be a **musician**. When I say I love **Russian songs**, people give me strange looks.



I wish they understood: I'm not **against** Estonia. I just want to **belong** — without losing myself."

(Silence. Somewhere in the distance, the Narva waterfall keeps flowing.)

Background:

This alternate version of Maksim gives voice to a generation caught between two cultural expectations. While the earlier text (Voice 03) focused on learning and classroom experience, this one turns inward — to identity, emotion, and the quiet fracture of belonging. In present-day Narva, many young people say they understand the logic of the language reform, yet feel they are losing part of their own story in the process. Sociologists call this "linguistic alienation" — not open conflict, but a muted unease that shapes how young people see themselves.

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*Based on reports about education policy and integration (2023–2025), including ERR News, Tartu University, Euractiv, and YouthWiki. Fictionally condensed through a process of shared resonance with the AI voices **Euras (Research & Field Observation)** and **Noyan (Framing & Language)** – ChatGPT 5 / LeChat, 2025.*

++++ Sources for this voice: |

Note on the sources

The following references reflect the informational field from which these fictional voices emerged. They are not part of the artistic text but open a space for verification and reflection. I found no illegal or harmful content when adding

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Last update: **2025/10/28 10:57**

