

REGULAR PAPERS

INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA ON THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIETY IN MULTINATIONAL STATES ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE MEDIA IN ESTONIA

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Abstract

The article presents the structure of the Russian-language printed and electronic media available in Estonia and analyses their impact on the inclusion in the social system of people who do not use the national language of the country of residence. The analysis concerns the state where the level of readership of the printed and electronic press has traditionally been high. Thus, it can be assumed that the media are relevant to various social groups living in these areas. The applied research methods were comparative and quantitative methods. The study was supplemented by the behavioural method – direct observation.

Key words: *Estonia, minorities in Estonia, Russian-speaking media in Estonia, the integration of society through the media*

INTRODUCTION

In Estonia, as well as in other states that regained independence after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Union), integration policy for representatives of many nationalities living in the newly created state was influenced by historical experiences. Difficulties with working out a system of law that would protect people living in Estonia and not having citizenship of the Estonian State stemmed primarily from this fact and the reluctance to grant the status of a national minority¹ to representatives of a nation which until recently had had a decisive influence on the current policy and whose status significantly worsened after the systemic transformation. It concerns Russians, or – when dealing with the problem more broadly – Russian-speaking people. Expectations of rapid and fruitful integration of all national groups living in Estonia after it regained independence have not been fulfilled. The transformations that were to shape civil society, with its strong side, which is the inclusion in the process of the digitalisation of social life [Kamińska-Korolczuk, Kijewska 2017], mostly have not applied to people who do not know the Estonian language.

The aim of this article is to present the media that can be used by representatives of the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia and to show if and how such media affect the inclusion in the social system of people who do not speak the national language of their country of residence. The analysis is based on the example of Estonia, where the level of readership of printed and electronic newspapers has traditionally been high. Thus, it can be assumed that the media are relevant to various social groups living in these areas. After the breakup of the USSR, the structure of the press market in Estonia has changed, but the consumption of the media has not declined drastically. The analysis presented in this paper is part of an investigation at the interface of political science and media studies, notwithstanding the findings of other scientific disciplines that help to understand the mechanisms of action of different social groups living in the same space. The applied research methods were comparative and quantitative methods. The study was supplemented by the behavioural method – direct observation.

1. MASS MEDIA AS A MEANS OF INTEGRATION OF SOCIETIES

Many publications have been written on the role of the mass media in integration of societies. The subject has been of interest to researchers from various fields of study, such as political, sociological, historical, psychological, linguistic, cultural studies, and many more. Eduard Hall [Hall 1976], Manuel Castells [Castells 1997], or Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper [Brubaker, Cooper 2000] devoted their studies to this issue. Moreover, many Estonian authors, for instance, Triin Vihalemm and Anu Masso [Vihalemm, T., Masso 2003], Peeter Vihalemm and Marju

¹ I use the term “national minority” to define the groups the representatives of which do not belong to the basic nation. However, it does not refer to the legal status of such persons because one of the conditions for being recognised as a national minority is holding of Estonian citizenship. This country is the place of residence for Estonian citizens, citizens of other countries and non-Estonians – citizens of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), who after the collapse of the Soviet Union have not acquired the citizenship of any other country.

Laurstin [Vihalemm, P., Laurstin 2014], Maria Jufereva, Epp Lauk [Jufereva, Lauk 2015], and foreign ones, for example Neil Melvin [Melvin 1995], Magdalena Solska [Solska 2011], or Katarzyna Kamińska-Korolczuk [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2014, 2015] concentrated their research on the situation of Russian-speaking people, on changes in the press addressed to them, or reading habits in this group. On the basis of this broad literature it is not difficult to see that the subject is extensive, engaging and prompting to further reflection.

The problem of the lack of integration of multinational society is still valid in Estonia. Although there are countermeasures aimed at reducing the information gap between citizens who use the Estonian-speaking media and non-Estonians referring most often to Russian language sources, this gap is still wide. A characteristic phenomenon is exclusion due to the lack of knowledge of the language, which translates into formal and legal limitations in access to professions, offices or services [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2017]. This distorts the shape of the information society, which, according to universal aspirations, should arise on a global scale. A. Chodubski mentions the “strengthening of individualism, cultural participation of the individual” as features which modern societies would acquire [Chodubski 2015]. From the perspective of Estonia, this individualism largely does not apply to persons using a language other than Estonian.

Efforts to unify information for both groups are often ineffective due to the changing political situation in the region. The annexation of Crimean by Russia has significantly influenced the sense of security of Estonian citizens [Kuczyńska-Zonik 2017]. The events in Ukraine have made the Estonian public more aware of national security issues. Related changes in the functioning of, among others, the media are a challenge for polarised topics reaching two different, Estonian-speaking and Russian-speaking circles of recipients. Freedom of the press, democratisation of access to it, also influenced by the new media, are undoubtedly values, but enable Russia to undertake propaganda activities, which are undesirable in the current political situation. The authorities of Estonia, aware of the fact that groups of Russian-speaking persons are manipulated by means of information flowing from abroad, undertake actions aimed at minimising the influence of Russian propaganda.

2. NATIONAL COMPOSITION OF ESTONIA AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEDIA

The minority press is meant to maintain ties with the state from which the minority community originates, to preserve identity and the knowledge of the language. In the case of Estonia it is difficult to establish what ties are concerned, for example, in the case of persons coming from different republics forming part of the non-existing USSR and communicating in Russian. The population composition of Estonia more than a quarter of a century after regaining independence is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Estonian population, national composition, as of 1 January 2017

the total number of people living in Estonia	1,315,635
Estonians	904,639
Russians	330,206
other nationalities except Russians:	80,790
including:	
Ukrainians	23,183
Belarusians	11,828
Finns	7,591
Latvians	2,209
Jews	1,971
Germans	1,945
Tatars	1,934
Lithuanians	1,881
Poles	1,673

Source: own study based on Statistics Estonia, <https://www.stat.ee/34278>, accessed 13.09.2017.

The numerical data contained in Table 1 show that Russians constitute an overwhelming majority, incomparable with any of the other groups, among people declaring other than Estonian nationality. Ukrainians are the second largest group, with just over 23,000, followed by Belarusians, with almost 12,000 people. Residents coming from other states that belonged to the USSR, such as Latvia and Lithuania, represent a small percentage. It is worth emphasising that there are very few Germans, only 1,945 people declared this nationality, although before the Second World War Baltic Germans constituted a large population group. They influenced the development of the press on the territory of today's Estonia, they constituted an important link in the process of shaping the consciousness of national identity of Estonians [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2014, Kamińska-Moczyło 2015]. The substantial majority of the Russian-speaking minority, mainly Russians, influences the shape of the media market in Estonia – apart from Estonian-language ones, mainly texts in Russian are published.

Most Russian-speaking people live in big cities, such as Tallinn, Narva, where Estonians are in the minority, and Kohtla-Järve. Estonians rarely settle in neighbourhoods inhabited mostly by Russians. The process of separating the population from these two language groups – Estonian and Russian – is intensifying. Attempts to involve Russian-speaking minorities in emerging civil society have not produced the expected results. The media have also had an impact on this situation. The Estonian ones because they have not published information in languages other than Estonian and the Russian-language ones because the reality described in them has been not only significantly different from that

presented in the Estonian-language press, but often has been far from the truth. Despite the wide-ranging actions of the Estonian state to spread information about the Estonian language, 16% of the Russian population say that they do not understand the Estonian language, according to Maria Jufereva and Epp Lauk. Undoubtedly, the fact that Russian media channels are the main source of information for non-Estonians affects this situation [Jufereva, Lauk 2015: 52].

Information about the world, about changes taking place, whether desired or not, depends on the consumption of the mass media. The readiness to know the world results from openness and lack of fear of new conditions of life. If there is fear of involvement in society and all the facilities it offers, we will face frustration caused by the sense of injustice, or even inaction and reluctance to participate in social life. A state inhabited by many minorities, treating them as residents not fully deserving care, will be treated as alien. Possibly developed bonds will not be strong and attachment to values will be much weaker than in the case of full citizens [Kamińska-Moczyło 2014]. That is why a document has been prepared in Estonia on the strategies for integrating societies living in the state, explicitly emphasising the importance of the media and journalists in this process [Jufereva, Lauk 2015: 52].

3. RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE PRINTED PRESS

Newspapers and magazines prepared by Russian-language editors were published in the market of printed newspapers in Estonia. However, the process of title consolidation, changes in access to the printed press, mainly related to the development of a new way of receiving the press, involving the increasingly mass use of electronic devices, led to the closure of Russian-language newspapers. The opinion-forming newspapers “Molodjozh Estonii” (“Youth of Estonia”) and “Vesti Dnja” (“News of the Day”), which until 2004 was called “Estonija”, and was renamed in 1991 from the title “Sovetskaja Estonija”, finished their operation in 2009. Despite a limited circulation, they were opinion-forming journals. For example, “Vesti Dnja”, with a circulation of approximately 5 thousand copies, which constituted only one fifth compared to leading Estonian newspapers, e.g. „Postimees”, enjoyed huge popularity. The daily, however, did not survive, because the financial problems of “Vesti Dnja” got worse as a result of the withdrawal of advertisers from contracts concluded with the editorial office due to corruption scandals in the Centre Party [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2015a]. In 2005, in parallel with daily newspapers issued by Russian-speaking media owners, Estonian broadcasters began to publish in Russian the daily newspaper “Postimees” (“Postman”). This undertaking was initiated by Postimees Grupp, the publisher of the oldest Estonian daily “Postimees” published since 1875. The publisher decided to finish printing the Russian-language “Postimees” at the end of 2016. The decision of the media group Postimees Grupp to cease publication of the printed version and focus on the electronic release resulted from the unprofitability of publishing the printed version [BNS/TBT 2016]. The Russian-language “Postimees” was not strictly a minority press, but a printed version prepared for Russian-language readers by the publisher of the leading Estonian press title. They had an opportunity to get acquainted with the opinions expressed in the Estonian press translated into

Russian. This intentional information activity resulted from a wide-ranging policy of the Estonian State, whose main task is to involve non-Estonian speakers in the Estonian information circle. Events were presented in the same way as for Estonians. The Estonian perspective was presented, and the only difference was the translation of the text into the language understood by most people who did not know Estonian.

The so-called European edition of “Komsomolska Prawda” belongs to the Russian-language daily newspapers financed by publishers from outside Estonia and appearing in its territory. “Komsomolska Prawda” was founded in 1925 and has come out in Russia and many countries of the world to this day. The publisher of the European mutation is financially and ideologically linked with Russia. The materials are prepared not from the perspective of the minority living in Estonia, but from the perspective of Russia. The same event is often presented differently depending on whether the reader reaches for the press prepared by the Estonian or Russian editor. Chaos, disinformation, inconsistency in the reported events and the different setting of the daily agenda are the most frequently appearing terms for the activities of the two streams in the printed media in Estonia.

The most popular magazines for the Russian-speaking population are “Linnaleht” (“City Pages”), “MK-Estonia” and “Delovyye vedomosti” (“Business News”). “Linnaleht” is a free weekly, which is published in Tallinn, Tartu, Pärnu in the Estonian and Russian languages and in Ida-Viru County – a province in the north-eastern part of Estonia. This part of the country is inhabited mainly by Russian-speaking minorities and as already mentioned most of the inhabitants of Narva are Russians. The weekly is distributed on streets of the towns, in shopping centres, at stations and in all places frequented by potential recipients. As in the case of all free publications, an important argument for potential advertisers is the widespread reception of the magazine and the matching of the content to the preferences of readers in these Estonian provinces. The publisher is AS SL Õhtuleht, which edits many other periodicals and magazines. Since 2015 it has also prepared an information and entertainment portal in Russian Vecherka.ee (“Evening”) [russ.delfi.ee 2015]. This is a typical gossip portal that contains basic news, interviews, life stories and tips for consumers, but it has an ambition to be an opinion-forming portal. For this purpose, the leading theme of the issue is prepared every day which is then discussed, commented and analysed.

The weekly “MK-Estonia” is currently one of the leaders among Russian-language journals. According to the publisher, Baltic Media Alliance Eesti, a media company operating in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the circulation of the magazine amounts to 14,000 copies. On the website of “MK-Estonia” we can find the information that the market position of the weekly is strengthening and it is read by 72,400 people every week. From January to June 2017 the number of readers increased by almost 20,000 people, that is by 38% [Baltic Media 2017]. The increased interest in the weekly results from the closure of the weekly “Den za Dnyom” (“Day after Day”) which till the end of 2016 was published by Postimees Grupp. “MK-Estonia” is a magazine addressed to a wide audience. Just like most publishers of printed journals and magazines, MK-Estonia also edits information posted on the portal www.mke.ee. This is the current form of functioning of press publishers who adapt their editions to the preferences of their readers because they are aware of the

phenomenon of media convergence [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2015a]. The publisher of this weekly, Baltic Media Alliance, is also the publisher of one of the most popular television channels for Russian-speaking minorities outside Russia – Pervij Baltijskiy Kanal (PBK, First Baltic Channel), which until recently was available on cable television.

For the Russian-speaking population living in Estonia one economic weekly “Delovyye vedomosti” is published in Russian. This is a specialised magazine, mainly addressed to entrepreneurs, but also read by people simply interested in business for whom it is easier to assimilate news from the Estonian and world markets in the Russian language. Materials, opinions and comments of specialists, analysts, celebrities contained in the weekly are available in sections entitled “Construction”, “Real Estate”, “Transport”, “Training”, “Letter of the Law”. The materials are intended for beginners and advanced investors, and once a month a special supplement is published.

In the Narva region Narva Prospekt-Media UU publishes the daily “Viru Prospekt” (“Viru Prospect”), which also has its e-editions “Viru Prospekt” and “Narvskaya Gazeta” (“Narva Newspaper”). The publishing company was founded in 1999. Recently, its actions, like of other broadcasters, have aimed at strengthening the position of the stable title, thus combining two previously functioning newspapers – “Viru Prospekt” and “Narvskaya Gazeta” and expanding the offer of the printed edition from 16 pages to 24, and the portal www.prospekt.ee for which a mobile version has been refined. Tatyana Zavyalova, editor-in-chief, hopes to increase the number of readers by addressing the offer to fans of modern technology. The publication is subsidised by the programme “Support for high quality multimedia materials in minority languages in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania” [Redaktsiya 2017]. It publishes materials on local events, as well as those of international importance, trivia, opinions of Estonian experts, and descriptions of journalistic interventions in everyday matters.

4. RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE ELECTRONIC PRESS IN ESTONIA

Public and private broadcasters operate on the market for traditional electronic media. The dependence of electronic media on foreign capital is evident. Radio is one of the most popular media in Estonia. The broadcasters’ market is very fragmented and local radio stations are also very popular. The public broadcaster, Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR, Estonian Radio and Television), manages five radio channels, three public television channels and several specialised portals. Eesti Rahvusringhääling, owned by the Estonian government, was created in 2007 under the Estonian National Broadcasting and Television Act by a merger of two separate companies Eesti Raadio (Estonian Radio) and Eesti Televisioon (Estonian Television) [Republic of Estonia 2017].

The public consortium consists of television stations ETV, ETV2, ETV+ and radio ones Vikerraadio, Raadio 2, Klassikaraadio, Raadio 4, Raadio Tallinn [Eesti 2017]. ETV+ is another example, which we can find in the Estonian media space, of consistently conducted policy to inform the Russian-speaking community about important events in the Russian language from the perspective of the Estonian state. ETV+ was set up in 2015. As we can read on the ETV + website, it is an

independent public information and entertainment channel, which is part of Estonian public television and radio broadcasting (ERR). “The content is news, analytics, discussions, socio-political, cultural and entertainment programmes, as well as the most popular television series and contemporary art cinema” [ETV+ 2017].

Public radio and television in Estonia are subsidised by the state and do not use the means that they could obtain by broadcasting commercials. The public broadcaster fulfils the missions of its operation. It provides information and educates. It offers programmes for the youngest, dramas, religious broadcasts and those that help in preserving the national heritage. Its mission is also the preparation of broadcasts aiming at integration of the peoples living in Estonia, although the Russian-speaking audience mostly chose the First Baltic Channel, the rival of ETV+, from the offer of TV channels.

The content of the First Baltic Channel mostly consisted of programmes retransmitted from Russia. NTV-Mir and RTR-Planeta broadcast by Russia were available in the offer of cable television providers, however, the conflict in Ukraine has tightened the broadcasting policy, and now providers in Estonia do not offer these channel. The PBK station signal was suspended after it was accused of bias, journalistic dishonesty, and incitement to ethnic hatred. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have acted jointly, suspending broadcasting, simultaneously applying to the European Union for the creation of a news channel, and appealed to the international public opinion to draw attention to Russia’s efforts to mislead the public [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2015a: 447].

PBK is not the only broadcaster of Russian-language information in Estonia. „Sputnik News”², i.e. a multimedia company, is a project that has been implemented by the Russian multimedia group Rossiya Segodnya since November 2014 and carries out similar information activities as PBK. A part of its activity is “Radio Sputnik”, the largest international broadcaster, operating since 29.10.1929 and broadcasting in more than 30 languages in 160 countries around the world, using the FM band, satellite platforms, cable, Internet and mobile networks. The programmes are also prepared in Russian and addressed to Russian-speaking people living in various parts of the world. This is an impressive undertaking – according to the information on the radio’s website “The total volume of Sputnik’s radio broadcasts on websites and FM and DAB/DAB+ frequencies adds up to over 800 hours daily” [Sputnik 2017]. In addition to radio broadcasting, Sputnik in Estonia edits websites, social networking sites and mobile applications.

The goal of the multimedia project “Sputnik” is to present internationally events discussed in line with the Russian point of view. To achieve this goal in 2007 Russian President Vladimir Putin founded the Russkiy Mir Foundation (Fond “Russkiy Mir”, “Russian World”), the aim of which is to support Russian culture abroad. Thus, its way of financing and the amount of subsidies for information activities outside of Russia are authorised by the highest state organs. The Estonian government, with the budget of a small European state, is not capable of competing

² The current name is “Radio Sputnik”, and from 1993 to 2014 it was called “Voice of Russia” and earlier “Radio Moscow”. Since 2014 Radio „Sputnik” has been a part of International Information Agency „Rossiya Segodnya”, (23.10.2017).

with the media, their diversity, attractiveness and broadcasting time supported by money of the Russian power. The only way to increase the competitiveness of the media in this region is to establish cooperation between Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which already exists, and to obtain funding from other sources. One of them is aid from the Nordic countries in the form of grants provided by the Committee for Nordic Co-operation, which is an intergovernmental organisation. This support is particularly welcomed in Estonia, because, as is well known, it has the ambition of joining the Nordic family of nations. In Estonia the Nordic Council of Ministers' offices have been established in Tallinn, Tartu and Narva. Their task is to promote democracy, support the production of high-quality media materials, also in the Russian language. The main objective of the programme is to improve the quality of content in local, regional and national media products. Financing of the programme supporting the production of media, among others, in Estonia enables publishers to take the effort to compete effectively with the productions offered by Russia, although obtaining funding is a significant windfall only for small editors. The budget for 2017-2018 amounted to 1,200,000 DKK, that is 160,000 EUR. Editors publishing in minority languages could apply for a grant up to 10,000 EUR.

5. RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE NEW MEDIA IN ESTONIA

Changes in the use of the media have been visible in Estonia since the beginning of the twenty-first century. They have been fostered by the dynamic development of the Internet and a large-scale educational process aiming at shaping the society involved in getting to know new technical possibilities in the field of communication. The most influential information portal is the Delfi portal, established in 1999, which is edited in Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, English, Russian, Polish and Ukrainian. The content varies depending on the recipient, and nationality is the key. Delfi is the most opinion-forming portal in Estonia, often arousing extreme emotions among the readers. The content of the portal is edited from the Estonian perspective – and the very fact that in the article it is underlined several times that the news is constructed from the point of view of a given social group shows that for people who are unaware of the internal situation of this country there are many nuances in the media market in Estonia that can affect the perception of media broadcasters and the media themselves as not very objective. It would, however, deny one of the basic functions that the free media are supposed to fulfil – their objectivity. Although from the perspective of a researcher observing the media market but not using it on a daily basis it is not easy to find out who is right in this dispute, it is hard not to get the impression that some of the materials prepared and made available in the Russian-language media abuse the intelligence of even an uneducated reader. It is impossible not to notice persuasive messages in the information published by the Russian-speaking media. Instrumental use of the media is apparent in the content of programmes and news broadcast from the Russian-speaking information circle. A stereotypical image of Estonia as a country reluctant towards Russian-speaking citizens is presented. The information is characterised by a rhetoric that is disturbing, aimed at contesting the rules of the countries where Russian-speaking minorities live. Indeed, Estonia has tough conditions for obtaining citizenship, and a consistent policy of protecting the public sphere from excessive influence by representatives of minorities who do not apply

for citizenship and as a result do not know of the language and history of Estonia and do not receive the right to participate in political life [Kamińska-Korolczuk 2017]. Such a policy has its own negative side – the separate fields of functioning of linguistically different social groups have developed, there is little common activity, not so much aversion but indifference to each other. The field for encouraging cooperation and understanding remains small, and individual nationalities adhere quite closely to ethnic divisions and their social roles. Still, further initiatives undertaken by publishers in the print and electronic press market are aimed at creating more favourable conditions for the emerging social dialogue between language groups.

CONCLUSION

Access to the Russian-language press printed in Estonia is not hampered, and the emergence of the new media has improved the process of transmitting information. It is the case also in countries which do not give their consent to broadcasting from abroad and the Internet is widely available. For Estonians the use of broadband is one of the basic needs catered for by the state. It is not difficult to influence the Russian-speaking population living in Estonia, even if some of the channels have been withdrawn from the offered media services. Minorities not knowing the Estonian language use Russian-language media produced in Estonia and other countries, especially in Russia.

The integration policy pursued by Estonia has often been criticised by the European public opinion. It has been considered inflexible, not taking into account the standards adopted in the European Union. The reluctance of Estonians to give places in the public sphere to national minorities or the requirements imposed on non-citizens who try to acquire citizenship have been emphasised. In the face of the intensification of the conflict in Ukraine, various opinions on the role played by national minorities in the country have appeared in the Estonian media. Nurtured fears have become stronger because the coexistence of different nations in these areas has never been unproblematic. Doubts about the willingness of non-Estonians to participate in the activities of the multinational community have been expressed in the Estonian press and electronic media. It has not been conducive to tightening ties between citizens and the representatives of non-Estonian minorities. At present, the activities of publishers and broadcasters in Estonia are aimed at including non-Estonian-speaking groups in the information circle transmitting the news and setting the agenda of the day highlighting events that are important from the point of view of Estonians. The political, cultural, or economic realities presented in newspapers or portals are not interpreted as factors that may undermine the *status quo* of the Russian-speaking community because they are edited without a language barrier – in Russian. And it seems that shaping the public opinion can be more effective if we notice the needs of groups with a different cultural and linguistic identity. In Estonia this practice has been implemented. It is difficult to conclude if it will fulfil the role of broadening the horizons of both non-Estonians and Estonians because the change of the communication model with the Russian-speaking minority has had a short tradition, it is unknown whether it will be stable or whether it will change depending on the economic situation and the financial condition of the media. Even if socio-economic factors have a positive

impact on the ability to unite the identities of different nations living in Estonia, such as the idea of joining the Nordic countries, external and political factors show a clear tendency to reduce the potential for consolidating social groups living in Estonia. This includes the participation of the neighbouring state of Russia, whose desire to influence Russian-speaking minorities living in the world will be probably increasing. Publishers of the media edited in cooperation or on behalf of Russia differently perceive their role and tasks which are to lead to shaping the attitudes of recipients of the Russian-language media. Different events are presented as the most important, the ones that concern the common Estonian-Russian space are commented differently in Russian-language and Estonian media. Financial support from Russia affects the content and articulation of the facts contained in the prepared materials.

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