

# 4

## Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Latvia

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### Background

#### *Statehood*

In the thirteenth century the forbears of the contemporary Latvians were conquered by the Teutonic knights. At that time, the Latvian tribes had not yet coalesced into a coherent nationality. The Teutonic state formation on the territory of contemporary Latvia and contemporary Estonia existed until 1561. On its disintegration, the easternmost part of Latvia-Latgale-passed to Poland remaining under Polish rule until 1772, when it was ceded to Russia. Between 1629 and 1721 the territory of Vidzeme (northwestern Latvia) was ruled by the kingdom of Sweden. It was conquered by Russia during the Great Nordic war. The Duchy of Kurland, covering the regions of Kurzeme and Zemgale (western and southern Latvia), existed between 1651 and 1795. In the latter year its territories were incorporated into the Russian empire.

In tsarist Russia the territories of contemporary Latvia were divided among three *gubernii*s: Kurland, Lifland, and Vitebsk. The *guberniia* of Vitebsk, to which a part of Latgale belonged, was not administratively a part of the Baltic provinces, but belonged to the "inner" guberniias.

In November 1918, after the collapse of the Russian empire, Latvia proclaimed its independence and in 1920 a peace treaty was signed by

TABLE 4.1 Ethnic Composition of Latvia's Population (1897-1989, in percent)

	1897	1920	1935	1959	1989
Latvians	68.3	72.6	75.5	62.0	52.0
Russians	12.0	5.7	10.6	26.6	34.0
Belarusians	-	4.1	14	2.9	4.5
Ukrainians	-	0.0	0.1	14	3.5
Germans	6.2	3.6	3.2	0.1	0.1
Jews	7.4	5.0	4.8	1.7	0.9
Poles	3.4	3.3	2.5	2.9	2.3
Lithuanians	14	1.6	12	1.5	1.3
Other	1.3	4.0	0.9	0.9	14

Sources: *Pervaaia vseobshchaia perepis'* 1905; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo* 1990, 14;

Latvia and Soviet Russia. In the early 1920s Latvia gained official recognition from the leading states of the world and became a member of the League of Nations. The fact that Latvia existed as an independent nation-state in the interwar period has a direct and strong impact on the political development of post-Communist Latvia. Thus, after the collapse of the Soviet regime, Latvia did not establish independence, but restored it, and was in a position to draw upon the entire legal and constitutional corpus of the predecessor state in its nation-building efforts.

In 1940, as a result of the so-called Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, Latvia was annexed by the Soviet Union. This act was not internationally recognized. In June 1941, the country was overrun by the German army, but 1944-45 saw the return of the Soviets and the interrupted process of Sovietization continued.

During the period of perestroika the Popular Front became the dominant political force in Latvia. It won the majority of the votes in the 1990 elections to the republican Supreme Soviet. On 4 May 1990, this assembly passed a Declaration of Independence, reestablishing *de jure* the sovereign Latvian Republic of the interwar years. Central USSR authorities recognized the independence of Latvia only in September 1991. From that date Latvia was also *de facto* independent.

#### *Development of the Ethnodemographic Situation*

In 1897, the total population of Latvia was 1,929,400 persons, the majority of whom were Latvians (68 percent). The largest minorities were the Russians (read: East Slavs), 12 percent; Jews, 7.4 percent; Germans, 6.2 percent; and Poles, 3.4 percent (Table 4.1).

Unfortunately, there are no accurate data on the Latvian population at the time of the outbreak of World War I. Most experts believe, however, that in 1914 there were approximately 2,493,000 people within the confines of present-day Latvia, or 2,552,000 if we include the district of Abrene—presently a part of the Pskov oblast in Russia<sup>1</sup>. The ethnic Latvians made up slightly more than 60 percent, the remaining 40 percent belonged to broad variety of other nationalities.<sup>2</sup> The significant ethnodemographic changes that had taken place since 1897 were apparently linked, among other things, to the rapid industrialization which had taken place in the meantime. This industrialization had required an influx of large numbers of migrants from other parts of the Russian empire. The lower percentage of Latvians did not reflect a decrease in the absolute number of Latvians. On the contrary, it seems that, in the immediate prewar years, the Latvian population reached an all-time high of 15 million.<sup>3</sup>

World War I was a demographic catastrophe for so small country as Latvia. By 1920, as a combined result of military actions, flight, and evacuation to remote regions of the Russian empire, the population of Latvia tumbled to two-thirds of its prewar level.<sup>4</sup> By 1919, only 1,480,000 inhabitants remained in Latvia.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnic composition of the population had also been significantly altered. As a part of the war effort large industrial plants in Riga and other Latvian cities were dismantled and shipped eastward into the interior of Russia. Along with them, the workforces of the plants were also evacuated. These workers were mainly non-Latvians. Ethnic Latvians were less affected by these measures since they, to a large extent, lived in the countryside. Thus, while the total population of Latvia decreased radically, the share of the Latvians noticeably increased (see Table 4.1).

In the 1920s, some of the refugees and evacuees returned to Latvia. Among these groups, ethnic Latvians predominated. According to one source, 236,000 persons returned to Latvia from Soviet Russia between 1920 and 1928.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, neither the return migration nor the

*Pervaia vseobshchaia perepis'* 1905; *Narodnoe khoziaistvo* 1990, 14; Mezgalis and Zvidrins 1973, 82.

2 Skujenieks 1930, 132-33.

3 *Cina* 8 March 1990; Mezs 1995, 31.

4 *Latvijas statistika* 1921, 8-12.

5 *Latvija citu* 1939, 79.

6 *Sovetskaia Latviia* 1985, 117.

natural increase of the population sufficed to reestablish the prewar population, which in 1940 was 25 percent below the 1914 level<sup>7</sup>

The first census conducted in the independent Latvian Republic, in 1920, showed that the share of the titular nation comprised 73 percent. Three subsequent censuses—in 1925, 1930, and 1935—gave witness to a gradual rise in the proportion of Latvians. Two of the main causes were their higher than average birthrates and the assimilation of non-Latvians, particularly in Latgale. In 1935, the Latvians comprised 75.5 percent of the total population of Latvia.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the ethnic composition of Latvia at this time was relatively homogeneous. Among the minorities, no particular ethnic group predominated. Here, the Russians made up the largest group (8.8 percent in 1935), but also the Germans (3.3 percent) and the Jews (4.9 percent) were very influential, particularly in certain fields of the economy and culture. In the state administration, on the other hand, the ethnic Latvian dominance was very pronounced. The overwhelming majority of the bureaucrats were Latvians.

All large and medium-sized minorities had their own schools which were financed by the state. Added to this, there were a ramified networks of social and cultural organizations serving the ethnic minorities. In the 1920s, Latvia and Estonia were regarded as two of the most democratic states in Europe with regard to minority policy. However, after Karl Ulmanis' *coup d'etat* in May 1934 the cultural autonomy rights were severely circumscribed. Nevertheless, a part of the minority school system continued to function right up to the beginning of World War II.

New dramatic changes in the numbers and proportions of Latvia's population took place during the war years. In 1939, practically all Baltic Germans, totaling approximately 60 thousand persons, were "repatriated" to Germany on Hitler's insistence.<sup>9</sup> Two years later, the Stalinist regime conducted its first wave of repressions and deportations in Latvia. Latvian researchers usually cite the figure of 15-16,000 deportees.<sup>10</sup> The deportees were selected not on the basis of nationality but social background—in particular, state officials, military personnel and wealthy people—and represented no particular ethnic group. Naturally, ethnic Latvians predominated among them since they were the most numerous group in the population at large.

<sup>7</sup> *Narodnoe khoziaistvo* 1989; *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* 1990, 14; Mezgailis and Zvidrins 1973, 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ceturta* 1936-39.

<sup>9</sup> Dreifelds 1984; Rutkis 1960, 449.

<sup>10</sup> Mezs 1995; *Cina* 31 January 1989.

During the German occupation, which started in 1941-42, almost the entire Jewish population of Latvia was exterminated. (In German documents one can find references to Jews living in Latvia in 1943-44. These Jews, however, were exiled to Latvia from Western Europe at a later stage, to be interned in the Riga ghetto.)<sup>11</sup> Together with the Jews, also the majority of the Latvian gypsies were liquidated. The number of people sent to forced labor in Germany was 32-33,000.<sup>12</sup> In 1944 more than 100,000 inhabitants of Latvia fled to the West in order to escape the approaching Soviet Army. And finally, thousands died in combat, fighting on both sides of the front.

When the war was over, Latvia had for the second time in thirty years lost a third of its total population. According to Latvian and Western researchers, no more than 1.3-1.4 million persons remained on Latvian soil in 1945.<sup>13</sup> After the war, arrests and deportations continued, culminating in 1949, when approximately 45,000 persons were deported at the same time.

Latvia has traditionally had a low natural population increase and these enormous losses could hardly be recouped simply by procreation. However, an influx of migrants from other Soviet republics raised the population again. As at the beginning of the century, this immigration was facilitated by an extensive development of the Latvian economy which created a great demand for more workers. The growth of the Latvian industrial sector led to the establishment of non-Latvian enclaves around the major new plants (Ogre, Olaine, Ventspils, etc.) Also, a significant number of the new immigrants consisted of employees of Soviet Army units deployed on Latvian territory, as well as their dependents. A great many Soviet officers and NCOs, who had completed their service in Latvia, decided to stay on in the country after demobilization. In fact, Riga became one of the most popular and prestigious residential areas in the entire Soviet Union for retired Soviet officers. One reason for this was the limited opportunity these people had to gain a residence permit for Moscow, Leningrad, or along the Black Sea coast.

In this way, immigration became the most important factor behind both the Latvian population increase and the concomitant change in its ethnic composition in the Soviet period. In the 1970s and '80s, Latvia had the highest levels of immigration of all Union republics. The fairly advanced economy, the relatively high quality of the cultural and recreational facilities (by Soviet standards), plus Riga's

11 Rutkis 1960,432.

12 *Sovetskaia Latvija* 1985, 229; Rutkis 1960,437.

13 Misiunas and Taagepera 1983,274-75; Dreifelds 1984; Mezgalis 1985,57.

long-standing reputation as a "European" city, combined to persuade many people from other parts of the USSR to move to Latvia. Naturally, this situation left an imprint on the economic and social situation of the indigenous (first and foremost, the titular) nation, as well as on their psychology and world view.

### **Demographic Dynamics After the Restoration of Independence**

#### *Numerical Changes of the Population*

As already mentioned, the growth of the Latvian population in the Soviet period was primarily brought about by a massive influx of people from other regions of the USSR. In 1988, the Latvian government introduced a number of measures to check this influx (limiting the possibility of acquiring residence permits [*propiska*], changing the procedures for housing distribution, etc.) Importantly, also the attitudes toward the new settlers among ordinary Latvians changed. Hostile sentiments which for a long time had been relatively widespread among large sections of the ethnically Latvian population, were now vented openly. Thanks to the new policy of glasnost, these feelings could also be expressed at public meetings and in the mass media. As a result of all this, the migration balance became negative in 1990 for the first time in many years, remaining so thereafter. In the 1990s, Latvia experienced a persistent and stable population decrease (see Figure 4.1).<sup>14</sup> Between 1991 and 1996 the population decreased by 165,000, that is, by more than 6.5 percent.

Latvia has achieved the position as the European country with the sharpest population decrease, surpassing both Estonia and Lithuania.<sup>15</sup> In the first half of 1996 there were 4.1 births per thousand inhabitants, as against 4.5 the year before. The mortality rate in the same period was 7.2 per 1000, as against 8.2 in the first half of 1995.<sup>16</sup>

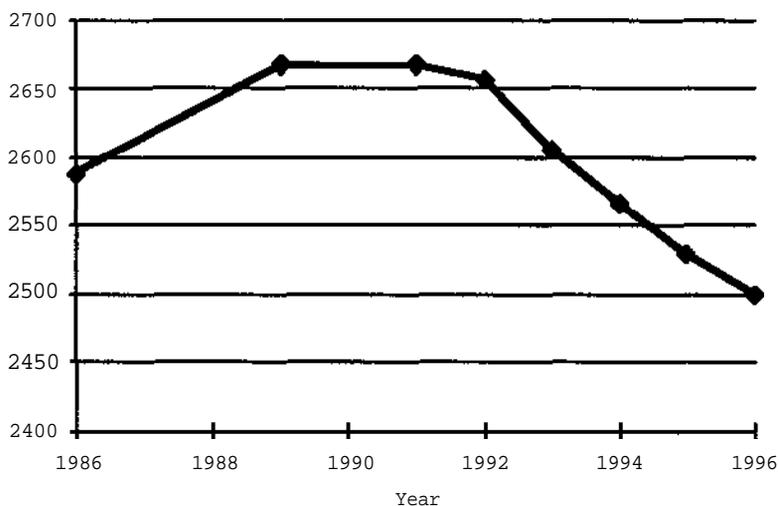
The most important factor influencing the demographic balance in Latvia in 1991-93 was the negative migration balance. However, this balance, while still negative, is gradually leveling out, and the relative importance of the negative natural population increase is growing.

<sup>14</sup> *Latvija skaitlos* 1996, 21

<sup>15</sup> *Biznes and Baltija*, 21 August 1995.

<sup>16</sup> *Diena* 9 September 1996

FIGURE 4.1 Population of Latvia (1986-1996)



Source: *Latvija skaitlos 1996*, 21.

In 1994 the population losses caused by these two factors were approximately of the same size, but in 1995 the natural population decrease began to play a more decisive role than did the migration balance.

### *Ethnic Composition*

By February 1996, the share of the titular nation—the ethnic Latvians—of the total population of Latvia had reached 56.49 percent. Russians comprised 30.38 percent; Belarusians, 4.29 percent; Ukrainians, 2.79 percent; Poles, 2.55 percent; Lithuanians, 1.42 percent; and Jews, 0.58 percent.<sup>17</sup> Then followed Gypsies, Germans, and Estonians, in descending order. The autochthonous Livian group numbered only 199 individuals.

As before, the ethnic composition of the urban population was very different from that of the rural population. In 1995, ethnic Latvians made up less than half of the population in all major cities of Latvia.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie gruppy 1996*, appendix.

<sup>18</sup> 'Par Latvijas Republikas cilvekiem', *Latvijas vestnesis*, 11 March 1995.

In the early 1990s the relative share of ethnic Latvians in the total population of Latvia started to rise, slowly but surely (Table 4.2). This came about both as a result of outmigration<sup>19</sup> and of the different levels of natural population increase among the various ethnic groups in the country. In 1985, the natural population increase among ethnic Latvians had been negative while it was positive among the nontitular population. However, between 1986 and 1989 the Latvians witnessed a positive natural population increase. Among the non-Latvians, the natural population increase continued to rise until 1987 but began to fall drastically from 1988. While both groups at present are experiencing negative growth, the decrease in the Latvian population is progressing more slowly (Figure 4.2).

In 1994, only one of the larger ethnic groups of Latvia, the Roma, experienced a positive population growth. Of the others, the Ukrainians had the least negative growth, followed by the Latvians. The most drastic decrease could be registered among the Jews. Since the late 1980s, the relative proportion of Latvians among newborn babies (recorded by nationality of the mother) has been steadily growing and

TABLE 4.2 Ethnic Changes in Latvia's Population since Independence

	1989	1992	1994	1996
Latvians	52.7	53.1	54.8	57.2
Russians	34.4	34.3	33.4	30.7
Belarusians	4.5	4.5	4.1	4.3
Ukrainians	3.5	3.4	3.1	2.8
Poles	2.3	2.3	2.2	2.6
Lithuanians	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.4
Other	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9

Sources: *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie gruppy* 1996, appendix. *Etnositucija Latvija* 1994, 4; *Diena* 15 February 1995.

TABLE 4.3 Age Structure of Ethnic Groups in Latvia (1989)

	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60+
Latvians	22	7	6	7	6	5	5	7	6	6	19
Russians	23	7	7	8	8	8	6	5	6	5	14
Belarusians	12	5	7	10	9	9	6	8	8	7	16
Ukrainians	15	6	10	11	10	9	7	6	6	4	12
Poles	15	5	6	7	7	7	8	8	7	7	25
Jews	12	4	3	5	7	7	8	5	7	7	32

Source: *Etnositucija Latvija* 1994, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. section on migration below.

FIGURE 4.2 Ethnic Make-Up of the Largest Towns in Latvia

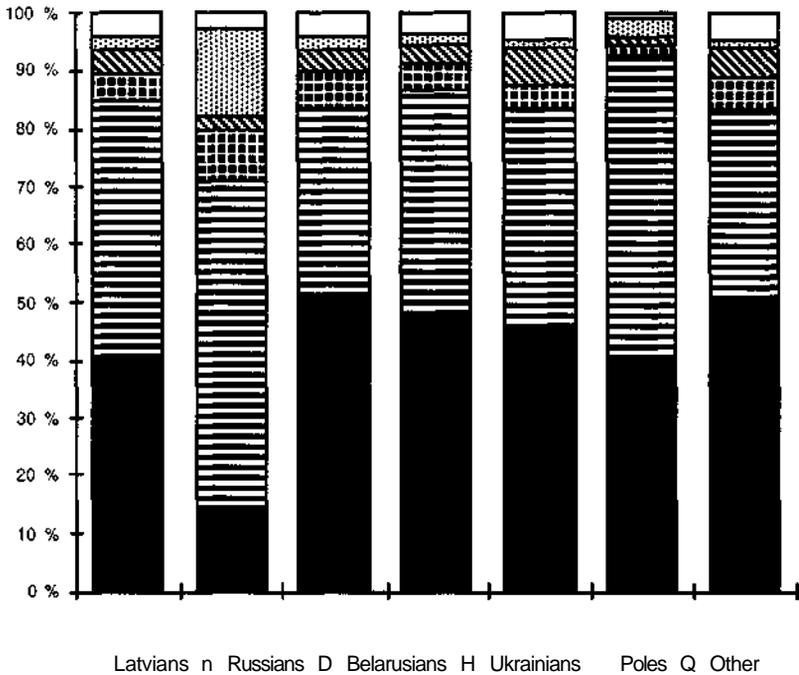
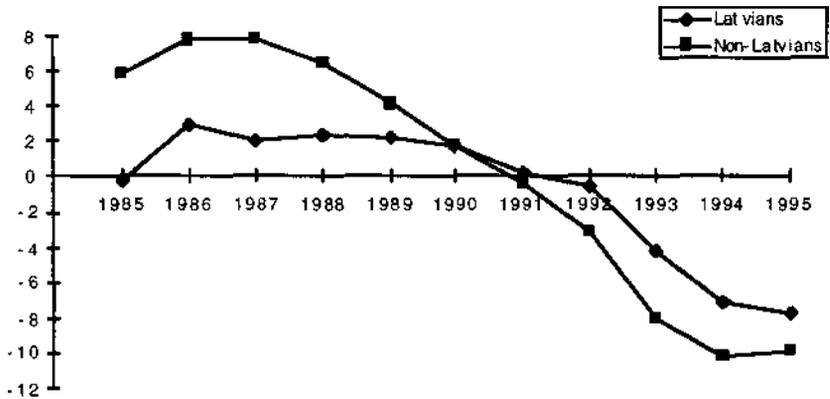


FIGURE 4.3 Natural Increase of Latvian and Non-Latvian Groups (1985-1995)



Sources: *Latvijas demogrāfijas* 1995, 48; *Latvijas demogrāfijas* 1996; Mezs 1994, 22; LR Valsts statistikas komiteja 1996, 47.

in 1994 reached 62.5 percent. In that year, the share of Latvians among the newborns was considerably higher (10 percent) than in the population at large. In all other ethnic groups, except the Lithuanians, this relationship was reversed.

### *Migration*

As a result of the role played by migratory processes in the Soviet period in altering the demographic picture in Latvia, the question of migration became the subject of intense discussion in the 1990s. From the very beginning of the national renaissance, under perestroika, the migration issue—along with the language issue—were subjected to heated disputes. The very word "migrant" became loaded with a negative, pejorative content.

Various political groups in Latvia began to contemplate the possibility of redressing the ethnic balance established during the Soviet period by means of mass emigration or, as it was called, "repatriation" of non-Latvians who had arrived in the country post-World War II. A number of political parties promoted the "scientifically proven" thesis that, in order to secure the survival of the Latvian people, ethnic Latvians had to make up no less than 75 percent of the total number of citizens in Latvia. This idea was retained in the party programs of several parties (in particular the Movement for National Independence and the Farmers' Union of Latvia)<sup>20</sup> right up to the 1993 election campaign. In 1993, the future prime minister V. Birkavs wrote on various possible approaches to the "Russian question." He pointed out that

among the national radicals, in particular among the national extremists, the idea of exiling the non-Latvians (or the "occupants" and "colonists," as they prefer to call them) dominate the discourse. The rationale behind this idea is to bring about a ratio of 75:25 of Latvians to non-Latvians in Latvia, as a

For his own part, Birkavs, who is one of the leaders of the liberal-national party "Latvian way," has suggested that the optimal solution to this problem has to be found in a "very careful policy of naturalization" combined with an active support for "voluntary repatriation" and "free emigration to third countries."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Diena*, 9 February 1993.

<sup>21</sup> *Diena*, 11 March 1993.

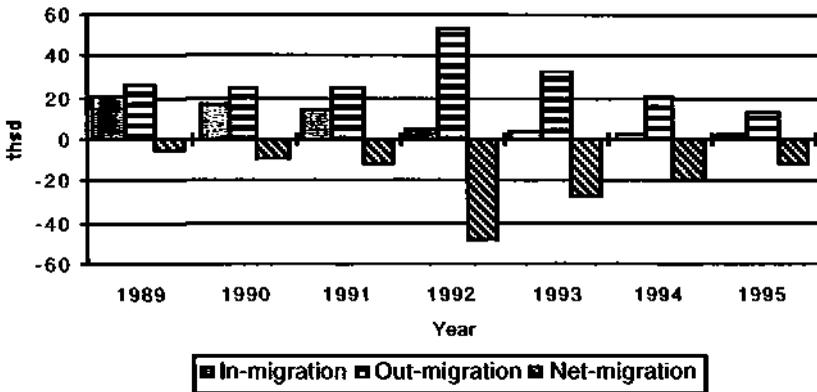
<sup>22</sup> *SM-segodnia*, 30 December 1993.

Frequently, spokesmen of the executive powers have also expressed an opinion on the issue. For instance, in 1993 the press secretary of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration said with regard to the postwar immigrants and their children, most of whom have been born in Latvia: "At all times the Department has emphasized and we want to reiterate that sooner or later all of these 700,000 inhabitants will have to leave Latvia."<sup>23</sup>

Since 1989 the migration balance has been negative. The number of immigrants has gradually decreased, and in 1995 only 2,800 persons entered the country.<sup>24</sup> This situation is linked to the extremely stringent criteria for immigration which have been set out by the Latvian legislators. For all practical purposes, the only three ways to acquire a permanent residence permit are 1) family reunification (with a spouse or a minor whom the citizen or the permanent resident of Latvia is providing for); 2) to invest no less than 1 million U.S. dollars in the Latvian economy<sup>25</sup>; or 3) in order to be repatriated.

Emigration peaked in 1992 when more than 53,000 persons left Latvia, for varying reasons: As a result of the recession in the Soviet-type industry high numbers of workers were being laid off. In order to find a

FIGURE 4.4 External Migration in Latvia (1989-1995)



Sources: *Latvija skaitlos* 1996, 28; *Diena*, 2 April 96, *Iedzivotaju* 1996, 1; *Latvijas demografijas* 1996, 134.

<sup>23</sup> *Labrit*, 17 February 1993.

<sup>24</sup> *Latvija skaitlos* 1996, 28.

<sup>25</sup> Zakon LP "O v" ezde i prebyvanii," *VS-SM* (supplement to *Diena*) 31 July 1992.

new job, they had to pass a language exam to demonstrate their command of the Latvian language. In addition, all residents had to be registered in the Registry of Residents, and, at that time, many people who were living in dormitories (in addition to several other categories of people) were denied such registration. At the same time, a number of factory dormitories were closed down, and people who were out of work, having no place to live, even temporarily, and poor chances of finding a new job, had nothing that kept them in Latvia any longer.

At the same time, the redeployment of the former Soviet army units which were now under Russian jurisdiction, also intensified. Finally, on 1 January 1992 a new law on privatization of cooperative flats entered into force.<sup>26</sup> This law allowed those who wanted to leave the country to sell their privatized flats legally.

However, since 1993 emigration from Latvia has gradually slowed down. Thus, the predictions of the sociologists who said that the overall majority of the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia had no intention of returning to their ethnic homeland, have been borne out.<sup>27</sup>

As before, the country of destination for the largest group of emigrants is Russia. In 1994, 77 percent of those who left Latvia headed for Russia, in 1995, 70 percent. The next most popular destinations were Belarus and Ukraine (5 and 7 percent, respectively). Only 2 to 3 percent left for U.S.A, Germany, or Israel.<sup>28</sup> Emigration to other countries was insignificant.

Generally speaking, these migrational processes have contributed to an aging of the remaining Latvian population. Naturally, elderly people have fewer real chances of achieving their goal if they should want to leave. Young people are everywhere more mobile. Among the emigrants there have been disproportionate numbers of individuals in their Thirties and Forties while the relative weight of persons over sixty years of age is only half their share of the population at large.

As regards the age group 16-29 years, they tend not to emigrate as much as the 30-50 year olds. One researcher, V. Volkov, has surmised that this reflects their greater hopes for successful adaptation to new life conditions in independent Latvia.<sup>29</sup>

Among the emigrants married people with children are overrepresented, as are persons with higher and medium levels of education.<sup>30</sup>

26 Zakon LP "O privatizatsii...", *VS-SM* (supplement to *Diena*) 24 December 1991.

28 *Iedzivotaju* 1995, 3.

29 Volkovs 1995, 161.

30 *Biznes un Baltija*, 18 March 1994.

These people may more easily find employment elsewhere than persons with low or no education.

## **Integration on the Political Level**

### ***Constitutional Provisions***

The 1922 constitution-the Satversme-which was reenacted in 1991 without any significant changes, does not contain any specific references to human rights or minority rights. In 1996 the Saeima (the Latvian Parliament) started deliberations on a draft for a new second part of the Constitution which will be exclusively devoted to human rights in general and to certain guarantees of minority rights in particular.<sup>31</sup> However, by the end of 1996 the draft had not yet passed even its first reading.

A Constitutional Law on the Rights and Obligations of Individuals and Citizens, which was adopted in December 1991, compensates for this lacuna to a certain extent.<sup>32</sup> Thus, for instance, Article 12 of this Act proclaims that all persons are equal before the law, irrespective of race, nationality, and language.

### ***The Law on Cultural Autonomy***

In March 1991, the Latvian Supreme Soviet adopted legislation on the free development of national and ethnic groups in Latvia and on their right to cultural autonomy.<sup>33</sup> This law guarantees all ethnic groups in Latvia the right to cultural autonomy and self-rule in matters concerning their own ethnic culture. They have the right to observe their traditions, to use their own symbols, and celebrate their national holidays. Article 5 gives all ethnic groups the right to establish national cultural societies and associations, and these organizations are guaranteed the right to address the public through government-controlled mass media as well as the right to set up their own printed media. According to Article 14, such cultural societies also have the right to engage in commercial activities and to enjoy tax privileges. Article 10 states that state organs of the Latvian Republic shall extend

31 *Diena*, 28 February 1996.

32 *Constitutional law* 1995, 19.

33 *Likums par Latvijas nacionalo*, 1995, 38.

material support to the development of the language, culture, and educational facilities of the national and ethnic groups living in Latvia and allocate financial means for these purposes over the state budget.

The national societies shall have the right to establish and run their own educational institutions. For their part, the national-cultural organizations are obliged to observe the laws of the Latvian Republic and to respect its sovereignty and territorial integrity (Article 6).

In the fall of 1993 the radical nationalistic Saeima faction "Fatherland and Freedom" presented a draft for an amended version of the Law on Cultural Autonomy. In their new version, the right to cultural autonomy should be extended to citizens of Latvia only. However, this amendment was rejected by the parliamentary majority.<sup>34</sup> A law adopted in April 1995-called the Act on the Status of Former Citizens of the USSR Who Do not Have Citizenship in Latvia or Any Other State (shortened below to Act on the Status of Former Citizens)-guarantees all permanent residents in Latvia, also non-citizens, the right to "preserve their native language and culture within the rights of national cultural autonomy and within their traditions, as long as these traditions do not conflict with Latvian laws" (art. 2, p.(2) 4).<sup>35</sup>

Implicitly, the law on cultural autonomy operates with a certain hierarchy of ethnic groups in Latvia. The preamble declares that "in the Latvian Republic lives the Latvian nation and the ancient indigenous nationality of the Livs, as well national and ethnic groups." No official documents define the distinction between "national" and "ethnic" groups. Off the record the architects of the law will say that, by "national," they had in mind groups which have their own statehood outside Latvia, such as, for instance, the Ukrainians, while the expression "ethnic" groups refers to those who have no statehood anywhere, such as, for instance, the Roma. Article 4 of the Act underlines the special responsibility of the state to preserve the national identity and the cultural and historical environment of the ancient indigenous nationality, the Livs.

In the Latvian political and public discourse frequent calls have been made for a further elaboration of this ethnic classification system. "Who, in fact, in scientific terminology, belongs to a national group, to an ethnic group, and to a historical minority, and which groups in Latvia may not be included among the autochthonous minorities?"<sup>36</sup> Appeals

34 *Diena* 12 November 1993; *Panorama Latvii*, 13 November 1993.

35 *SM-segodnia*, 4 May 1995.

36 *Diena* 11 June 1996.

for such categorization are met with fierce resistance from those minorities that are not regarded as "historical" in Latvia, the Ukrainians in particular. However, Latvian legislation currently in force does not distinguish among the minorities according to these "categories."

The Law on Cultural Autonomy was one of the first of its kind in the post-Communist states and was highly regarded by the representatives of various international organizations who studied it. Its main shortcoming is its purely declaratory character. The Law contains no mechanisms for the implementation of its declared principles. No legal regulations or instructions that could have compensated for this flaw exist. Therefore, to this day, there is no clear understanding in the Latvian legislation as to which organizations qualify for the appellation "national-cultural society." As a result, the actual implementation of the rights for which the law provides hinges on the economic situation in the country and on the good will of the bureaucrats in the executive organs of power.

### *Official Ethnicity Registration in Latvian Passports*

As stipulated in normative acts enacted by the Latvian Republic,<sup>37</sup> Latvian passports record not only the citizenship of the passport holders, but also their "nationality" (read: ethnicity). Thus, Latvia has retained the Soviet practice of official, mandatory ascription of ethnic extraction in personal IDs. The nationality point is retained also in the new passports which are conferred on the non-citizens in conformity with the provisions in the Act on the Status of Former Citizens. Also in the Registry of Residents the nationality of the inhabitants, including newborn babies, is recorded.<sup>38</sup> In cases of mixed marriages the nationality of one of the parents will be ascribed to the child.

Article 2 in the Act on Cultural Autonomy from 1991 laid down that the permanent residents should have the right to choose their nationality freely in accordance with their ethnic self-understanding. However, departmental instructions issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs allow for changes in the official registration of nationality only in cases when a passport holder of ethnically mixed parentage

<sup>37</sup> *Noteikumi par Latvijas*, 1995, 5.

<sup>38</sup> *LR Likums* "Par iedzīvotāju registru," 17 December 1991, 6 and 8

wants to adopt the nationality of the other parent or of one of the grandparents. After prolonged legal disputes a new law was finally adopted in June 1994 which sets forth procedures for changes of first names, last names, and nationality.<sup>39</sup> For all practical purposes, this law legalizes changes of nationality by "blood" only, not according to self-identification. A person who wants to have the nationality entry in his or her passport changed to "Latvian" must not only produce evidence that one of his or her parents is/was Latvian, but also "present a school certificate or another document showing the he has a command of the state language corresponding to the third (highest) level.<sup>40</sup> The provisions of the law on cultural autonomy were subsequently amended to correspond to this new law.<sup>41</sup>

In 1996, the Saeima adopted some amendments to the law on changes of first names, last names, and nationality. The language requirements were lowered for certain categories of applicants who wanted to be registered as "Latvians": disabled persons of Group 1 whose invalidity was permanent; disabled persons of Group 2 with a speech or hearing impediment, as well as persons over 75 years of age. These groups were now required to have a command of the Latvian language equal to the second (medium) level only.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time the regulations for registering as a "Liv" were also amended: In cases in which the applicant is unable to produce evidence of his Livian extraction, a resolution from the Organization of Livs testifying to the ethnic origin of the applicant may be attached to the application. This resolution must be certified by the Cabinet of Ministers.

How many nationality entries have actually been altered according to these procedures we do not know, as there are no exact data available about the practical implementation of this law. However, circumstantial evidence allows us to draw certain conclusions. Thus, in 1995 12,200 Jews were registered in Latvia,<sup>43</sup> a year later this group had increased to 14,200.<sup>44</sup> This change could hardly have been brought about by natural increase, not least because the Jews have the lowest natural growth of all the ethnic groups in Latvia. The only possible explanation behind this expansion of the Jewish community must therefore be sought in adjustments in the nationality entry in the passports. In a similar

39 *LR Likums* "Par varda, uzvarda un tautibas ieraksta mainu," 15 June 1994.

40 Concerning the requirements for command of the state language, cf section on the language situation below.

41 The amendment was adopted on 30 June 1994. See *Diena*, 19 July 1994

42 *Diena*, 12 June 1996.

43 *Latvija skaitlos* 1996, 25.

44 *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie gruppy*, 1996, supplement.

manner, the numbers of Latvians, Poles, and Germans are growing. Obviously, these processes reflect a changing cultural identity among certain Russified groups, but some cases also bear the unmistakable imprint of very mundane considerations (especially among the "new" Jews and Germans, who thus gain the opportunity to emigrate to Israel or Germany).

To sum up: while the Latvian legislation prohibits ethnic discrimination on principle it does contain certain provisions which single out certain groups for special treatment. In practical terms, however, the only such provision that has really significant consequences is the stipulation in the Citizenship Law providing for citizenship on an ethnic principle.<sup>45</sup>

### *Consultative Institutions*

In January 1991, the Latvian Supreme Council adopted a statute on the establishment of a Consultative Council of Nationalities to be attached to the Supreme Council of the Latvian Republic. The main purpose of this council would be to "provide for the participation of representatives of all national and ethnic groups in the legislative process in order to secure their equal rights in economic, social, political and cultural matters."<sup>46</sup> The statute of the Supreme Council stipulated that each ethnic group should delegate three representatives to this Consultative Council. The Council should have the right to present draft laws (enjoy the right of legal initiative). Resolutions passed by the council should be regarded as a recommendation to the Supreme Council. Also the Law on Cultural Autonomy from March 1991 (discussed above) refers to the establishment of a consultative council. However, neither the law nor the statute laid down rules for the nomination or election of members to the Council, the only stipulation being that its final composition must be confirmed by the Parliament. When the activists of the various cultural societies finally, after prolonged efforts, managed to present a list of council members to the Supreme Council the majority of the MPs voted against the proposal. The consultative council was therefore never able to commence its work.

In the spring of 1993 the newly elected president of the Latvian Republic, Guntis Ulmanis, declared his intention to establish a consultative council on minority question to be attached to the president's office. The model for Ulmanis' scheme was the Round Table for minority

<sup>45</sup> Cf. section on citizenship below.

<sup>46</sup> *Ofitsial'naija informatsiia press-tsentra Verkhovnogo Soveta LR*, 11 February 1991.

problems which had been created by the president's office in Estonia the same year. It took approximately three years to implement President Ulmanis' idea. The Presidential Consultative Council of Latvia did not meet for its first session until mid-July 1996.<sup>47</sup> The Association of National Cultural Societies of Latvia had been asked to appoint six members to this council, while some others were personally invited by the president to participate.

In the summer of 1991 the Latvian Council of Ministers established a Department of Nationalities. The task of this department was to assist in the resolution of problems related to national minorities and their organizations. Initially, the Department was independent and not subordinated to any particular ministry. It employed more than ten officials. However, as a result of several reshufflings in early 1995 the Department was turned into a section under the Ministry of Justice and its staff complement was reduced to three. At the same time the prerogatives of the office were curbed. It was now restricted for all practical purposes to assist the national societies in conducting their cultural activities.

In 1990 a new Section of Minority Schools was created within the Ministry of Education. Staffed with four officials, this section was assigned the task of promoting the establishment of minority schools and handling issues related to Russian-language educational institutions. However, very soon the Section was reorganized into an office with only two employees and subsequently even this office was scrapped. Matters concerning schools with a non-Latvian language of instruction were entrusted to a single expert in the Ministry.<sup>48</sup> Finally, this position was eliminated too.<sup>49</sup>

In the fall of 1988, when the country was in the grips of a national revival, a Forum for the Peoples of Latvia was convened. This was a major event, and, in many respects, defined the future course of the official ethnic policy for some years to come.<sup>50</sup> In spite of the fact that plans were made to convene new forums with regular intervals, this first forum was fated to be the last one as well. In succeeding years neither the Parliament nor the Government took any initiative for its convocation.

47 *Panorama Latvii*, 20 July 1996.

48 See, for instance, the interview with one of the members of the Committee on Human Rights and Nationality Affairs in the Latvian Supreme Soviet, E. Aboltins, *SM-segodnia*, 23 April 1993.

49 *SM-segodnia*, 21 April 1994.

50 *Latvijas PRS Tautu* 1989.

## **The Political Rhetorics of Nation-Building**

From the very outset, all the political forces that were engaged in the drive for the reestablishment of Latvian independence devoted much attention to questions related to nation-formation in an independent Latvian state. Their ideologies and strategies revolved around such issues as ethnopolitical strategies, the role of the ethnic factor, and the role of the various ethnic groups in state-building and nation-building.

Nationalist Latvian organizations set forth the principle of ethnocentricity for the independent Latvian state. Thus, already in the summer of 1990, the vice-chairman of the Movement for the National Independence of Latvia, Mirdza Vitola, was declaring: "The main objective of our program is a create a Latvia in which the Latvian people will be masters on their own soil."<sup>51</sup> To a large extent this statement characterized the position of many other influential Latvian social movements as well. For instance, the chairman of the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL), Romualdas Razukas, forecasted that the membership of the Front would gradually become more and more ethnically homogeneous: "The time has passed when more non-Latvians can become members of the PFL. [...] Perhaps other democratic organizations will be created for the non-Latvians, labor unions, for instance."<sup>52</sup> These and similar utterances reflected quite graphically the dominant way of thinking among most ethnic Latvians regarding the role and place of the non-Latvians in public life in an independent Latvia.

Many leaders of the PFL and other prominent organizations emphasized that the idea of democracy alone could not provide for a stable social development of an independent Latvian state. The idea of the priority of the Latvian ethnonation had to be introduced as a supplementary conceptual basis of Latvian statehood.<sup>53</sup> The leaders of the nationalistic organizations reacted very strongly against all attempts to protect the interests of the minorities.

I regard the Law on the Free Development of National and Ethnic Groups in Latvia and on their Right to Cultural Autonomy as a spit in the face. [...] First and foremost the rights of the indigenous nation must be secured. Only then may the indigenous nation decide on the question of the national minorities in a democratic manner.

51 *Sovetskaia Molodezh'*, 4 July 1990.

52 *Atmoda*, 25 September 1990.

53 See, e.g., the article by Ia. Freimanis in *Atmoda*, 15 January 1991.

wrote Olgerts Dzenitis, the leader of the Latvian branch of the "Organization of Unrepresented peoples."<sup>54</sup>

Also Latvian scholars contributed to the discussion on ethnonational statehood, giving this idea an academic basis for "the wider public" to build on. One of the leading Latvian ethnologists, Leo Dribins, wrote in a popular article that.

when a people is deprived of a national purpose it is reduced to a conglomerate of individuals existing on a certain territory, a formless grey population, exasperated by everyday, prosaic disorders, and living by a pecuniary hope of succeeding in their private lives. The national purpose unites and elevates the people. Also a national state must serve this goal.<sup>55</sup>

In this way the idea of an ethnic statehood was presented as a lofty moral ideal. It was addressed from an ethical viewpoint, not from a perspective of rational and democratic social structures.

Another ethnologist, Elmars Vebers, insisted that the issue of the rights of the Latvian ethnonation needed a more detailed, legal elaboration. These rights he linked to the idea of "ethical Latvian-ness" by which he meant "the synthesis of ethnic and ethical values." In Vebers' opinion, an implementation of this approach would turn Latvia into a "state of national justice, that is, into an (ethnically) Latvian country."<sup>56</sup>

The assertion that ethnic rights ought to have paramount value was opposed by the inner core of PFL leaders. Usually, they formulated their positions in terms of culture, but in their rhetoric also considerations of political strategy may be easily detected. For instance, one of the main architects behind the Popular Front, the poet, philosopher and man of letter Viktors Avotins, wrote: "I am in favor of a normal and principled solution to the painful problems which Stalinism has created for my people's statehood and constitutional rights. But I will *actively* go against any kind of discrimination."<sup>57</sup> This position was supported by those members of the non-Latvian intelligentsia who took active part in the movement for the restoration of Latvian independence. As formulated by the Director of the Department of nationalities, Vladimir Steshenko:

I believe that the starting point on the road toward Latvian independence must be a recognition of the fact that we are people of different nationalities.

<sup>54</sup> *Jumala*, 12 September 1991.

<sup>55</sup> *SM-segodnia*, 6 February 1992.

<sup>56</sup> *Literatura un maksla*, 7 February 1992.

<sup>57</sup> *Sovetskaia molodezh'*, 2 July 1988. Emphasis in the original.

We have ended up in this country for very different reasons, but all of us regard her as our Motherland and want her to be free and to prosper. Therefore, we are the people of Latvia [...].<sup>58</sup>

Vladlen Dozortsev, a deputy to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, formulated this position even more trenchantly: "It is hardly a sign of health in a community if the people are doing their utmost to attain national uniformity."<sup>59</sup> It should be pointed out that the attitudes of Steshenko and Dozortsev were reflected in the vast majority of official documents produced by the Popular Front. The Baltic Assembly, for instance—a joint conference of leaders from the Popular Fronts of Estonia and Latvia as well as from the Lithuanian movement of Sajudis—in 1989 pledged "to secure the civic rights of all national and ethnic groups who live on the territories of our states, as well as to concede them the right to cultural self-rule."<sup>60</sup>

Thus, in the following years, two concepts for nation-formation—one ethnic and one civic and political—became bones of strong contention in the struggle for social paradigms at the level of Latvian political rhetoric and *belle-lettres*.

Toward the end of 1992, the concept of a "single community state" (*odnoobshchinnoe gosudarstvo*) came into vogue as a description of the desired evolution of the nation-building process. For instance, one of the leaders of the Movement for the National Independence of Latvia, Einars Cilinskis, claimed that if the so-called "zero option" of citizenship was accepted (which would grant all permanent residents of Latvia full citizenship rights),

Latvia will be turned into a two-community state with two political groups and two representative bodies. [...] World experience has shown that such two-community states are very brittle. [...] We are in favor of decolonization and deoccupation. All those who entered Latvia along with the occupation army should leave the country together with it. [...] There is also the option of emigration, to be repatriated. Most importantly, the political power must be in the hands of the [ethnic] Latvians. That is the only way to secure that Latvia will become a national state.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the national radicals understood the term "one-community state" first and foremost as an instrument to "squeeze out" of Latvia as many non-Latvians as possible and to deny those who stay behind any participation in the wielding of political power. More moderate

58 *Jurmala*, 12 September 1991.

59 *Daugava* 1992, 4, 112.

60 *Baltiškaia assambleia* 1989, 5.

61 *SM-segodnia*, 28 November 1992.

Latvian politicians, for their part, regarded the notion of one-community rather as an instrument of assimilation, albeit a more or less harsh instrument. As expressed by the political commentator Valdis Egle, "the centrists would like to see a [national] unification on the basis of Latvian culture."<sup>62</sup>

In 1995 the term "political nation" cropped up in the political and publicistic debate. Apparently, the introduction of this concept reflected the increased contacts with Western political and scholarly milieux, which greatly intensified when Latvia became a member of the Council of Europe. Initially, to most people, the idea of a "political nation" was regarded as identical to the "one-community state," and this view is still widespread. However, most authors today who apply the concept of a "political nation" to Latvia, think somewhat differently.

One of the founders of the Latvian Popular Front, currently Latvian ambassador to Russia, Janis Peters, writes:

The only solution is to create a single nation in the Latvian state. At present, we don't have such a nation, we have only nationalities, one of which is the Latvians. A state in which the population does not have a shared sense of belonging to one nation, will find it hard to defend its interests, since the ethnic interests are not identified with the national interests of the state. In a state, the concept of "national" is a transethnic concept.<sup>63</sup>

This opinion is seconded, albeit somewhat ambiguously, by Leo Dribins: "The political nation is a community of people which is united by political objectives and interests. [...] Ethnic nationalism loses its positive power if it is not able to rally all nationalities around its national state, that is, if it is not able to create a political nation."<sup>64</sup> The journalist Ainars Dimants, who enjoys a reputation as a strong and inflexible supporter of liberalism, lends his support for the idea: "we should by all means strive toward the creation of a democratic state with a socially responsible market economy, and should not stress ethnic values only."<sup>65</sup>

Saeima member Janis Urbanovish emphasized that it is imperative to integrate the Russian-speakers into Latvian society. Without such integration a political nation may not be achieved: "the apprehensions of the Russians have persisted for five years, and will not subside until

62 *Latvijas Vestnesis*, 8 May 1993.

63 *Diena*, 28 December 1995.

64 *Diena*, 14 March 1996.

65 *Diena*, 21 October 1996.

an answer has been found to the question: what will the political nation of Latvia look like, in which common goals and mutual trust reign?"<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, also other versions of the political nation, based on older, ethnocentric ideas, are actively circulated on the level of political rhetoric. For instance, the philosopher Vilnis Zarins writes: "when all citizens of Latvia can read and write in good, literate Latvian, only then will any talk of a political nation have a real basis."<sup>67</sup> Latvian-language newspapers frequently publish letters from readers who protest against the very idea of a political nation: "Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians who live in Latvia may not be regarded as national minorities, since all these people have their own ethnic territories somewhere else in the world. If they want to live in the territory of Latvia, they must, without any reservations, accept all the laws, the social structure, the mentality, language, and culture of the Latvians, in short, everything that characterizes the life of the Latvian people."<sup>68</sup>

To conclude: toward the end of 1997 the concept of "ethnic statehood" continued to dominate the discourse at the level of political rhetoric and collective consciousness, although a number of other interpretations also had been introduced into the debate.

## **The Citizenship Issue**

### *Restored Citizenship*

Among the new states of the former Soviet Union the solution to the citizenship problem in Latvia and Estonia was unique and, to large extent, defined the specific character of the ethnopolitical conflict. As will be recalled, these two Baltic states were the only post-Soviet states which did not adopt the "zero option" of citizenship after the restoration of independence. Only those individuals who were citizens of Latvia before 1940 and their descendants were recognized as citizens of the reestablished states. This solution was based on formal-legal considerations-the concept of legal restoration.

When Latvia was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, all citizens of Latvia were granted Soviet citizenship through a decree of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and their Latvian citizenship was annulled.

66 *Diena*, 26 October 1996.

67 *Diena*, 8 November 1996.

68 *Netkarīga Rita Avize*, 11 April 1996.

Many democratic states refused to recognize the legality of this annexation, although the nature of this refusal was more political than legal.

In the elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet in the spring of 1990 all inhabitants of Latvia could participate, including Soviet military personnel. The Popular Front of Latvia won a resounding victory at the polls. A significant number of non-Latvians voters also supported this alternative. The PFL election program contained what, for all practical purposes, amounted to support of the "zero option" citizenship alternative,<sup>69</sup> and this plank in the Front's platform was decisive in securing the support of many Russian-speaking voters. The "zero option" was also publicly endorsed in the speeches and statements of many PFL leaders. Andrej Pantelejevs, for one—who was elected to the Saeima and became the leader of the Latvian Way caucus in the 5th and 6th Saeimas—declared in March 1990 that, "I believe that anyone who regards himself as a patriot of Latvia may become a Latvian citizen. The definition and the criteria for the acquisition of citizenship ought to be each Latvian inhabitant's personal, voluntary, and conscious expression of will."<sup>70</sup> Later, Pantelejevs explained why the Popular Front retreated from this position:

I will say this very candidly and somewhat cynically. Theoretically, the ethnic Latvians could have fought for their independence with honest means. That would have led to confrontations with weapons in hand. The alternative course, therefore, looked much more sensible: To penetrate by legal means the power structures which existed at that time. In order to do that we needed votes, and, as you know, at that time all inhabitants of Latvia had the right to vote. So, we fully consciously said that our goal was the so-called zero option. Yes, this was a conscious lie in order to avoid human casualties.<sup>71</sup>

This pragmatic approach was common to quite a few members of the relatively narrow new political elite which was in the process of being formed at the time.

69 *Atmoda*, 12 February 1990.

70 *Atmoda*, 16 March 1990.

71 *Latvīia-chia ona rodina?* 1994,105.

*Perceptions of the Citizenship Issue  
Among Different Ethnic Groups*

Among the Latvian population at large the restrictive approach to the citizenship problem was often based on ethnic considerations: more effectively than any other solution this approach secured the goal of making the ethnic Latvians "masters on their own soil."<sup>72</sup> A restrictive citizenship legislation would secure their control of the levers of the state apparatus, and such control was in turn regarded as indispensable in order to prevent the physical disappearance of the Latvian people.<sup>73</sup>

Very soon after the achievement of independence the idea of restricted access to citizenship gained prominence among ethnic Latvians. Of course, part of the reason for this turn was the active propaganda of the nationalist organizations, but one should not exaggerate their importance. A survey conducted in 1991 at the request of the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen*, showed that 41 percent of the ethnic Latvians were in favor of a "stern" attitude in the citizenship question, while only 8 percent supported the liberal "zero option."<sup>74</sup> Another survey conducted in 1993 by Richard Rose and William Maley indicated that half of all ethnic Latvians were in favor of extending citizenship to citizens of prewar Latvians and their descendants only.<sup>75</sup>

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of the ethnic Latvians conceded that post-1940 emigrants to Latvia ought to be allowed to be naturalized on specific, more or less stringent conditions. Thus, in a third survey conducted in August 1993 by the Baltic Research Centre, with financial support from the Central European University and the Latvian Scientific Council, 39 percent of the interviewed Latvians thought that citizenship ought to be granted on a quota basis in order to secure that the share of ethnic Latvians among the citizens did not fall below 75 percent. In the same group, 53 percent believed that "citizenship ought to be open to all persons who have lived for a certain period of time in this country, who know the Latvian language, and are loyal toward the Latvian Republic." Only three percent supported the zero option.<sup>76</sup> In this opinion poll, the attitudes of the non-Latvians differed very markedly from those of the Latvians: the three options outlined above were supported by 3 percent, 31 percent and 61 percent,

72 See, e.g., *Atmoda*, 25 September 90. *Ibid.*, 2 October 1990; *passim*.

See, e.g., the resolution from the conference "The chances of the Latvian nation," in *Latviesunacijas izredzes* 1990, 142.

74 Poulsen 1994, 26.

75 Rose and Maley 1994.

76 *Diena*, 7 October 1993.

respectively. Thus, the question of citizenship is one the issues which most clearly divides the attitudes of the Russophones from those of ethnic Latvians.

The survey conducted by the Baltic Research Centre showed that despite the negative attitude toward the restrictive citizenship options which predominated among the non-citizens, a large number of them intended to do everything which was required of them by the laws in order to achieve Latvian citizenship. However, if as much as 67 percent thought so in January 1993, this percentage had dropped drastically by August of the same year when only 41 percent adhered to this view. Obviously, in January very many people did not grasp how complicated the naturalization procedure would become. In August, on the other hand, the Parliament had begun to discuss various draft laws for citizenship. These discussions were reported in the press, and many non-citizens realized that they would be unable to fulfill the stringent criteria or even fall within the categories that could apply for citizenship in the foreseeable future. From January to August 1993 the percentage of non-citizens who intended to "stay on in Latvia without citizenship" rose from 7 percent to 28 percent. The numbers who planned to "move to another country," on the other hand, remained relatively constant (3 percent in January, 4 percent in August).

The evolution of the responses in this two-stage survey may be regarded as short-term changes brought about by the greater clarity surrounding the likely naturalization procedures. The long-term tendencies, on the other hand, went in the other direction. In particular, research conducted by the Baltic Data House between 1989 and 1994 showed that an increasing number of non-citizens wanted to become citizens of Latvia." In 1990, approximately 40 percent of the non-Latvians expressed a desire to receive Latvian citizenship; by 1994 this figure had risen to three-quarters of the Russians and two-thirds of the non-Russian non-citizens. In the latter year, only 10 percent of the non-Latvians either did not want to become a citizen of Latvia, or had not made up their mind.<sup>78</sup>

By the time the citizenship law was adopted, the majority of the ethnic Latvians apparently regarded the issue as exhausted. For the non-citizens, on the contrary, the question had become even more acute. Evidence of these divided attitudes may found in a survey conducted in December 1994 by the Institute of Market and Social Research "Latvijas fakti": the non-citizens regarded the problem of citizenship as a question which the Latvian Parliament and government ought to give

priority over all other issues. (34.6 percent of the non-citizens adhered to this view while 32.5 percent indicated unemployment as the most important problem. 26.6 percent ticked off for the need to reestablish local industry, and 24.8 percent regarded crime prevention as the most urgent task of the legislators.) Citizens of Latvia, on the other hand, did not list the problem of citizenship among the top ten important questions of contemporary Latvian society at all.<sup>79</sup>

*Citizenship and Human Rights:  
The Attitudes of the International Community*

The problem of citizenship in Latvia provoked lively debates among international human rights experts. Since there was no precedence for legal state restoration after such a long period of foreign annexation, the opinions of the experts differed significantly.<sup>80</sup> In the early 1990s, numerous studies devoted to this issue were published in the West as well as in Latvia. Some of the experts inclined toward a restorationist concept of citizenship,<sup>81</sup> while others concluded that the principle of "citizenship restoration" conflicted with the norms of basic human rights documents.<sup>82</sup> A third group of analysts insisted that there was no contradiction between the Latvian citizenship principles on the one hand and internationally accepted human rights on the other.<sup>83</sup>

One of the most incisive analyses of these problems was provided by Rogers Brubaker. He distinguished between three models, i.e., new states, restored states, and compromise models. The task of a new state is to define an initial body of citizens: this is usually done in a territorially inclusive fashion. The task of a restored state is to confirm the status of an already existing citizenry and to restore citizenship and statehood to real effectiveness. In the compromise models the existing citizenry is confirmed but it is not considered as a sufficiently inclusive body for the restored state.<sup>84</sup> With few reservations, Brubaker's approach to the citizenship issue was accepted by most international organizations, and the principle of "restored citizenship" as such became ever-more rarely the topic of questioning from a human rights point of view. At the same time, the international organizations continued to

<sup>79</sup> *Labrit*, 11 January 1995.

<sup>80</sup> For a detailed analysis of the conclusions of the various experts and fact-finding missions, see Birckenbach 1997.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Bojars 1992, 331.

<sup>82</sup> In particular, Eide 1992.

<sup>83</sup> For instance, Fehervary 1993, 392.

<sup>84</sup> Brubaker 1992, 269.

monitor closely the process of citizenship legislation in Latvia and the implementation of the citizenship law. Particularly important in this respect was the CSCE/OSCE Mission to Latvia, which was mandated, first and foremost, to observe on the citizenship situation.<sup>85</sup>

As Velio Pettai has remarked, the policy of nonrecognition of the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states, which most Western countries had adopted during the Cold War, led them to "objectivize" the ethnonationalism of the Baltic peoples by treating it in the terms of international law. For that reason, the first parliamentary elections to be held in Latvia and Estonia after the restoration of independence were declared "free and fair" despite the fact that a large part of the permanent residents were barred from participating in them. Rather than bringing pressure to bear on the Baltic countries the West chose to integrate them into European political structures in the expectation that the "Baltic trauma" would eventually pass and that the influence of ethnonationalism in the state policies of these countries would gradually diminish.<sup>86</sup>

### *The Adoption of the Citizenship Law*

When Latvia adopted its declaration of independence in May 1990 what amounted to a situation of "dual power" existed for a while in Latvia.<sup>87</sup> The extreme lack of clarity which this situation engendered was aggravated by strong disagreements within the Latvian political elite and by the ambiguous signals emanating from the international community. As a combined result, for a long time after the formal restoration of independence no legal acts were passed on the citizenship issue.

In the midst of the January crisis in 1991, during which Soviet OMON units fought against police units that were loyal to Riga authorities, a bilateral treaty between the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation was hastily signed (on 13 January) and equally hastily ratified by the Latvian Supreme Council (on 15 January). One of the articles in this agreement granted all individuals who were permanent residents of Latvia at the time of the restoration of Latvian

85 On the activities of the OSCE mission to Latvia, see Lange 1994; Tsilevich 1995.

86 Pettai 1993.

87 Between May 1990 and August 1991 there existed in Latvia both a police corps which was loyal to the government and Soviet OMON forces which did not take orders from Latvian authorities. Similarly, there were two parallel Attorney Generals' offices, etc.

independence (May 1990) the right to choose freely between Latvian and Russian citizenship. However, this agreement was never ratified by the Russian Parliament and therefore did not enter legal force.

The Latvian Supreme Council returned to the question of citizenship legislation only after the coup attempt in Moscow in August 1991 had collapsed and the international community had recognized Latvian independence. The nationalist faction in the parliament asserted that since this organ had been elected by the entire corpus of Latvian residents, it did not have the right to decide on the question of citizenship, only to restore citizenship rights to the prewar body of citizens. A law regulating the principles of naturalization could, they maintained, be adopted only by a Saeima elected exclusively by citizens. The Supreme Council acceded to this point of view. Thus, on 15 October 1991, it adopted a Resolution on the Restoration of the Body of Citizens and on the Main Principles of Naturalization.<sup>88</sup> Based on this resolution a registry of persons who held Latvian citizenship before 1940 and their descendants was compiled. Those who entered this registry were allowed to participate in the parliamentary elections of 1993. Only in the fall of 1993 did the new parliament, the Saeima, begin to discuss the citizenship law anew.

The protracted and stormy Saeima debates on this issue focused primarily on the dilemma of "providing guarantees for the survival of the Latvian nation," on the one hand, and the need to adopt a law which was in accordance with European standards, on the other.<sup>89</sup> In the upshot, the Saeima adopted a draft law in its first reading. The main peculiarity of this draft was the introduction of the principle of yearly quotas for naturalization, to be fixed annually by the Cabinet of Ministers and confirmed by the Saeima. These quotas, it was stated, should be "based on the demographic and economic situation of the state, and geared toward the development of Latvia as a national, one-community state."<sup>90</sup>

However, the Council of Europe and the CSCE objected strongly against this principle.<sup>91</sup> The discussions in the Latvian Parliament continued for some months, in the course of which a number of basic principles in the draft law underwent essential changes. Finally, on 21 June 1994 the Law on Citizenship was passed in a third reading. Also in this

89 The minutes of the plenary session of the Saeima were published in *Latvijas vestnesis*, 2 December 1993. *tnesis*, 30 November 1993.

91 See van der Stoep, 'Comments on the Draft citizenship law' 1994/ *SM-segodnia* 24-26

definitive edition the law contained certain clauses which ran against the recommendations of the European organizations (in particular, the quota system, although in this version it was limited to fewer categories).

As a result of the parliament's handling of the citizenship issue Latvia ran the risk of being denied membership in the Council of Europe. President Ulmanis therefore made use of his constitutional right to reject the law and returned it to the Parliament for renewed examination. On 22 July 1994, the Saeima debated the draft law once again and introduced some more amendments based on the recommendations of European experts. When this had been done the president promulgated the law.

In the final version of the citizenship law the quota system was replaced by a "timetable" or by "windows" of naturalization. Only persons who belonged to certain privileged categories could begin to apply for citizenship immediately after the law entered into legal force. These were ethnic Latvians; Livs; spouses of citizens who had been married for at least ten years; persons who had had legal residence in Latvia before 1940; graduates from Latvian-language schools, and former citizens of Lithuania and Estonia, as well as certain other groups.

The second category, which included individuals who were born in Latvia and aged between 16 and 20 years old, could begin to apply for citizenship on 1 January 1996. Next, from 1 January 1997 individuals under 25 years of age could begin to apply, etc. Persons born outside Latvia may begin to apply for citizenship in 2001 if they entered Latvia as minors, in the year 2002 if they were 30 years or younger on arrival, and all others after 2003.<sup>92</sup>

In all categories the applicants must fulfill the same criteria of naturalization: five years of residence in Latvia; a command of the Latvian language; familiarity with the fundamental aspects of the Latvian constitution, of the Constitutional law, of the text of the national anthem, and of the history of Latvia. They must also document that they have a legal source of income in Latvia, and renounce their previous citizenship (expatriation). Persons belonging to some categories may never apply for citizenship. Among these are, *in casu*, persons who have chosen Latvia as their country of permanent abode after being demobilized from the Soviet Army.

## *Naturalization*

The first months after the adoption of the citizenship law were used to draw up and pass the necessary legal implementation documents to go with it, as well as to hire personnel to staff the Naturalization Authority. Thus, the actual naturalization process was able to start up only on 1 February 1995. It soon transpired that there was no stampede to become Latvian citizens: by the end of July 1996, the Cabinet of Ministers had granted citizenship rights to no more than 2,459 persons while 4,474 cases remained under examination in the various regional offices of the Authority.<sup>93</sup> By 31 January 1997 altogether 4,161 new citizenships had been granted and, by March of the same year, 4,644.<sup>94</sup> Much bigger groups were eligible for naturalization: in 1995, approximately 60,000 persons (those having the right to preferential treatment); in 1996, an additional 33,000 (Latvian-born young people in the age groups 16-20); and in 1997 another 31,000 (Latvian-born people younger than 25). Thus, as pointed out by the director of the Naturalization Board, E. Aldermane, by June 1997 124,000 individuals were eligible for naturalization.<sup>95</sup>

The low volume of naturalization came as a surprise to all involved parties. All surveys (referred to above) indicated that a majority of the non-citizens wanted Latvian citizenship. Different attempts have been made to explain the low number of applications: A survey conducted by the Naturalization Board of Latvia suggested the following main reasons for the evident disinclination of the non-citizens to apply for citizenship:<sup>96</sup> Insufficient command of the Latvian language (26 percent); insufficient familiarity with Latvian laws and history (26 percent); lack of necessary information (14 percent); and too heavy naturalization fee (11 percent).<sup>97</sup> Among other reasons given were a reluctance to serve in the Latvian army; unwillingness to lose an opportunity to travel to Russia without a visa, and general passivity among the non-citizen population.

The non-citizens themselves, as well as representatives of the political opposition, often question these conclusions.<sup>98</sup> They argue that also girls who are not subject to conscription into the army fail to apply for

<sup>93</sup> *Naturalizācijas process Latvijā. Galvenie radītāji*. 13 August 1995.

<sup>94</sup> Information sheet of the Latvian Naturalization Board, 10 February 1997; information from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 April 1997.

<sup>95</sup> *SM-segodnia*, 9 June 1997.

<sup>96</sup> *On naturalization* 1997, 30-31.

<sup>97</sup> 30 Lats, the equivalent of 60 U.S. dollars.

<sup>98</sup> See, e.g., *SM-segodnia*, 23 April 1997, and many similar comments.

citizenship. Also, the USSR passports on the basis of which the non-citizens can travel visa-free to Russia, will soon be invalid. Finally, school children and university students enjoy a fifty-percent discount on the naturalization fee, and money in itself is hardly a crucial factor.

The main obstacle to fast naturalization, it is argued, is to be found in the far too stringent tests. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Max van der Stoel, has claimed that most citizens of the Netherlands would fail a test consisting of similar questions about Dutch history and law.<sup>99</sup> What may be even more important is the non-citizens' growing sense of alienation from the state. Many non-citizens consider the conditions for receiving citizenship as unjust and degrading. Also, they do not trust that the state will "play fair" and abide by its own rules. The authorities have already deceived them once, by renegeing on the promise of the "zero option." Thus, there are good reasons to believe that the causes behind the unexpectedly low volume of naturalization applications should be sought, first of all, in the state policies which effectively discouraged non-citizens and undermine their initial enthusiasm about naturalization.

A survey conducted in November 1996 showed that only 19 percent of the non-citizens were strongly determined to apply for citizenship while 24 percent were thinking about doing so.<sup>100</sup> In a similar survey conducted one-and-a-half years earlier by the same research team, twice as many—38 percent—had been determined to apply.

### *Ethnic Aspects of Citizenship*

Some of the naturalized citizens received their new status as a result of amendments to the citizenship law that were adopted in March 1995. These amendments gave ethnic Latvians and graduates from schools with instruction in the Latvian language the right to become citizens without any more ado, simply by registering as such.<sup>101</sup> As a result, many people were now faced with the problem of proving their Latvian origin. When the registration deadline expired (on 1 March 1996), it transpired that approximately 17,000 persons living permanently in Latvia and claiming to be ethnic Latvians, did not have but wanted to gain Latvian citizenship.<sup>102</sup> Some of these were people who had themselves lived in Russia in the interwar period, or their parents had.

99 RFE/RL Newslines, 8 April 1997.

100 Rose 1997a, 59.

101 *Latvijas Republikas Pamatlikumi* 1995, 25.

102 *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie* 1996.

The March amendments created for the first time a direct linkage between Latvian citizenship and ethnicity. To be sure, also before these amendments were adopted the "ethnic dimension" of the citizenship legislation was rather transparent. Although the resolution adopted by the Supreme Council of the Latvian Republic in 1991 on the restoration of the body of Latvian citizens did not contain any overt ethnic criteria it nevertheless automatically turned the vast majority of ethnic Latvians into citizens while the majority of the Russian-speaking residents in Latvia were categorized as citizens of USSR who, when the Soviet Union collapsed shortly afterwards, became *defacto* stateless persons.

Table 4.4 shows the ethnic composition of the body of citizens and non-citizens in Latvia as of February 1996. Among the citizens, ethnic Latvians make up 78.5 percent while their share of the population in general is around 56 percent. For the Russians, the figures are 16 and 30 percent, respectively.

By February 1996, 99 percent of all ethnic Latvians in Latvia had acquired Latvian citizenship, while only some 38 percent of the Russians, 19 percent of the Belarusians, and 6 percent of the Ukrainians had (see Figure 4.5). Among the so-called "historical minorities," such as Roma and Poles, the percentages of people acquiring citizenship were significantly higher.

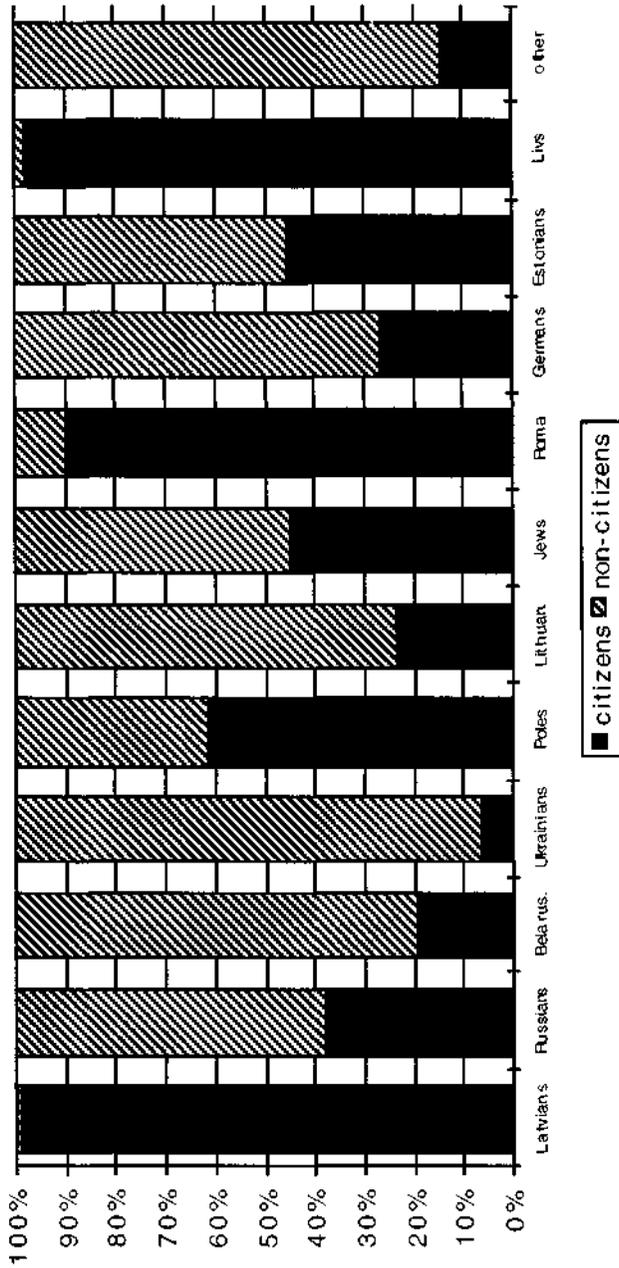
TABLE 4.4 Ethnic Composition of Citizenry and Ethnicity of Non-Citizens (February 1996)

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	<u>percent of citizens</u>	<u>percent of non-citizens</u>
Latvians	78.6	2.5
Russians	16.3	65.1
Belarusians	1.2	12.0
Ukrainians	0.2	9.0
Poles	2.2	3.4
Lithuanians	0.5	3.8
Jews	0.4	1.1
Roma	0.4	0.1
Germans	0.1	0.4
other	0.2	2.7

Source: *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie* 1996.

FIGURE 4.5 Share of Citizens Within Main Ethnic Groups in Latvia (February 1996)



Source: *Natsionalnye i etnicheskie 1996.*

In addition to applying for Latvian citizenship Russian-speaking non-citizens of Latvia have the option of applying for citizenship in another state. Every former Soviet citizen could become a citizen of Russia through a process of formal registration. Belarusian citizenship law is also very liberal in this respect. Ukrainian citizenship law contains somewhat stricter limitations, but the current version of this law gives emigrants from the Ukraine the right to become Ukrainian citizens without physically moving to the Ukraine.

There are no exact data available on the numbers of permanent residents of Latvia who have taken up citizenship in another state. From time to time fragmentary information is published in the media. For instance, the following figures have been cited in the press with reference to sources in the Russian embassy in Riga: by April 1993, the number of persons who had received Russian citizenship through Russian consular offices in Latvia was given as 12,000,<sup>103</sup> as of July 1993, 17,000,<sup>104</sup> and by February 1997 approximately 65,000.<sup>105</sup> By the summer of 1994 around 20,000 persons had become Belarusian citizens.<sup>106</sup> The number of Estonian, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian citizens was estimated to be considerably lower.

It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of these data. As it happens, many people apply for Russian citizenship immediately before their departure for Russia, and the Russian consulate does not know how many of the "new" Russian citizens stay on in Latvia and how many leave.

The first official Latvian statistics to shed some light on this issue were published in the demographic yearbook of 1996.<sup>107</sup> Referring to information taken from the Registry of Residents, the compilers of the yearbook could tell that by the beginning of 1996 citizens of the Russian Federation made up 0.15 percent of the total population of Latvia. In absolute figures, this amounted to 3,750 persons. 1,250 persons were citizens of Lithuania, and 500 were Ukrainian citizens. Another 0.04 percent of the residents of Latvia (1,000 individuals all told) were citizens of other countries. These data, however, can hardly be regarded as complete or accurate.

103 *SM-segodna*, 27 April 1993.

104 *Diena*, 8 July 1993.

105 *SM-segodna*, 18 February 1997, quoting the Russian ambassador to Latvia, A. Udaltsov.

106 *Russkii put'*, 2 July 1994.

107 *Latvijas demografijas* 1996, 38.

In any case, it seems clear that only a minute proportion of the non-citizens in Latvia are electing to take the citizenship of another country. In this respect, the Latvian situation contrasts sharply with the situation in Estonia. While the total number of Russophone non-citizens in Estonia is only half of what it is in Latvia, as many as 83,000 of them had taken Russian citizenship by February 1996. Another 1,000 had taken Latvian citizenship, 750 Lithuanian, and 400 Ukrainian.<sup>108</sup> By October 1996 the number of Russian citizens in Estonia had reached 116,000.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the Russophone non-citizens of Estonia prefer to take citizenship in another state considerably more often than do the non-citizens of Latvia.

### *The Status of the Non-Citizens*

Until April 1995, the legal status of permanent residents of Latvia who have not been recognized as citizens remained undefined. Prior to that time a number of laws, regulations, and administrative decisions were adopted which limited the social and economic rights of non-citizens: property rights, the right to work in certain professions, the right to receive social benefits, the right of self-defense, freedom of conscience, and a number of others.<sup>110</sup>

The prolonged legal vacuum in Latvia led to a situation in which radically minded officials and local administrators in the municipalities could act arbitrarily. Systematic administrative violations were perpetrated by officials in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration which was entrusted with the task of compiling the Register of Residents. Any person denied registration in this register was barred from legal employment, social benefits, marriage registration, etc. This situation attracted the attention of several international human rights organizations.<sup>111</sup>

The radical nationalist parties continued their active campaign for the "decolonization" of Latvia. According to their notion, non-citizens should be regarded as "illegal immigrants" and "colonists."<sup>112</sup> In April

108 *Estonia today*, <http://www.vm.ee>. 21 February 1996.

109 This figure was cited by member of the Estonian Parliament, S. Isakov, in his presentation at the symposium "Russian minorities in the Baltic countries. National identity and state loyalty", Lubeck-Travemunde, 25-27 October 1996.

For a more detailed examination of the different rights enjoyed by citizens and non-citizens in Latvia, see Tsilevich and Ruchkovsky 1994,13; and Opalski, Tsilevich, and Dutkiewicz 1994 (appendix).

111 *Violations* 1993.

112 *Diena*, 8 January 1993; *ibid.*, 30 September 1993; *passim*.

1995, however, a law was adopted on "the status of former citizens of the USSR who are not citizens of Latvia or another state."<sup>113</sup> This law legalized the continued residence of the non-citizens in the country, guaranteed their right to leave and reenter Latvia freely, and granted them a (somewhat circumscribed) right of family reunion. It also confirmed the non-citizens' right of cultural autonomy. In effect, this law introduced a new legal status: the former citizens of the USSR were regarded neither as citizens of Latvia, nor as foreigners (that is, they are not citizens of another state), but they are not treated as stateless persons, either.

While the adoption of this law greatly clarified the situation, its implementation was hampered by serious problems. The promised "non-citizens' passports," which will give these people an actual chance to realize their freedom of movement, were issued in April 1997, two years after the adoption of the law. Also, no amendments had been made in the laws regulating immigration procedures which could put flesh on the declared right of family reunion. As before, the border guards continued to demand "reentry guarantees" or "return visas" whenever a non-citizen left the country even for shorter journeys. Nevertheless it must be concluded that the situation of the non-citizens has clearly been stabilized.

## **Political Representation and Participation**

### *Representation in Governmental Institutions*

The opportunities for nontitular ethnic groups to gain representation in Latvian bodies of power are first and foremost regulated by the citizenship law. Naturally, the significant discrepancy between the ethnic composition of the population at large, on the one hand, and the ethnic composition of the citizenry, on the other, has guaranteed the titular ethnic group a solid dominance in all elected bodies. However, the strong tendency toward Latvian overrepresentation in the parliament and Russian underrepresentation (and, to a somewhat less extent, the underrepresentation of other ethnic groups as well) did not start with the citizens-only elections to the 5th and 6th Saeima. It was clearly observable in the Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR which was elected in 1990 by all inhabitants of Latvia.

<sup>113</sup> The complete text of this law was published in Russian in *SM-segodnia*, 4 May 1995.

In spite of this, we believe that the mechanisms that created these disproportions in 1990 were different from the dynamics at work in 1993 and 1995. In 1990, many Russophones voted for candidates of the Popular Front, disregarding the fact that the majority of them were ethnic Latvians. These candidates were considered as proponents not of ethnic, but democratic ideas and values in general, and as clearly preferable to the conservative candidates of the Communist Party.<sup>114</sup> The outcome of the parliamentary elections in 1993 and 1995, on the other hand, resulted largely from a very low level of ethnic mobilization among the nontitular population (or more correctly, among those nontitulars who had been granted Latvian citizenship).<sup>115</sup> It should also be noted that Latvian election legislation does not give every citizen an automatic right to run for office, but only those who can document a mastery of the Latvian language at the third (highest) level.<sup>116</sup> This provision affects almost exclusively non-Latvian citizens.

As regards non-Latvian representation in local government, it should be noted that, in contrast to the situation in Estonia, non-citizens who are permanent residents in Latvia enjoy neither passive electoral rights (the right to run for office) or active rights (the right to vote) in local elections. In addition, the law on local elections requires all runners for a seat on the municipal councils to be fluent in Latvian both oral and written. Combined with the factors referred to above this stipulation has secured an absolute dominance of ethnic Latvians in the bodies of local (municipal) power. Thus, while the Latvians make up only approximately 40 percent of the total population in Riga, the Riga municipal council elected in 1994 had only three Russian deputies, all other representatives were ethnic Latvians.<sup>117</sup> In Daugavpils, where Latvians make up some 14 percent of the population, seven Latvians were elected to the city council, which consists of fifteen seats all told.<sup>118</sup> In a number of major Latvian cities—Jelgava, Jurmala, Lijepaja, Ventspils, etc., no non-Latvians were elected to the city council at all.<sup>119</sup> However, after the March 1997 local elections, the situation in

114 For different viewpoints on the character of the national movement in Latvia and the attitude of the Russians in Latvia to this movement, see Ustinova 1991; Apine 1994, and Tsilevich 1994.

115 We discuss some psychosocial causes for this lack of mobilization on p. 141-142.

The text of the election law has been published in *Latvijas Republikas 6. Saeimas* 1996, 10-16.

117 *Latvijas Republikas pasvaldību* 1994, 9-10.

118 *Ibid.*, 10-11.

TABLE 4.5 Representation of Ethnic Groups in the Parliaments of Latvia (in percent)

		<i>Latvians</i>	<i>Russians</i>	<i>Other</i>
LSSR SC	Electorate	52.0	34.0	14.0
1990	Deputies	69.5	22.5	8.0
5 Saeima,	Electorate	78.6	16.3	5.1
1993	Deputies	88.0	6.0	6.0
6 Saeima,	Electorate	79.3	15.9	4.8
1995	Deputies	90.0	6.0	4.0

*Sources: Latvijas Republikas Augstaka 1991, 20-80; Latvijas Republikas 5. Saeimas 1993; Latvijas Republikas 6. Saeimas 1996, 779-783.*

some municipalities improved. For instance, in the new Riga municipal council seven Russians, two Jews, one Lithuanian and one Liv took seats.

The representation of the various ethnic groups may be regarded as an indicator of their respective ethnic mobilization. The ethnic representation in the organs of the executive, on the other hand, reflects first and foremost the personnel policy of the state. A number of researchers believe that in the Soviet period Latvia diverged from the standard pattern of cadre indigenization which prevailed in most Union republics. Not Latvians, but Russians and other Slavic groups were disproportionately well represented within the republican political elite. Cadre policy in Latvia discriminated against ethnic Latvians.<sup>120</sup> This view has frequently been challenged, however. Its opponents usually point to the disproportionately high numbers of deputies in the Latvian Supreme Soviet who belonged to the titular nation, as well as the many Latvian ministers, supervisors in the city and district party cells, etc.<sup>121</sup> It is a well-established fact that, in the Soviet period, appointments to the organs of state power were conducted according to a list of criteria compiled "at the top," which included, inter alia, regulations of the ethnic compositions of the government, supreme Soviets, etc.

It is not necessary for our purposes to solve this dispute on the cadre policy of Soviet Latvia. We observe, nonetheless, that whether or not the Russians and the other nontitular ethnic groups were over- or

120 Muiznieks 1995, 114; Karklins 1987; Levits 1987.

121 See, e.g., Hodnett 1979; and the article by Oleg Shchiptsov, a former member of the Latvian Supreme Soviet, in *Panorama Latvii*, 8 March 1994.

underrepresented prior to 1991, for all practical purposes they were completely squeezed out of the political elite after the reestablishment of Latvian independence. As Anton Steen has remarked, "Russians are almost non-existent in top state bureaucracy and in the judiciary. [...] The inclusion of Russians into the elite structure is seen by the elites as a real threat to national culture and independence."<sup>122</sup>

As mentioned above, the changes in the bureaucratic elites were largely predetermined by the citizenship law: non-citizens were barred from top jobs in the bodies of state power, the judiciary, etc. Another hurdle was put in place by the language legislation. An applicant to any state job had to be fluent in the state language. Nevertheless, these legal restriction by themselves do not seem to sufficiently explain the low percentages of non-Latvians among the contemporary political elite in Latvia. Other informal sanctions and screening mechanisms must also have come into play.

Although almost no statistical data on the ethnic composition of the bodies of state power in Latvia exist, certain indirect evidence seems to corroborate this conclusion. Thus, for instance, persons who have received their education in the Latvian language are exempted from the language-certification requirement when they apply for a job.<sup>123</sup> As a rule, these applicants will be ethnic Latvians. We know that in 1992 only two person had to obtain a language certification in all institutions and offices attached to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The figure for the Ministry of Economic Reform was seven persons.<sup>124</sup> In the same year tens of thousands of applicants for jobs in the structures of the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Internal Affairs had to undergo attestation, of whom most were bus drivers and policemen, etc., and very few white-collar bureaucrats. These inconsistencies give some idea of the informal systems of "ethnic stratification" and "ethnic division of labor" at work.

In early 1994 the entire Latvian government was made up of ethnic Latvians,<sup>125</sup> and since the reestablishment of independence not one ethnic Russian has served as a minister in Latvia. As of January 1994, 152 judges were employed by the Latvian courts. Of these, 142 were Latvians, nine Russians, and one a Pole.<sup>126</sup> The official release of this information is a rare exception to the rule that data on the ethnic composition of the bureaucratic elites are hardly ever published.

122 Steen 1997b, 48 and 54.

123 See p. 113-116 below.

124 Muiznieks 1993b.

125 Muiznieks 1995,115.

126 *Latvijas vestnesis*, 29 January 1994.

Generally speaking, the political behavior of the ethnic Latvians differs significantly from the behavior of the Russophone citizens of Latvia. The vast majority of political parties in Latvia (including parties with relatively liberal ethnopolitical programs), have practically no Russophones as active members. Among the ten or so parties represented in the 6th Saeima there are only three exceptions to this rule: the Popular Concord Party (in which two out of four deputies were non-Latvians in the fall of 1996); the bloc of Socialist parties (three non-Latvians of three elected); and the For Equal Rights Party (one out of two). All Russian deputies in the Saeima were elected from these lists.

Certain evidence suggests that ethnic Latvians participate more actively in elections than do non-Latvians. According to a survey conducted by the polling institute "Prognoz" on the eve of the parliamentary elections in September 1995, 70.2 percent of the Latvian respondents had definitely made up their mind to vote, while only 10.1 percent in this group were certain that they would not be turning out. Among the non-Latvian citizens, on the other hand, the corresponding figures were 56.8 and 19.1 percent.<sup>127</sup> This information was corroborated by the official data on the actual behavior of the voters. In electoral districts with high numbers of non-Latvians among the registered voters the turnout was generally below average.

One should note that any analysis of electoral preferences based on a formal classification of Latvian political parties may be more confusing than clarifying. The multiparty system in the country is still in flux, and neither the names of the parties, nor their images—created partly by themselves and partly by the press—give an adequate idea of their political profile according to conventional customs of classification (conservative, liberal, social democratic etc.). It is therefore more or less inevitable that any categorization of the party system in Latvia will have to be approximate and inaccurate and, as such, could hardly serve as a starting point for analysis.<sup>128</sup>

It should also be noted that, in contrast to a number of other states in Eastern and Central Europe where ethnic minorities make up significant parts of the population (Slovakia, Rumania and Estonia), Latvia has no influential minority parties organized on the basis of ethnicity. To be sure, among the groups contesting the Saeima seats in 1993 and 1995

<sup>127</sup> *SM-segodnia*, 29 September 1995.

<sup>128</sup> This is true, for instance, of the party description in Norgaard et al., 1996, 98-105.

there were lists which contained the word "Russian" in the party designation. In 1993 this list was organized jointly by the Centre of Democratic Initiatives and the Baltic Constitutional Party.<sup>129</sup> In the 1995 elections this list did not participate but the Party of Russian Citizens of Latvia did. This party was an offshoot of the Abrene society, an organization with Latvian nationalist leanings. An important plank in this party's platform was its demand for compensation to former property owners in the district of Abrene, a region which had been annexed by the Russian Federation after World War II.<sup>130</sup> In both 1993 and 1995 the "Russian" list garnered slightly above one percent of the total vote<sup>131</sup> and did not even approach the electoral hurdle, which in 1993 was 4 percent, but increased to five percent in 1995.

As non-Latvians make up approximately 20 percent of the electorate it seems clear that, so far, no more than 5 percent of them have been ready to support a "Russian" list. Moreover, since this alternative in the two elections was represented by very different parties, in terms both of programs and personalities, it seems that this conclusion holds true irrespective of the actual profile of the Russian party. This conclusion seems to support our thesis that the political mobilization of the Russians in Latvia on ethnic programs is very low.

Due to the secrecy of the ballot there are no exact data on the electoral preferences of the non-Latvian voters. However, we may draw certain conclusions on the basis of various sociological surveys in combination with an analysis of the voting results broken down by electoral districts.

The Latvian electoral law divides the country into five electoral districts in which the candidates are elected by a proportional system. The districts are coterminous with the traditional, historical regions of

TABLE 4.6 Ethnic Composition of Citizens by Administrative District, 1995

	<u>Riga</u>	<u>Vidzeme</u>	<u>Latgale</u>	<u>Kurzeme</u>	<u>Zemgale</u>	
Latvians	70.4	89.5	53.4	94.5	90.0	
Russians	23.1	8.3	35.8	3.2	6.9	
Others	6.5	2.2	10.8	2.4		3.1

Source: *Latvijas vestnesis*, 22-23 March 1995.

129 *Diena*, 6 May 1993; *SM-segodnia*, 20 May 1995.

130 For more information on PRCL, see its party organ *Zemliaki*, as well as *SM-segodnia*, 29 December 1994.

131 *Latvijas republikas 5. Saeimas vešanas*; 1993; *Latvijas republikas 6. Saeimas vešanas*. 1995.

Latvia, and their ethnic composition varies therefore considerably (Table 4.6). The "most Latvian" district is Kurzeme in the westernmost part of Latvia. Here, ethnic Latvians make up almost 95 percent of the voters. In the easternmost district of Latgale, on the other hand, the percentage is slightly above 50.

Figure 4.6 shows the number of votes attained by some important electoral lists in three districts. Without going into details on the political profile of these parties, the particulars of the programs, or motivations of the electorate,<sup>132</sup> we will only note here certain characteristics of the electoral results on the basis of which we may draw some conclusions about the electoral preferences of the various ethnic groups.

The radical-nationalistic parties—MNIL and Fatherland and Freedom—attracted an insignificant number of votes in the "least Latvian" district, Latgale. At the same time the results of these parties were considerably better in ethnically heterogeneous Riga than in the "most Latvian" district of Kurzeme. Thus it seems that the average Latvian voter in the cities inclined more toward nationalist positions than the average Latvian voter in the countryside. In Riga, Latvians have much more frequent intercourse with Russians than in compactly Latvian rayons. It follows therefore that there will be a greater incidence of everyday conflicts and fiercer competition for the most prestigious jobs in the former than in the latter.

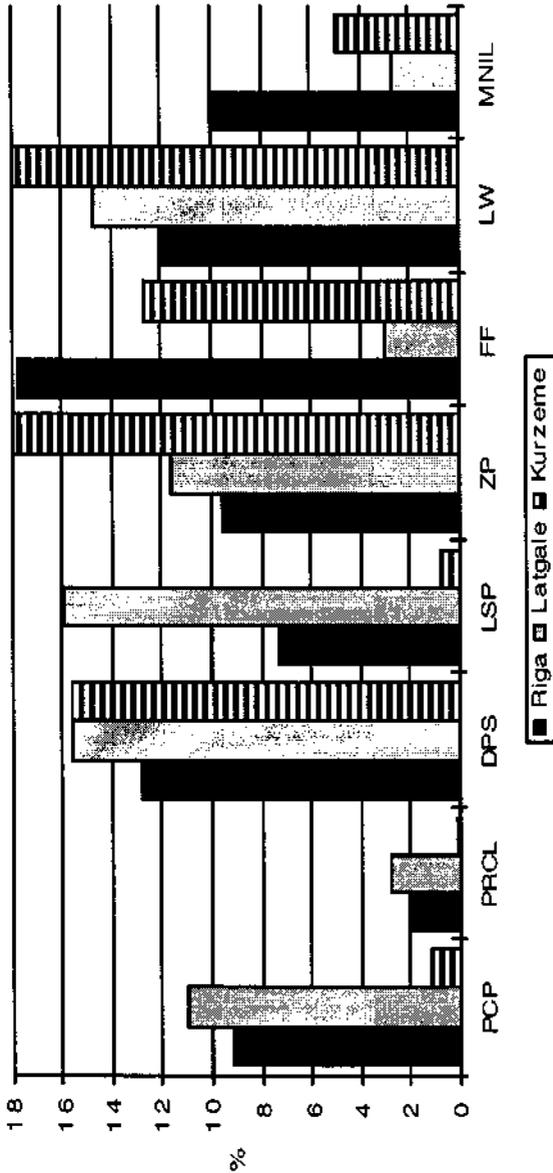
On the other hand, the Popular Concord Party and the Socialist Party managed to surpass the electoral threshold solely due to the votes they received in the "most Russian" districts, Latgale and Riga. Their respective results in the "most Latvian" districts fluctuated around one percent.

The results of the more centrist, moderate parties with liberal nationalist orientations (Latvian Way and DP Saimnieks) were much more evenly distributed and much less dependent on the ethnic composition of the electorate.

These data allow us to draw the following conclusion: While the Latvian voters divide their sympathies between the radical-nationalist and moderate parties, the Russophone voters give their support to these same moderate parties plus the "anti-nationalist" parties—Popular Concord and the leftist Socialist Party.

132 For a more thorough analysis of the relationship between the electoral results of the various parties and ethnic composition of the electoral districts and a general discussion of the ethnic factor in Latvian parliamentary elections, see Kolsto and Tsilevich 1997.

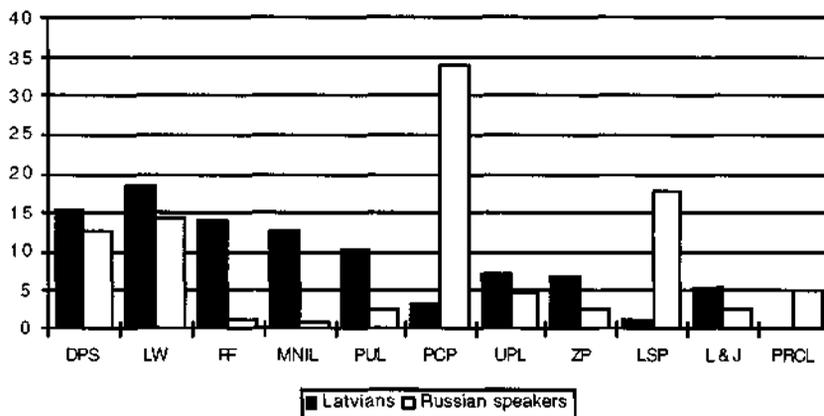
FIGURE 4.6 Results of Parliamentary Elections in Three Electoral Districts (1995)



Source: *Latvijas republikas 6. Saeimas vēstnesis* 1995.

Legend of party names: PCP - Popular Concord Party; PRCL - the Party of Russian Citizens in Latvia; DPS - the Democratic Party "Saitrnieks" ("Master"); LSP - the joint list of the Latvian Socialist Party and the Equal Rights Movement; ZP - the popular movement Latvia: Zigerist's Party; FF, the Fatherland and Freedom Party; LW, the "Latvian Way" Party; MNIL - the Movement for the National Independence of Latvia.

FIGURE 4.7 Electoral Preferences of Latvians and Russian-Speakers (1995)



Source: *SM-segodnia* 29 September 1995. Legend of party names (not already listed in Figure 4.6 above): PUL—the Peasant Union of Latvia; UPL—the Unity Party of Latvia; L&J—the coalition "Labor and Justice." The latter list represented a coalition of the Social Democrats and the Party of Deceived Investors "Tainsiba" ("Justice")

These clear differences in the electoral preferences of the Latvian and Russophone voters are also vividly brought out by the sociological surveys. Figure 4.7 reproduces the results of an opinion poll conducted on the eve of the elections to the 6th Saeima by the Prognoz polling institute. The results bear witness to significant differences in the electoral preferences of the ethnic Latvians on the one hand and the Russophones on the other.

Another survey was carried out by the Baltic Data House immediately after the elections to the 6th Saeima (the poll was limited to those parties that made it over the five-percent electoral threshold). The results of this survey corroborate the conclusions we drew above based on the electoral results in the various districts: The non-Latvians make up the vast majority of the supporters of the Popular Concord Party and the Socialist Party. As regards the moderate Democratic Party—"Saimnieks"—and the extreme populist Zigerist's Party, the share of non-Latvians voters is slightly below the share of the non-Latvians in the population at large. For the liberal-nationalist party the Latvian Way this ratio was as high as 1:2. The radical

nationalistic parties such as Fatherland and Freedom and the Movement for the National Independence of Latvia had practically no Russophone voters. Approximately 45 percent of the Russophone voters supported either the centrist Popular Concord Party or the leftist Socialist Party, both of which favor a liberal minority policy, a speedy naturalization of the non-citizens, and revocation of limitations on property rights, labor rights, and social security rights of non-citizens. Between 10 and 15 percent of the non-Latvians voted for moderate Latvian parties.

## The Language Situation

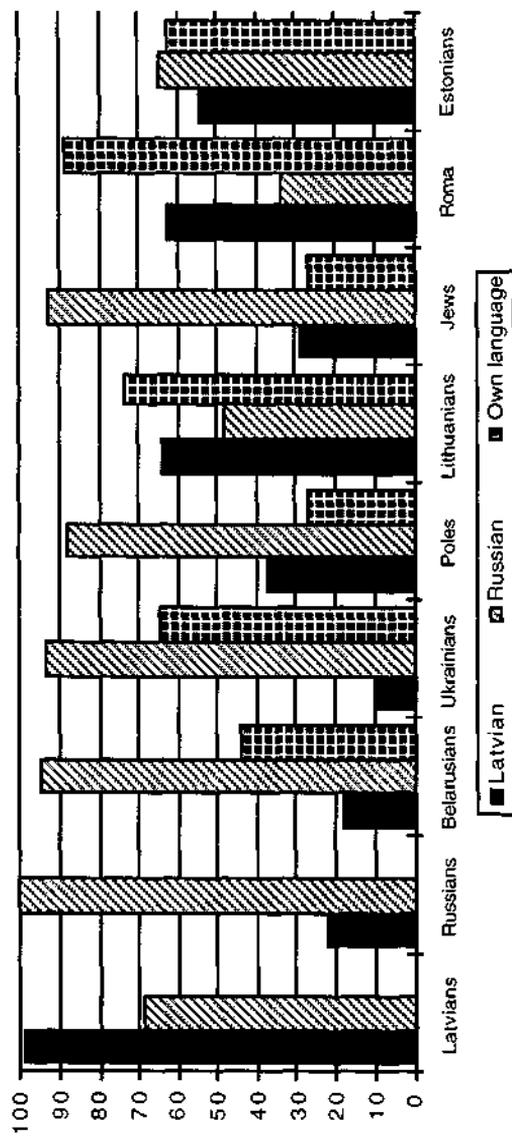
### *Linguistic Conditions in the Soviet Period*

In the rural areas of Latvia, Latvian continued to dominate the language situation in the postwar period. Latgale presented the only significant exception to this rule. In the cities, however, the social spheres in which the Latvian language could be freely used, became increasingly narrower. In the state administration and in material production the language of work was almost exclusively Russian. To a somewhat greater extent Latvian stood its ground in cultural life, in the agricultural sector, and, significantly, in the realm of science and education.

In the Soviet period, there were no legal documents requiring Latvian residents to master the Latvian language. Most people who moved to Latvia with the intention of settling there permanently had no incentives to learn the local language. As a result, in the 1989 census only 22.3 percent of the Russians who lived in the Latvian SSR claimed to be fluent in Latvian. The figures for other East Slavic groups were even lower: 18 percent of the Belarusians and 9.8 percent of the Ukrainians claimed to have a good command of Latvian (Figure 4.8). Of the total population 62 percent were fluent in Latvian, as against 81 percent who were fluent in Russian.

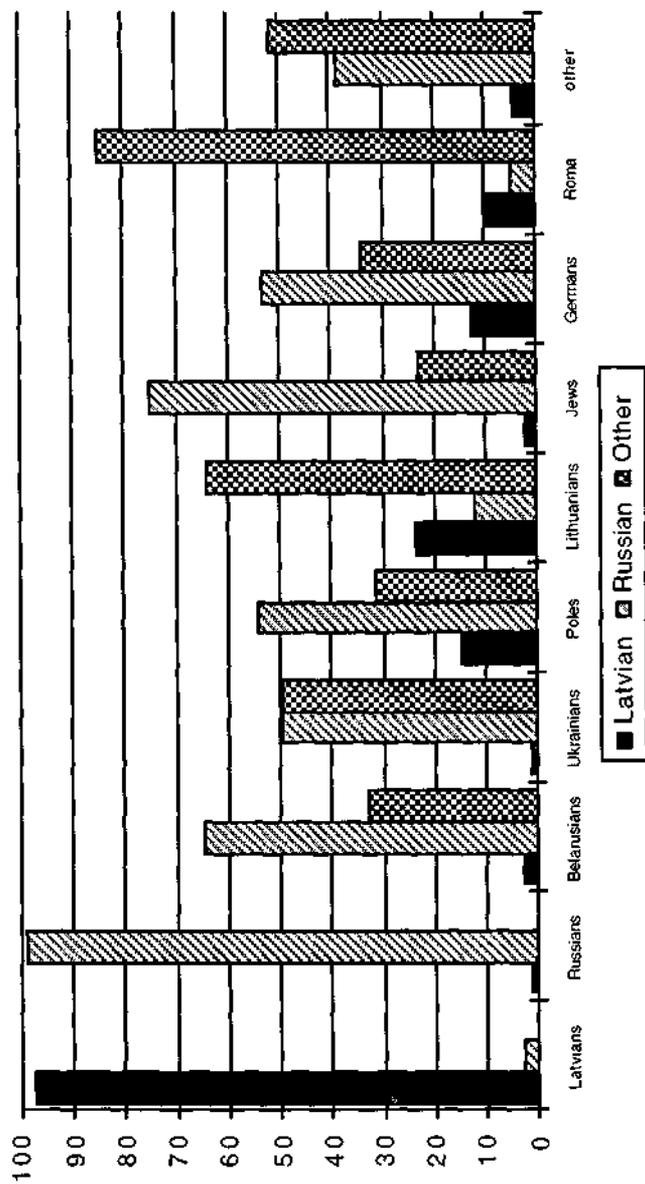
Generally speaking, Russian was the preferred language in ethnically mixed families. As the 1989 census data showed, in most ethnic groups in Latvia a majority regarded Russian as their "mother tongue" (*rodnoi iazyk*) (see Figure 4.9). The only exceptions were the Latvians, the Lithuanians, and the Roma. To most Latvians the resulting language situation was very disconcerting and the language problem became one of the main factors behind the ethnic Latvian mobilization during perestroika and "Atmoda" (the national revival).

FIGURE 4.8 Command of Language by Ethnic Group (1989)



Source: Mezs 1994, 25.

FIGURE 4.9 Mother Tongue of Inhabitants of Latvia



Source: Etnosituacija Latvija 1992, 10.

## Legislation

One of the first legal acts to be carried out on the road to the restoration of Latvian independence was the Latvian Supreme Soviet resolution of 6 October 1988, conferring on Latvian the official status as "state language" in the Latvian Soviet Republic. In December that year, the Latvian Council of Ministers passed another resolution outlining a plan of action to introduce Latvian as the state language.<sup>133</sup> Characteristically for that time, the program also contained certain sections on ways and means to improve the study of the Russian language; it was still necessary to keep a certain "political balance". A Language Commission consisting of 18 persons was formed and attached to the Supreme Soviet.

The Act on the Languages of the Latvian Republic was adopted on 5 May 1989.<sup>134</sup> Latvian was proclaimed the sole state language and all official business should henceforth be conducted in Latvian. Alongside this basic principle, however, the 1989 law also contained certain guarantees for the continued use of Russian. In particular, in correspondence and oral communication between a resident and state bodies, the resident, though not the official, was entitled to select the language of communication.

The language law's period of implementation was stipulated to three years. However, in March 1992, two months before the law was about to enter legal force, the Latvian Parliament passed a number of significant amendments to it which, in reality, changed its very essence.<sup>135</sup> As a result, Russian, for all practical purposes, became a foreign language in Latvia, to be treated on a par with any other non-Latvian language. The Russian language is mentioned only once in the law, in Article 8: "The bodies of state power are obliged to accept and examine documents from the residents of Latvia which are written in either Latvian, English, German, or Russian." At the same time, Articles 8 and 9 stipulated that all documents in which a state body—that is, any institution, enterprise or organization belonging to the state—addresses the citizens, including written responses to letters and complaints, shall be written in the state language. It is true that Article 9 permitted responses to be written in the same language as that used by the citizen in the first place, but from now on, the choice of language in cases such as this was left to the discretion of the official.

133 *Latvijas PSR Ministru* 1989, 184-188.

134 Guboglo 1994, 36-39.

135 The text of the law in Latvian, English and Russian translations is published in *Valsts Valoda* 1992.

All official administrative tasks, and all meetings and conferences in state bodies are to be conducted in the state language (Article 6). Another language may be used as well, but in such circumstances the organizers of the meeting must provide for translation into Latvian if one of the participants so requires. Also all other enterprises, institutions, and organizations operating within the borders of the Latvian Republic, are required to employ Latvian in all official business as well as in all domestic correspondence (Article 7).

At congresses, conferences, meetings, and rallies there is a free choice of language. However, if a meeting is open to the public, the organizers must provide for translation into the state language (Article 5).

Perhaps the most important article of the Act was Article 4, which stated that all employees in bodies of state power, that is, all institutions, enterprises, and organizations belonging to the state, had to have a command of and employ the state language, as well as other languages, to the extent required by the person's professional duties. This prerequisite was extended to cover the private sphere as well. On the basis of this particular legal norm large-scale attestations of Latvian language proficiency were carried out (see below). No regulations or proficiency tests with relevance to the other languages were mentioned in this article.

The adoption of the Language Act was followed by a number of ordinances and other sublegal acts which together regulated the usages of the various languages in Latvia. Thus, for instance, on 1 July 1992 an appendix to the Administrative code was adopted, establishing a system of punishment for violations of the Language Act.<sup>136</sup>

The Regulations on the Use of the State Language in Appellations and Information, adopted 4 November 1992,<sup>137</sup> authorized the use of non-state languages in public information only in the following instances: for security reasons; at events organized by national cultural societies; at international seminars and conferences; and when such information is intended for foreign tourists. In the latter case, special permission must be obtained by the State Language Center. In addition to this limited number of cases, information on the tax system was also exempted from the general prohibition against the use of non-state languages in public documents.<sup>138</sup> Whenever a non-state language is used in these excepted instances, the same information must also be provided in the state language, and "the text written in the state language must be

136 Published for the first time in Russian in *VS i SM* (supplement to *Diena*), 24 July 1992.

137 Published for the first time in Russian in *VS i SM* (supplement to *Diena*), 11 December 1992.

138 *Grozījumi Nolikuma* 1995.

more conspicuous" (Article 5.2). In all other instances public information must be given in Latvian only.

Latvian electoral law states that only citizens of Latvia who have a command of the state language at the third level (= highest level) may be registered as candidates for the Saeima and for local elected bodies. Candidates whose education took place in a non-Latvian language are required to present a certificate of language proficiency at the third level on registering.<sup>139</sup>

### *The Language Inspectorate*

On 22 July 1992, a State Language Inspectorate was established in order to secure compliance with the Language Act as well as with all ordinances and other sublegal acts which regulate the language situation.<sup>140</sup> One of the chief objectives of this office was to maintain act as a watchdog *vis-a-vis* the official language of administration and business in enterprises and institutions; ascertain which languages were employed for public information purposes; ascertain that the tests of proficiency in the state language were carried out in accordance with the rules, and so forth.

The Inspectorate employed 16 inspectors, each of whom had the right to impose fines for violations of the language law amounting to as much as 75 lats, the equivalent of 150 U.S.D. The head of the inspectorate could impose fines not exceeding 150 lats. In addition, the ordinance on the State Language Inspectorate allowed for private citizens to work as volunteer language inspectors. In the fall of 1994, 211 persons were attached to the Inspectorate in this capacity.<sup>141</sup> In a number of cities and districts local authorities have organized their own municipal language inspections.

Since they commenced their work in 1992 through 30 June 1994, the language inspectors filed more than one thousand administrative protocols on violations of the language legislation. The total sum of the fines which have been imposed, amount to 21,425 lats (more than 40 thousand U.S.D).<sup>142</sup> The activities of the language inspectorate have stirred up strong emotions among the public, and been subjected to attacks from very different quarters. Many Russophones, as well as many Latvians, were very upset when the inspectorate attempted to annul the

<sup>139</sup> The text of the law is published, inter alia, in *Latvijas Republikas 6. Saeimas*, 10-16.

<sup>140</sup> *VS i SM*, (supplement to *Diena*,) 18 September 1992.

<sup>141</sup> Kamenska 1994, 21.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

mandates of a number of elected deputies on the Daugavpils City Council on the grounds that they allegedly lacked a sufficient command of the state language.<sup>143</sup> At the same time, reports in the Latvian-language press about a volunteer inspector who was attacked when dutifully carrying out his job,<sup>144</sup> sparked off a highly charged debate, although it was never established whether the attack was a reaction against his work for the language inspectorate.

### *Language Tests*

The Council of Ministers Resolution no. 189, adopted on 25 May 1992, approved the establishment of a system of language attestations and the procedures for such attestations.<sup>145</sup> The Resolution introduced three levels of proficiency in the state language: the first and lowest indicates an elementary understanding of, and ability to speak, Latvian; the second and intermediate, the ability to speak and write well enough to carry out one's professional duties at the workplace; and finally, the third and highest level, the ability to speak and write Latvian.

On the basis of this resolution several networks of attestation commissions were established. The main network consisted of commissions attached to ministries, institutions, and enterprises. The various workplaces were instructed to compile lists of positions and professions which were subject to attestation, indicating what level of proficiency was required in each case. Persons who had received their education in the Latvian language were exempt from attestation. In practice, employees in all kinds of professions except manual workers, but including, for instance, cleaning assistants and guards, had to undergo attestation procedures.

An employee who had passed the attestation assessment required of him received a certificate confirming his language capabilities. In accordance with amendments to the Labor Code,<sup>146</sup> a person who lacked the correct certificate for a particular job could not be employed in it. These amendments also made it possible to sack employees lacking the necessary certificate, on grounds of "professional incompetence." In practice, no mass dismissals on such a basis were carried out. No

143 *Dinaburg*, 9 June 1994.

144 *Diena*, 29 November 1995.

145 The text of this resolution was published in *VS i SM*, (supplement to *Diena*), 12 June 1992.

146 Published in *AP MP* (supplement to *Diena*), 28 August 1992.

research is available to account for the causes for this. We assume, however, that in most cases some of the following social dynamics may have played a role: first, people who felt incapable—or were unwilling—to learn Latvian looked for another job in advance, preferring to leave voluntarily in order to avoid a record of dismissal due to lack of professional abilities. Second, people prepared themselves for the test and passed—but afterwards quickly forgot what they had learned. Third, an employer might prefer to keep on his payroll people who had failed the test: since he was entitled to fire them at any time, they could be expected to work harder and make fewer complaints. Nonetheless, the press has reported instances of entire groups of employees being dismissed. This has happened, for instance, to a number of teachers at the Daugavpils Musical College<sup>147</sup> as well as to employees at Poly-clinical Hospital no. 3 in Riga.<sup>148</sup>

The affected institutions and public offices operated with very different levels of language demands. Despite the fact that the State Language Center had published detailed lists of sample questions to be used during the attestation procedures,<sup>149</sup> as well as methodological guidelines for the commissions,<sup>150</sup> all efforts to standardize the language requirements failed.<sup>151</sup> As a result, the chances of passing the attestation in a particular locality depended in no small part on the good will—or caprice—of the members of the commission.

In the testing period which lasted from 15 June 1992 to 15 December 1993 300,000 employees were supposed to undergo language attestation. On the expiry of the deadline, however, only a half, or 154,000, had actually been tested.<sup>152</sup> The results of the tests which were carried out in 1992 are reproduced in figure 4.10.<sup>153</sup> A number of ministries and departments in which a very large proportion of the workforce consisted of non-Latvians, *in casu*, in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as railway workers, were given an extended deadline for language attestations.

Also after the completion of the test period permanent attestation commissions continued to function. Every Latvian resident might at any time sign up for a language test, but now he or she would have to pay for

147' *Latgales Laiks*, 31 August 1995.

148 *SM-segodnia*, 23 December 1992.

149 *Saeima un Ministru Kabineta*, 2 June 1992.

150 *VS i SM*, (supplement to *Diena*), 13 November 1992.

151 Kamenska 1994,19.

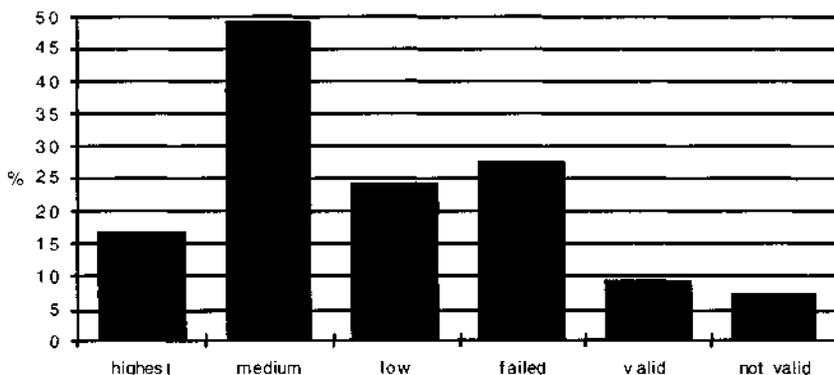
152 *Ibid.*, 1994,13.

153 The data are from Kamenska 1994,13.

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**FIGURE 4.10 Results of the State Language Tests, 1992 (level, failures, absent)**


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it. In the fall of 1994 the fee for employed persons was six lats and for unemployed three lats.<sup>154</sup> According to expert estimates, about 250,000 persons had gone through language attestation by the end of 1995.<sup>155</sup>

### *Regional Regulations*

In contrast to the situation in Lithuania and Estonia Latvia has not adopted any special rules for the use of the non-Latvian languages in areas where the Russophones or other minorities make up compact majorities. This situation creates special problems, first and foremost for Daugavpils, the second largest city of Latvia, where ethnic Latvians make up less than 14 percent of the population.

Dzintars Abikis, the chairperson of the parliamentary commission on education, science, and culture, believes that uniformity is one of the basic principles of Latvian language policy. There may be certain regional variations with the regard to the timetables for the introduction of the language legislation, but, he says, not with the regard to the lasting language regimes to be introduced.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Kamenska 1994, 17.

<sup>155</sup> Druviete 1996, 25.

<sup>156</sup> Abikis' presentation at the seminar on Interethnic Relations, Ethnopolitics, and Social Integration in the Baltic states, Jurmala, 13-15 September 1996.

In November 1995, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers approved a new draft law on the state language referring it to the Parliament for further discussion.<sup>157</sup> In this draft the language regulations were even tighter than in the existing legislation. In particular, the new draft permitted communication with state bodies and local government bodies in the state language only. An address written in another language had to be accompanied by a correct translation attested by an authorized notary. Thus, even the formal requirement that state and local officials "have a sufficient command of other languages to carry out their professional duties" was removed. In addition, the draft law stipulated that the working language at all meetings in firms and enterprises, public organizations, and religious societies should be Latvian. The draft also contained a number of other restrictions on the usage of all other languages than the state language.

One of the architects behind the draft, the leader of the State Language Center, Dzintra Hirscha, claimed that "the draft bill on the state language marks a definitely new level in the development of our language policy. It protects the linguistic rights and human rights of the titular nation, without encroaching, of course, upon the rights of the minorities."<sup>158</sup> On another occasion she maintained that "unlike other laws, the language law is a process. It indicates the goals toward which we may slowly draw near in the future."<sup>159</sup>

The new draft law was strongly criticized by the State Bureau on Human Rights as well as by some international organizations. The Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in the Council of Baltic Sea States, Ole Espersen, discussed the draft law in his Annual Report in 1996. He had been informed by the chairperson of the Latvian parliamentary commission on education, science, and culture that the draft had been returned to its architects for further improvement.<sup>160</sup> This piece of information, however, has not been confirmed by any Latvian sources.

157 *Latvijas vestnesis*, 1995, 28 November 1995.

158 *Ibid.*

159 *Diena*, 29 November 1995.

160 *Council of Baltic Sea States* 1996, 73.

*The National Program  
for Latvian Language Training*

In the fall of 1995, the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers approved a National Program for Training in the State Language. The UN Development Programme Office in Latvia participated actively in the elaboration of this program.<sup>161</sup> The program envisages the training of highly qualified teachers to teach Latvian to 150,000 pupils in schools where the language of instruction is non-Latvian, as well as to 150,000 adults. The program budget was approximately 23.9 million U.S.D and was to be footed by a group of foreign donor countries. Sweden would contribute with 5.3m Swedish kronor, and Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, as well as some other countries were also meant to participate.<sup>162</sup> After some delay an agreement on the release of the first tranche of 3.2m U.S.D was signed on 6 December 1996.<sup>163</sup> A special State Language Training Unit has been set up. This unit has been training teachers who, in turn, will be teaching other teachers. Latvian-language courses for teachers at Russian schools have been conducted. The idea behind these courses is to give the teachers the competency to teach their subjects in Latvian, thus removing the main obstacle in the way of turning Russian schools into Latvian-language schools, i.e., the lack of suitably qualified teachers.

*Changes in the Language Situation in the 1990s*

Few data are available on the dynamics of the language situation in Latvia since the restoration of independence. It seems clear that in many cases the language tests did not lead to a permanent change in the languages people used at their workplaces. Having passed the test they continued to employ a non-state language in everyday discourse. This is particularly true in non-Latvian work collectives where there is no incentive to use Latvian.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, independent researchers have drawn the conclusion that "Russians in the Baltics are beginning to recognize the success of the nationalizing programs, and have made substantial efforts to develop facility in the titular language."<sup>165</sup>

161 *Latvia. Human Development Report*, 1996,73.

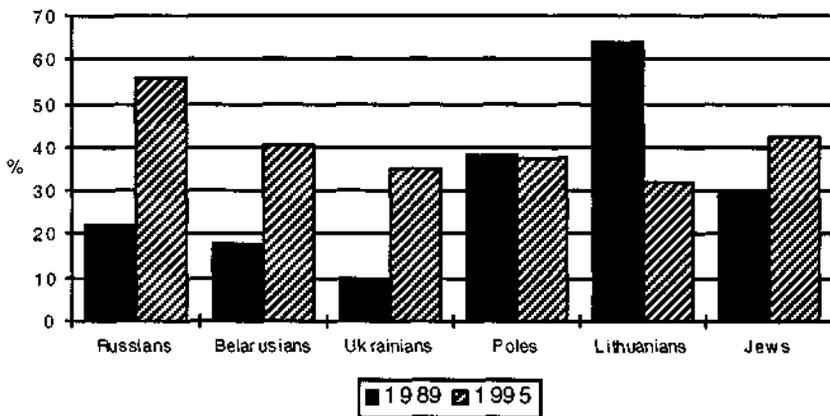
162 *Diena*, 17 February 1996.

163 *Diena*, 3 December 1996.

164 Kamenska 1994, 20.

165 Laitin 1996a, 23.

FIGURE 4.11 Changes in Command of Latvian Language by Ethnic Group



Sources: 1989 Census data, and Druviete 1995, 23.

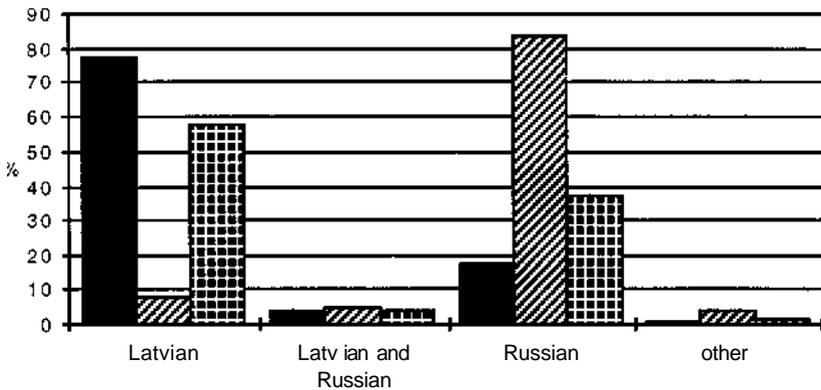
Figure 4.11 shows the results of a survey conducted in 1995 in some Latvian cities. When juxtaposed with the 1989 census data this survey indicates a radical increase in the Russians' proficiency in the Latvian language (55.8 percent, up from 22.3 percent). Admittedly, data from surveys and censuses are not directly comparable, but the same marked change is corroborated also by other sources. Thus, the National Media Survey, for instance, indicates a 60 percent proficiency among the Russians for the same year, while the Rose 1995 survey gives as high a figure as 62 percent.<sup>166</sup> These increased figures probably reflect changes in the self-perception of those who were interviewed. Under the new circumstances in independent Latvia, when the Russophones are forced to speak some Latvian, at least occasionally, they upgrade the assessment of their own language capabilities. Some other psychological factors may also be at work.<sup>167</sup>

More reliable data are provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (Figure 4.12). When residents enroll in the Register of Residents they are questioned as to the preferred language of

<sup>166</sup> *Baltic Media Book* 1996, 14; Rose 1995, 45

<sup>167</sup> We are much more skeptical about data indicating that the proficiency in the Latvian language has decreased drastically among certain other minorities, for example, among the Lithuanians. The Lithuanian figures are hampered by a serious problem of representativity. The absolute numbers in the survey are very small, and, in addition, this poll was conducted in the cities only, while the majority of the Lithuanians live in compact rural settlements in the southern part of the country, along the Lithuanian border.

FIGURE 4.12 Main Language of Communication in Family (1994)



[Latvian citizens 0 Non-citizens p All residents

Source: Kamenska 1994, 53.

communication in the family. These data show that few changes have occurred in the language practices of ethnically mixed families. On the whole, they indicate that, on the family level, the qualitative language situation which dominated in the late 1980s remains basically unaltered. As before, the language preferences of Latvian citizens differ sharply from the language habits of non-citizens.

A survey conducted by the Baltic Data House in May 1994 gives some idea about the languages of communication in state bodies and in the service industry.<sup>168</sup> Those interviewed were asked how often a question posed in Latvian received an answer in Russian at their workplace. Fifteen percent of the Latvians said that this happened "often"; 48 percent answered "sometimes," while 34 percent said it never happened. Conversely, 10 percent of the Russians claimed that they often received an answer in Latvian when they addressed someone in Russian. 39 percent had experienced this sometimes, while 48 percent had always been answered in Russian. This means that the subjective feeling of language comfort was, in fact, still somewhat higher among Russians than among Latvians.

<sup>168</sup> Zepa 1995, 42.

## Language in Education

### *Historical Overview*

In independent Latvia in the interwar period, a complex system of minority language education was in existence.<sup>169</sup> The 1919 Act on Education declared that the pupils ought to receive their mandatory education in their "family language" (Article 39).<sup>170</sup> The parents themselves determined which language they regarded as their family language (Article 40).<sup>171</sup> The state and local governments were obliged to provide schools for the minorities to the extent that this was necessary to fulfill their needs. In order to start an entire class in a minority language a minimum of 30 pupils was required (Article 41).

A special Law on Minority Schools laid down the norms and procedures for the financing of such schools: of the total sum allotted by the state and the municipalities for educational purposes the minority school should receive a share commensurate with their fraction of the total population in a given territory (Article 2). At the Ministry of Education a special department dealt with matters concerning minority schools. This department was divided into special sections for each minority. The heads of these sections were appointed on the basis of nominations by the minorities themselves. These officials represented their respective minority groups in all cultural matters and also had the right to be present and to speak at the sessions of the Cabinet of Ministers. They had consultative status in all matters concerning the cultural life of the minorities (Articles 6 and 7).

In the 1933/34 school year there were 1,502 Latvian language schools in operation in Latvia, among them, 55 high schools. In addition, there were 555 minority schools, including 41 high schools. Broken down by language groups, 88 schools were Russian (including 10 high schools); 88 (9) were German; 100 (14) were Jewish; 35 (3) were Polish; 23 (1) Belarussian; 13 (1) Lithuanian; and 4 (0) Estonian.<sup>172</sup> It is estimated that approximately 80 percent of all pupils coming from minority families received their education in minority schools that year. After the coup d'etat in 1934 the number of minority schools was drastically reduced, but part of the minority school system continued to exist.

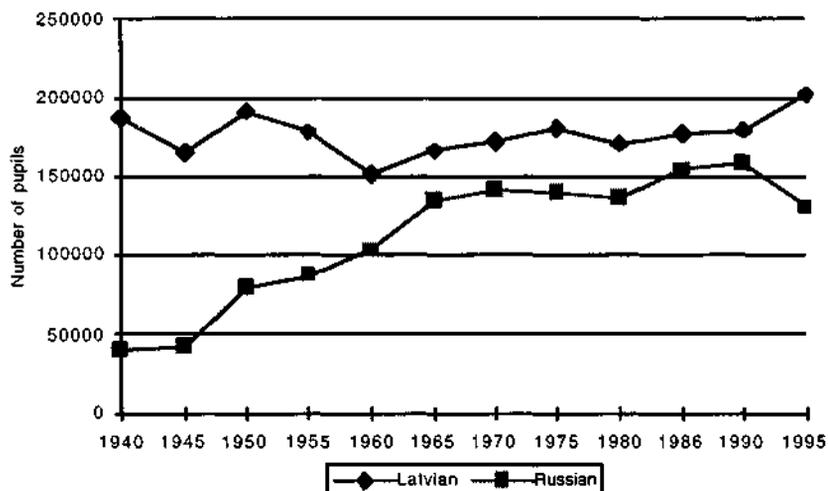
169 Antane 1991.

170 *Likums par Latvijas* 1919.

171 *Likums par mazakuma* 1919.

172 *Natsional'nye* 1996, 12.

FIGURE 4.13 Number of Pupils in Latvian Schools of Latvia by Language of Instruction (Absolute numbers)



Source: Latvian State Archive, data collected by Ilmars Mezs.

In the Soviet period, education in Latvia at all levels was offered in Latvian and Russian only. The dynamics of the language preferences of the pupils in Soviet Latvia are shown in figure 4.13.<sup>173</sup>

### Legislation

The current Law on Education was adopted in June 1991.<sup>174</sup> It guarantees the right to be educated in the state language at all levels (Article 5). Representatives of nontitular ethnic groups are granted "the right and the guarantee" to receive education in their native language "in accordance with the Law on Languages." The law states furthermore that the Latvian state will provide the necessary means to ensure the enjoyment of this right.

173 Mezs 1997, data compiled from the Latvian State archive.

174 "Latvijas republikas Izglītības likums," *Diena*, 26 July 1991.

All pupils who attend an educational institution at any level which is subject to the jurisdiction of the Latvian Republic, are obliged to study the Latvian language. This is the case irrespective of the language of instruction in the actual school and irrespective by whom the school is run. Graduate students from medium-level schools (high schools and technical colleges) have to pass an exam proving their proficiency in Latvian. In all higher institutions of learning which are financed by the state, Latvian is the basic language of instruction for all students, starting from the second school year.

Thus, the Latvian Education Law assumes the existence of non-Latvian schools, but neither the Act itself nor any other legal Acts spell out the conditions under which such schools may be opened. This is very different from the detailed regulations regarding Latvian-language schools. According to the law such schools must be opened on the insistence of the parents of no less than ten pupils at the first level, and of the parents of no less than 25 pupils at the medium level. Questions relating to the opening and closure of minority schools are delegated to the municipal administrations which frequently make willful decisions on the matter.

Since the Law on Education was adopted in 1991 it has been subject to numerous amendments. For instance, new regulations introduced in the 1996/97 school year established that in elementary schools (from the first through the ninth grade) with a non-state language of education no less than two subjects must be taught in Latvian. On the high school level (tenth through twelfth grade) this requirement was expanded to include no less than three subjects.

According to Article 62 in the current version of the law, up to 80 percent of the budget of licensed private schools may be covered by the exchequer. However, in May 1994 the Cabinet of Ministers decided that such financing shall be extended only to private schools in which the language of instruction is Latvian.<sup>175</sup> This new system was retained in the new Rules for State Financing of Private Schools which were adopted in July 1996. (True, state subvention could be granted "in exceptional circumstances" also to elementary minority schools, but not to medium and higher educational institutions.)<sup>176</sup>

A new draft law on education was adopted on its first reading in the Saeima in the fall of 1996.<sup>177</sup> This law introduced an innovation which had been on the cards for some time already: By 2005, all medium-level educational institutions will have to have switched to Latvian as their

<sup>175</sup> *Latvijas vestnesis*, 9 June 1994.

<sup>176</sup> *LR Ministru kabineta noteikumi* 1996.

<sup>177</sup> The draft law was published in *Izglitiba un kultura*, 4 January 1996.

sole language of instruction. The draft permitted education in Russian and "other non-state languages" in elementary schools only. The law also gave a new conceptual definition of minority schools: these are schools in which the instruction is given "in Latvian and in the language of the minority." In effect, the draft leaves it to the Ministry of Education to decide at its own discretion which subjects may be taught in the minority language and which will require instruction in the state language.

The draft provoked serious concern and protests from the Russian-speaking public. On the initiative of the Latvian Committee for Human Rights and the Equal Rights Movement more than 50,000 signatures were amassed in a very short time protesting the elimination of medium-level Russian education.<sup>178</sup> Also many experts on educational organizations strongly criticized the draft.<sup>179</sup> After its first reading 709 suggestions for amendments of the law were submitted, that is, seven amendment proposals on average for every article. This huge number of proposals made it practically impossible to continue the work on the draft law in the Saeima. As a result, by the fall of 1997 the basic principles for minority language education had still not been decided on.

### *Main Controversies*

The main problem for the non-Latvians as regards educational policy is the uncertainty of the future of Russian-language education. In spite of the guarantees for education in minority languages which are contained in the current version of the Law on Education, many Latvian politicians and official spokespersons of the Latvian Republic already in the early 1990s began to talk about the necessity of eliminating instruction in "non-state" languages above high school level and even above the elementary level. This, it was claimed, was necessary in order to facilitate the integration of Latvian society.

In 1993, the Minister of Education, Janis Vaivads, expressed the following:

I don't think that we ought to have two different school concepts in Latvia, [one for state-language schools and one for Russian schools]. When the state becomes mononational, it will be impossible to countenance different educational systems. Still, it is true that the process of rolling back the Russian school will be very long-winded and gradual.<sup>180</sup>

178 *SM-segodnia*, 12 April 1996.

179 For instance, *SM-segodnia*, 12 March 1996.

180 *Panorama Latvii*, 31 August 1993, as quoted in *Diena*, 12 October 1993.

Another scenario was advanced with relative frequency: the Russian schools had to be reformed in order to make sure that the next generation of non-Latvians obtained a complete grasp of the state language. In 1996 an advisor to the Minister of Education, Baiba Petersone, backed this idea at a meeting with teachers from Russian schools: "we cannot accept that the educated younger generation be fettered in any way for want of language proficiency."<sup>181</sup> The ministry adhered to the view that it is impossible to gain full mastery in a language by studying it as a second language alone. Complete command can only be obtained in the language that is used as the medium of instruction in the schools, not in the languages taught as one of several subjects, the Ministry insisted. The leader of the State Language Center, Dzintra Hirscha, rounded off with the following sweeping statement: "The reform is necessary, since knowledge of the Latvian language in and of itself does not signify loyalty toward the state or integration into society. Only the curriculum and the overall methods of instruction may create the preconditions for such integration."<sup>182</sup> In this statement, the political motive behind the language legislation was apparent for all to see.

This strategy provoked strong cries of resentment from the Russophone public and from Russophone cultural organizations. The vice-chairperson of the Latvian society of Russian culture, Tatiana Arshavskaia, objected that education in a language other than one's native tongue, that is, in a language in which the pupils have not yet gained full proficiency, inevitably will lower the achievement levels of Russian school kids. Further complicating the situation is the acute lack of qualified teachers who are fluent in both Latvian and Russian, in addition to being well versed in the subject they are teaching. It is very likely that the Russian pupils would achieve a good command of the Latvian language if the teaching standards of Latvian as a second language were improved, Arshavskaia believed. This option, however, has not been given much consideration in the Ministry. On the contrary, the training of Latvian-language teachers for Russian schools has to all intents and purposes ceased.<sup>183</sup>

The quality of Latvian-language education in Russian schools is frequently subjected to harsh criticism in the Russian-language media in Latvia.<sup>184</sup> This criticism, it seems, reflects a widespread feeling among the non-Latvian population. For instance, in a survey conducted in 1993 by the American political scientist David Laitin, 95.2 percent of the

181 *SM-segodnia*, 26 March 1996.

182 *Diena*, 1 June 1996.

183 *SM-segodnia*, 6 June 1996.

184 See, for instance, *SM-segodnia* 13 May 1996.

Russians in Latvia believe that Latvian ought to be a mandatory subject in all schools in Latvia.<sup>185</sup>

Another survey which was organized by Ina Druviete in 1995,<sup>186</sup> showed that 90.9 percent of the Russians wanted their children to be fluent in Latvian. The corresponding figures for the Belarusians and Ukrainians were 87.7 percent and 88.9 percent, respectively. 64.1 percent of the Russians, 62.8 percent of the Belarusians, and 67.6 percent of the Ukrainians expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of instruction in Latvian given to their children.

In the Druviete poll, furthermore, the persons interviewed were asked about their preferred model for Russian-language schools. 43.5 percent of the Russians and 43.9 percent of the respondents of other non-Latvian nationalities said that "education ought to be given in Russian while Latvian ought to be taught as a second language." 28.6 percent of the Russians and 25 percent of the "others" thought that "most of the teaching ought to be conducted in Russian, but some subjects ought to be taught in Latvian." 17.2 and 11.7 percent, respectively, supported the view that "all education ought to be in Russian," while 9.7 percent of the Russians and 15.3 percent of the "others" believed that "most of the education ought to be in Latvian while some subjects (such as Russian and literature) ought to be given in Russian." Finally, only 1 percent of the Russians and 4.1 percent of the non-Russian minorities wanted all education to be conducted in Latvian.

Thus, there is a radical discrepancy between the reform in the Russian schools contemplated by the political leadership in Latvia, on the one hand, and the preferences of the national minorities themselves, on the other.

In this situation, the Latvian Society of Russian Culture and the Latvian Association of Russian-Language Teachers put forward a constructive "Alternative Concept for language policy in Latvian national minority education."<sup>187</sup> The main ideas here included beginning the teaching of the state language to Russian-speaking children at an early stage; achieving a proper balance between Latvian and mother tongues in required reading texts; broadening the opening for students to choose optional courses in Latvian in accordance with their preferences and future educational plans; and establishing special centers for the re-training of teachers for Russian and minority schools.

Most likely, in the final outcome the future system of education for the nontitular population in Latvia will be decided upon through a

185 Laitin 1996a, 7.

186 Druviete 1995.

187 The Concept was published in *Diena* (supplement), 29 May 1996.

complex give-and-take process which will involve not only the Latvian political elite and the cultural organizations of the Russophones, but also the participation of international organizations and even Russia.

*Linguistic Shifts in the  
Latvian Educational System*

From 1988 to 1997 the share of pupils in Latvian schools who studied in Latvian rose from 51.1 to 61.9 percent. In the same period, the proportion of students choosing Russian-language schools fell from 48.5 to less than 39 percent. This tendency was particularly marked in the lowest grades. In the elementary schools (first through fourth grade) as many as 66 percent of the children attended Latvian-language classes in the 1995/96 school year.<sup>188</sup> The number of schools that are offering Russian language education is slowly, but surely, getting smaller and smaller. At the same time the number of Latvian schools is on the increase (see Figure 4.15).

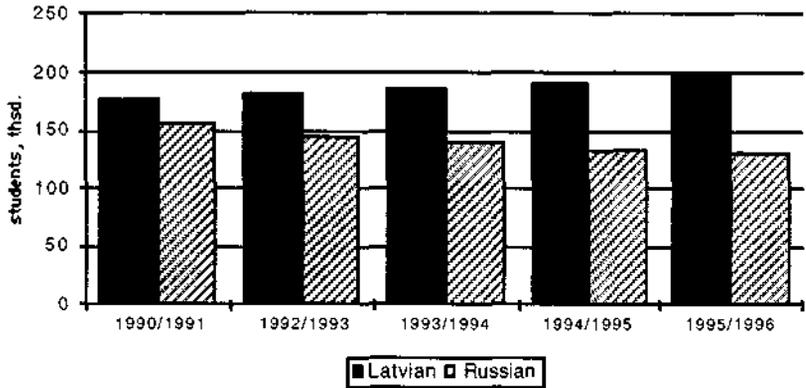
The government insists that these changes in the school structure are a consequence of the altered demographic composition of the population. In particular, when the Russian army was withdrawn in August 1994, a number of Russian schools attached to the military garrisons were closed. Moreover, official spokespersons will explain, there is a growing tendency among Russophone parents to send their children to Latvian-language schools. Hence, the increasing closure of Russian schools is both natural and democratic.<sup>189</sup> Most Russophones nevertheless perceive the ever-more limited chances to be educated in Russian as discriminatory. They believe that the quality of the education offered to Russian children is purposely and systematically lowered. As a corollary, their competitiveness at university entry and in the labor market is weakening. Their most vocal reactions the Russophone parents have reserved for the local municipalities that, in a number of cases, have closed down solid, prestigious Russian schools through arbitrary decisions. One such incidence was the closure of the 26th School in Riga in June 1994 which caused protracted protests: hunger strikes, pickets, petitions, etc.<sup>190</sup>

188 *Diena*, 23 March 1996.

189 See, e.g., *Diena*, 23 March 1996; and the reply of the Minister for Education and Science, Maris Grinblats, to an official inquiry from a Saeima deputy, Parliamentary Doc. no. 1-2-102 of 5 June 1996.

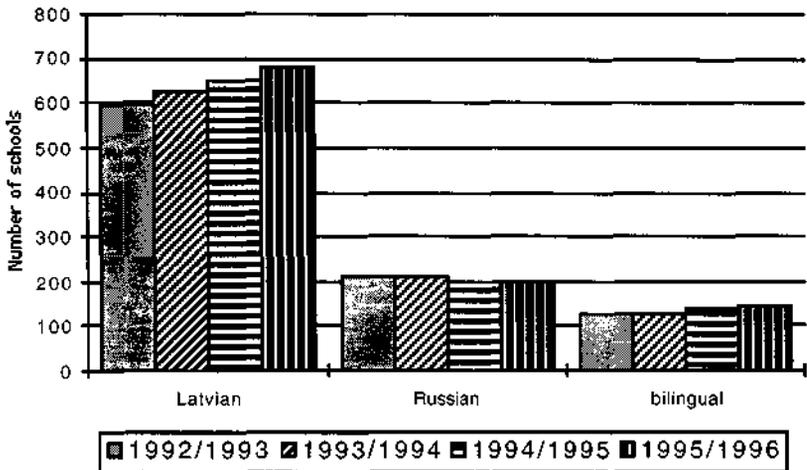
190 *SM-segodnia*, 28 June 1994, as well as numerous other publications on this theme in the same paper.

FIGURE 4.14 Language of Instruction in Latvia's Schools



Sources: *Latvija skaitlos 1996*, 55; *Ethnosituacija Latvija 1994*, 16. The "other" category does not show up in the figure since it amounts to less than one percent.

FIGURE 4.15 Number of Schools in Latvia by Language of Instruction



Sources: *Izglitibas iestades 1996*, 46; Tomasuns 1994.

In order to give as objective an assessment as possible of the arguments of both parties in this dispute we would need exact data on the number of non-Latvians pupils who are attending Latvian schools. Unfortunately, no such official statistics are available. All we have been able to obtain are data on the ethnic composition of the student mass in ten primary schools in the Vidzeme district of Riga. They show that, for about 20 percent of the students in grades 1 through 4 in Latvian-language schools, Latvian was not the main language of communication in their family. This figure had remained fairly stable for the last four years.

Very often when significant numbers of Russian children try to get entrance into Latvian-language schools, the parents of the Latvian kids file protests. They fear that the Russian kids will influence the language, culture, and behavior of their Latvian school mates more than the other way around. In a reply to concerned Latvian parents the Minister of Education, Maris Grinblats, declared in June 1996 that "under no circumstances will we [...] accept a mechanical mixture of Latvian children and children of other nationalities in the same school or in the same class."<sup>191</sup> Against the backdrop of such declarations it is not quite clear how one should understand the official concept for a reform of the non-Latvian education, according to which most Russophone youngsters should receive their medium-level education in Latvian. It appears that, as the Russian high schools are closed down, new "Latvian-language schools for Russian-language children" will have to be constructed, to exist alongside the regular Latvian schools. How this will foster increased ethnic integration in society, is far from clear. Ever more often the somber prediction is heard that as a result of the school reform the Russian children will choose not to take any medium-level education at all. Education above the elementary level is not mandatory in Latvia.<sup>192</sup>

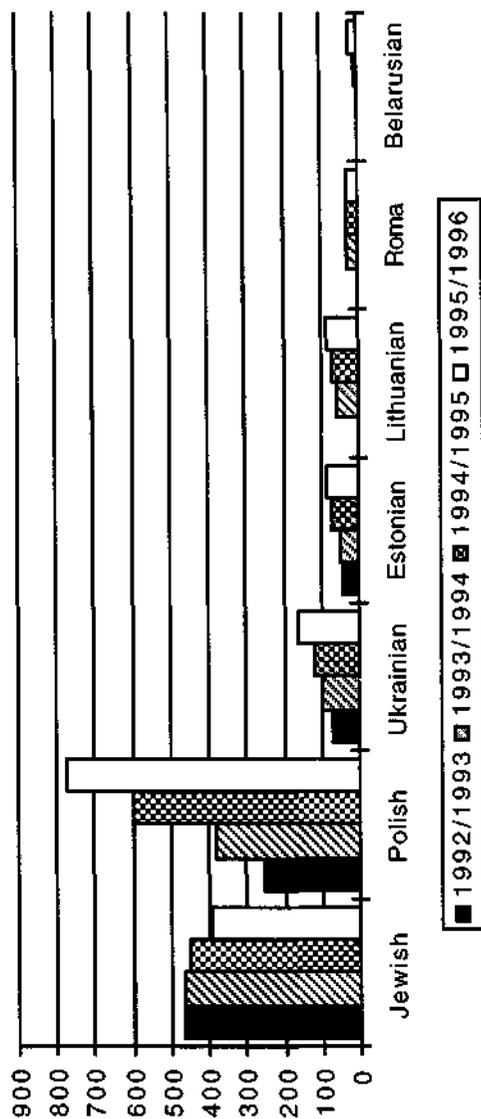
The number of pupils in the Russian schools is on average far higher than in the Latvian schools. To a certain extent this can be explained by the fact that the majority of the non-Latvian population is concentrated in the cities, while the small country schools are mostly Latvian. As regards specialized high schools and technical schools, all of them are losing students, irrespective of language of instruction. However, the students are deserting the Russian schools faster than they are deserting the Latvian ones.

In 1994, the Russian language was continuing to fulfill its functions as a *lingua franca* in Latvia. While ethnic Latvians in that year made up

<sup>191</sup> *Latvijas vestnesis*, 13 June 1996.

<sup>192</sup> *Minority Rights and Mechanisms* 1996, 6.

FIGURE 4.16 Number of Students in Minority Schools (Classes) in Latvia



Source: *Izglītības iestādes*, 1995/96, 1996, 46; Tomasuns 1994; and unpublished material from the Information Center of the Ministry of Education and Science.

approximately 97 percent of the pupils in Latvian language schools, ethnic Russians made up slightly more than 70 percent of the total student mass in Russian-language schools. Remarkably, in these schools the share of ethnic Latvians continued to be above 10 percent. To some degree, this seems to be a legacy from the Soviet period when children from ethnically mixed families usually went to Russian schools. Also, these figures probably reveal a mismatch between the formal ethnicity and the actual mother tongue and self-awareness of some pupils. In spite of being listed in the census data as Latvians they felt themselves to be Russians.

### *Minority Schools*

In the late 1980s a process of reestablishing national minority schools started in Latvia. In 1989, the Riga Jewish high school was opened. At that time, this was the only Jewish school throughout the whole of the USSR.<sup>193</sup> Over the next years two Polish, one Ukrainian, one Estonian, and one Lithuanian school were opened in Riga. Classes were available in Belarusian. Polish schools were opened in Daugavpils, Rezekne, Jekabpils and Kraslava; Lithuanian classes in Liepaja, and Roma classes in Ventspils. In the 1995/1996 school year the number of students increased in practically all minority schools except the Jewish ones, though no new schools or classes were opened (see Figure 4.16). In some cases financial support from the "ethnic homeland" (in particular, Poland and Israel) plays an important role in the upkeep of these schools.

It should be pointed out that the minority language is not always used as the language of instruction in the "national" schools. Thus, in the Jewish and Ukrainian schools<sup>194</sup> most subjects are taught in Russian, and in Latvian in the Estonian school. What makes these schools "national" is the inclusion of several additional subjects in the curriculum, such as courses in the national language, national history, and national culture.

The pupils who study in minority schools in Latvia make up less than one percent of the total student body. However, among the pupils at the lowest level (grades 1 through 4) the percentage is slightly higher.<sup>195</sup> Jews tend to be attracted to national schools more than other

193 *Natsional'nye i etnicheskie* 1996, 36.

194 *SM-segodnia*, 20 March 1996.

195 Data from the Information Center of the Ministry of Education and Science.

TABLE 4.7 Share of School-Age Children Attending Minority Schools by Ethnic Groups, 1995

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<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Belarusians	0.5
Poles	11.4
Lithuanians	3.2
Jews	30.6
Estonians	6.7
Roma	3.8

*Source:* Information Center of the Ministry of Education and Science.

minorities, apparently in preparation for emigration to Israel. Among all other groups the percentages are considerably lower (see Table 4.7).

### **Ethnic "Division of Labor" and Socioeconomic Stratification**

The restoration of Latvian independence brought about significant changes in the social structure of the Latvian and the Russophone communities. For one thing, as a corollary of the establishment of a number of new state institutions a multitude of new jobs were created in the organs of government. The vast majority of the officials who filled these positions were ethnic Latvians.

Representatives of the Russophone population tend to be employed more often than Latvians in the crisis-ridden Latvian industry, not least in the mastodon plants which used to be oriented toward the all-Union Soviet economic structure. A significant part of the non-Latvian population of working age was/is made up of blue collar workers and young specialists who worked at these plants as well as at research institutes and engineering design agencies.

Russians have also traditionally dominated in the middle and higher administrative levels of the national economy. In these areas, ethnic Latvians made up only 31.5 percent of the workforce in the mid-1980s. Finally, Russophones were also clearly overrepresented in jobs with very low pay and prestige such as transport, construction and unskilled industrial work.<sup>196</sup> In contrast, ethnic Latvians have

traditionally dominated in agriculture (71.9 percent) as well as in culture and the arts (69.2 percent).<sup>197</sup> In these sectors the crisis set in only some years after the depression had hit the heavy industry.

Specifically, two main factors contributed to the new ethnic stratification of the Latvian job market: the introduction of new market principles in the economy, on the one hand, and the titular nationality's near total control over the levers of political power on the other. To some considerable degree these two factors run at cross-purposes. While a market economy in principle is ruled by an "invisible hand," the monopolization of political power in the hands of one group meant that it is able to decide "the rules of the game."

Conventional wisdom insists that private business in Latvia is mostly controlled by Russophone tycoons. For instance, at a meeting of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1993, the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgs Andrejevs, asserted that "80 percent of the finance capital of Latvia is in the hands of non-Latvians."<sup>198</sup> In an interview with the Russian weekly *Golos* the ambassador of Latvia to Russia Janis Peteris in 1992 claimed that "82 percent of the Latvian capital belongs to non-Latvians."<sup>199</sup>

According to our data, more than 40 percent of the ethnic Latvians believe that the *nouveaux riches* in Latvia are Russians, while only slightly more than 5 percent believe that Latvians predominate in this social segment. The corresponding figures for Russians are 12 percent and 6 percent (see Figure 4.17). One might say that, on the level of stereotypes, the Russians now occupy the position traditionally reserved for the Jews.

No objective data exist to either substantiate or disprove these opinions. Nonetheless, the leading Latvian political scientist Nils Muiznieks is of the opinion that the prevalent idea about the dominance of non-Latvians in Latvian business life has some element of truth: Non-Latvian managers in the industry and in the transport sectors have traditionally had good contacts in Russia and have been better placed for a launch into private business than Latvians who have been engaged in agriculture or in the cultural sphere.<sup>200</sup>

An important factor behind the emerging ethno-professional structure is also the exclusion of non-Latvians from public administration.

197 Mezgailis and Katkovska 1992, 68.

198 *Diena*, 4 February 1993.

199 Quoted in *SM-segodnia*, 10 November 1992.

200 Muiznieks 1994.

FIGURE 4.17 Whom Do You Consider to Belong to the New Rich in Latvia?

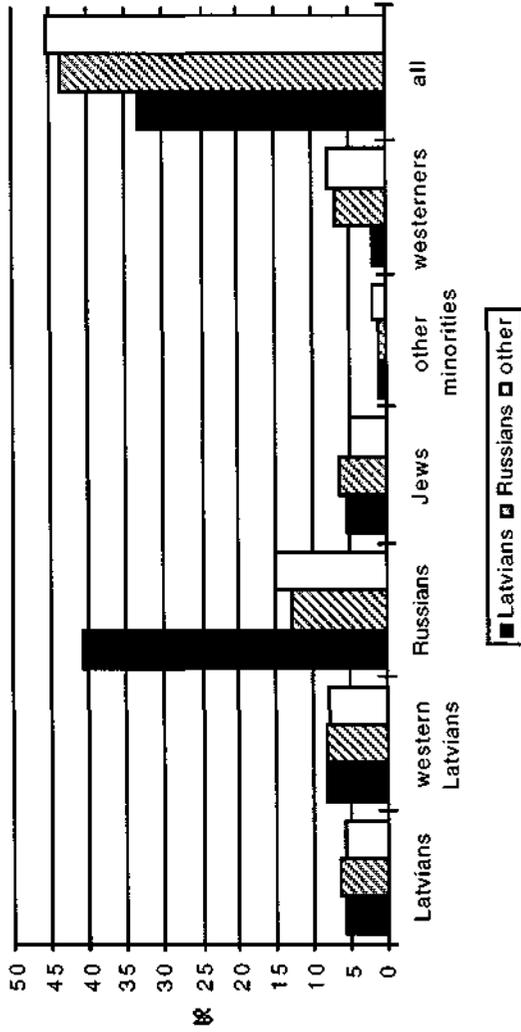
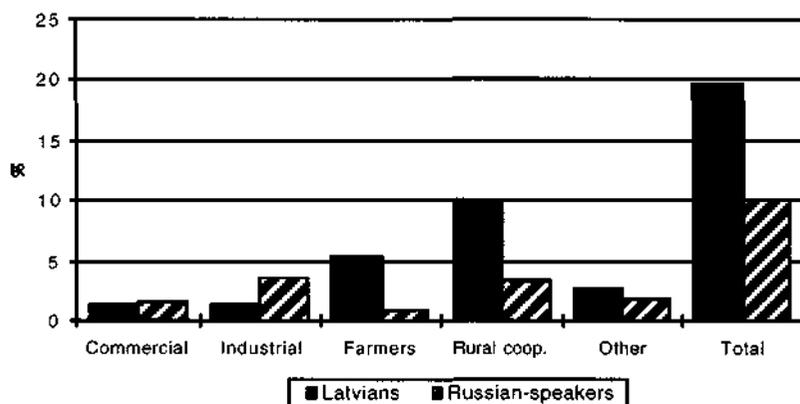
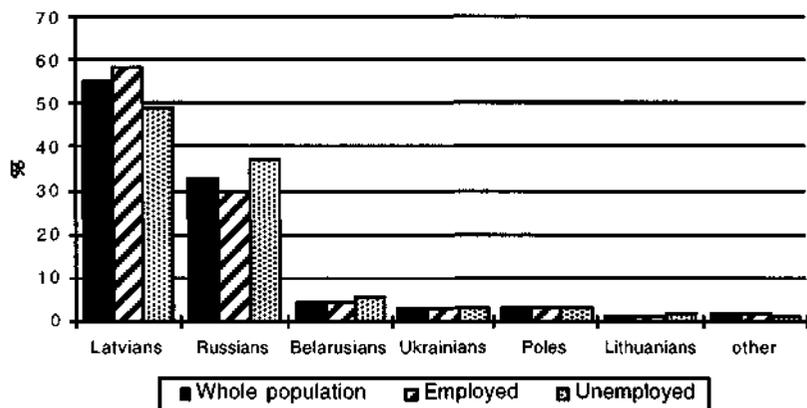


FIGURE 4.18 Ownership of Private Enterprises by Ethnicity (1993)



Source: Dreifelds 1996, 160–61.

FIGURE 4.19 Ethnic Structure of Employed and Unemployed Residents of Latvia (1996)



Source: Darbaspeks 1996, 29 and 64; Par bezdarbu valsti 1996, 4.

The president of the major Latvian bank Pareks, Valerii Kargin, has opined that

business in this country is controlled more by Jews and Russians than by Latvians. This fact makes the Latvians angry, although to some extent it is their own fault. Russians and Jews were squeezed out from positions in government institutions and to compensate they started their own business, just like kids who are learning to swim by being thrown into the water. Thus, the following situation has emerged: Latvians dominate in public administration and non-Latvians in the national economy.<sup>201</sup>

The data reproduced in Figure 4.18 give some idea about the relative shares of the various ethnic groups among Latvian property owners (although they tell us nothing about the distribution of capital among ethnic groups). The data were commissioned by the Canadian researcher Juris Dreifelds and collected by the Latvian Centre of Social Research in 1993. As one would expect, a significantly higher number of farms belong to ethnic Latvians. The same is true with regard to agricultural associations and cooperatives. Cross-tabulating with the ethnic composition of the population at large, Juris Dreifelds found that the Latvians' share of private capital in industry was 30 percent and 48 percent in private commerce.<sup>202</sup> However, it appears that Dreifelds did not take into account such factors as the turnover quantities of the various enterprises or the total volume of the capital they represent. Therefore, one would probably be ill-advised to make any definite conclusions about the ethnic distribution of private capital in Latvia on the basis of his figures.

An important indicator of ethnic stratification in the economy and social life in any country is the differences in the levels of unemployment among the various ethnic groups. As is shown in Figure 4.19, the share of Latvians in the employed segment of the population is somewhat greater than average while their share among the unemployed is somewhat lower than the population at large. The figures for Russians and most other ethnic groups point in the opposite direction. In November 1996, 26 percent of the Russians in Latvia and 14 percent of the ethnic Latvians claimed that they had been unemployed at some time during the last half year while 53 percent of the Latvians and 45 percent of the Russians had never experienced unemployment. (33 percent of the Latvians and 29 percent of the Russian respondents were not in the labor force.<sup>203</sup>) Another survey, conducted in 1994 by the NORBALT

201 Lieven 1993, 365.

202 Ibid.

203 Rose 1997a.

living conditions project, showed that Russians have a considerably higher probability of being unemployed than ethnic Latvians, all other background characteristics being equal. Within the Russian group, persons holding Latvian citizenship are better protected against unemployment than are non-citizens and citizens of other states.<sup>204</sup>

However, also these data ought to be treated with caution. Official Latvian unemployment statistics disregard several important factors. First and foremost they do not take into account the hidden unemployment, that is, the high number of cases when workers are sent on unpaid leave for an indefinite period of time, rather than being fired. Such bogus arrangements make it possible for the enterprises to avoid paying gratuity of discharge to laid-off workers. The workers, on their side, know that if they quit their job voluntarily, they will forfeit their right to this gratuity in perpetuity. Thus neither party is interested in a formal dismissal. The workers stay on without a job or a salary but are at the same time not considered unemployed.

While inattention to these dynamics tends to produce unrealistically low unemployment figures, other omissions have the opposite effect. Official statistics, inevitably, do not include employment in the "grey sector" (petty street peddling, shuttle trade, small-scale smuggling, and work "for cash" without a formal work contract—an arrangement which allows the worker to evade taxes and the employer to evade social security payments). It is widely believed that non-Latvians are more active in this "grey economy" than are the Latvians. If this really is the case, the real unemployment rates among the various ethnic groups are somewhat closer to their shares of the population at large than the official statistics would indicate.

Table 4.8 gives the responses we received in our survey regarding attitudes toward preferential employment policies. It comes as no surprise that more Latvians than non-Latvians want to give ethnic Latvians and citizens of Latvia preferred treatment on the labor market.

TABLE 4.8 Who Should Have Employment Priority in a Situation of Few Jobs?

	<i>Ethnic Latvians</i>	<i>Latvian citizens</i>	<i>Specialists</i>
Answers from Latvians	18.1	33.3	45.0
Answers from Russians	3.7	10.5	81.5
Other	3.2	17.8	74.9

204 Aasland 1997, 113 and 115.

### Differences of Perceptions

In the Communist period the Soviet Union was a single political unit with one official ideology. This created the illusion that the country and its inhabitants formed a uniform mass, having the same viewpoints and opinions on all important issues. In reality, however, the various ethnic groups living in Latvia had very different attitudes toward and perceptions about the history and the legal status of the Latvian republic.

Thus, the majority of the Russophones who arrived in Latvia after the Second World War did not question the official version of the history of the Baltic states. (According to this version, what took place in 1940 was a socialist revolution; the USSR and the Soviet people played a decisive role in the economic and social achievements of the Baltic countries, etc.) In the opinion of Rasma Karklins, such perceptions predisposed a certain segment of the Russophone population toward condescending and patronizing attitudes toward the Latvians.<sup>205</sup>

Among ethnic Latvians, on the other hand, an unofficial, oral version of the history of the country circulated alongside the official version and was passed on from generation to generation.<sup>206</sup> This version remained unknown to the majority of the Russians right up to the introduction of glasnost.

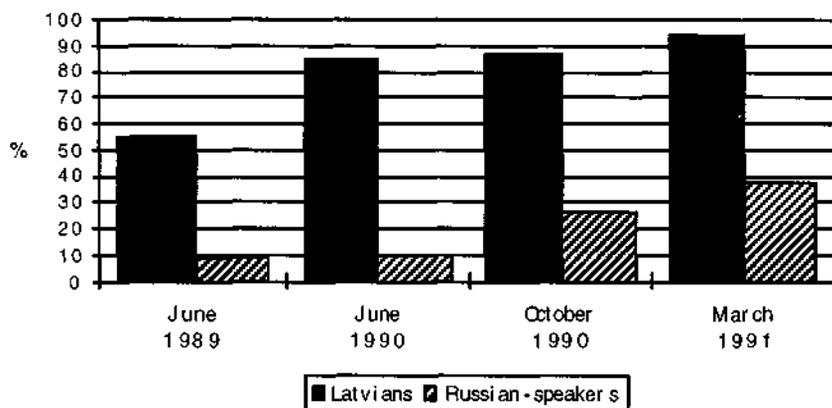
Another important difference in the perceptions that predominate among the major ethnic groups is the understanding of the Soviet nationality policy. To most Latvians, the Soviet regime had an unmistakable ethnic color: "Soviet" was identified with "Russian." One of the main reasons for this was the language factor: The instruments of power almost without exception used the Russian language. In addition, the establishment of Soviet power in Latvia was on the popular level associated with the appearance in the country of scores of soldiers who spoke Russian. Up to the very present, Latvians from very different walks of life refer to the Soviet period as "krievu laiki" ("Russian times").

The Latvians' perception of the Soviet power as an ethnically alien rule led directly to their political rejection of this regime. It was therefore quite natural that the idea of restored statehood would enjoy great popularity among the Latvians while most Russians never gave a thought to it. The data reproduced in figure 4.20 show the dynamics

205 Karklins 1986/1989,52-53.

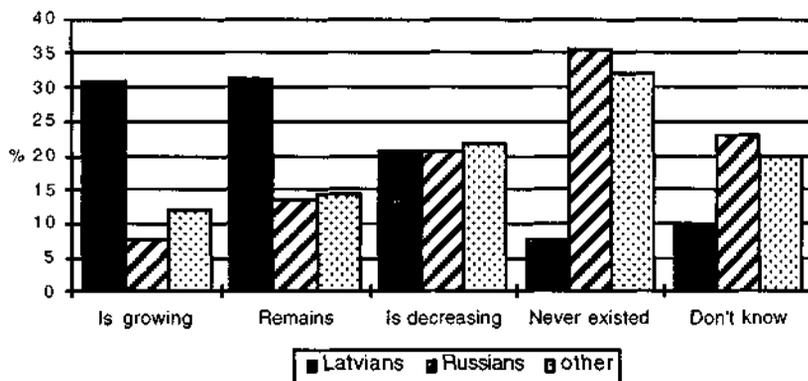
206 On the role of oral history in Latvia, see Savdona 1994, 25-30.

FIGURE 4.20 Support for Latvia's Independence



Source: Zepa 1992, 23.

FIGURE 4.21 Evaluation of the Threat of Extinction of the Latvian Nation



Source: Survey conducted by "Latvian Facts" in October 1995. See Chapter 6, appendix.

in the attitudes toward Latvian independence from the USSR, and the different trajectories of Russophone and Latvian opinions. Among the Russophones support for Latvian independence increased fourfold between 1989 and 1991, but still remained less than half of the Latvians' support.

Ethnic Latvians react very sensitively to any tendencies toward changes in the ethnodemographic situation in Latvia. They fear that if the Latvians should become a minority in the country, this would lead to radical changes in the ethnocultural environment, in the language situation, etc.<sup>207</sup> As late as 1996 more than 30 percent of the Latvians believed that the danger of the extinction of the Latvian ethnonation had still not passed away. Almost the same number of respondents believed that this danger in later years had become even more acute, while 35 percent of the non-Latvians at this time believed that no such danger existed (see Figure 4.21).

However, if in earlier years ethnicity seems to have been the most important factor determining people's attitudes toward basic values in Latvia, then in later years sociologists have detected ever more distinct differences of opinions along the age cohort divides which cut across ethnic divisions. The effect of this trend is most pronounced among the non-Latvian youth. As a result, the viewpoints of young Russophones and young Latvians are rapidly approaching each other.<sup>208</sup> In particular, the vast majority of the non-Latvian youth today regard Latvia as their motherland. Nevertheless, with regard to certain other issues such as citizenship, attitudes toward Russia, and the evaluation of some historical events, the viewpoints of Russians and Latvians are worlds apart. Thus, Russians and Latvians have basically the same perceptions about the general level of the threat against the security of the Latvian state, but disagree as to whence the threat is stemming. More than 40 percent of the citizens of Latvia believe that Russia is the greatest source of insecurity while only some 7 percent of the non-citizens believe so (Table 4.9).

207 For an outline of these changes, see pp. 69-71 .

208 In particular, this tendency has been registered by the leading Latvian sociologist Brigita Zepa, and discussed in the paper she presented at the conference "The process of the formation of political nations in the Baltic states," Riga, 17-18 October 1996. Comparative tendencies have been registered also in Estonian, cf. Axel Kirch's presentation at the same conference.

TABLE 4.9 Assessment of Main Threats to Peace and Security by Latvia's Residents

	<i>Citizens</i>	<i>Residents</i>
Neighboring countries (except Russia)	1.7	2.4
Russia	41.9	6.7
Ethnic minorities	5.4	1.4
Immigrants, refugees	14.0	5.3
Terrorism	54.4	47.5
Environmental pollution	57.5	55.2
Drugs, criminality	74.9	69.8
Losing national identity	26.1	15.8
Corruption	63.1	61.9

*Source:* Survey conducted by "Latvian Facts" in October 1995. See Chapter 6., appendix. The respondents were free to agree with more than one option on the list.

As the New Baltic Barometer **III** survey data reveals, Russians are much more pessimistic about the future prospect for Latvia's economy: only 33 percent believe that economic conditions will improve in five years, while 60 percent expect them to continue to be poor.<sup>209</sup> For ethnic Latvians, the corresponding figures are 43 percent on both counts. Also answers to the question "Are you the sort of person who works with others in the community to try to solve local problems" are revealing. Only 5 percent of Russians do this often, 22 percent sometimes, and 51 percent never. For ethnic Latvians, the figures were 8 percent, 31 percent, and 38 percent.<sup>210</sup>

### *Russophone Organizations*

Traditionally, dominant tendencies within a group are analyzed through a description of the activities of political and social organizations created and run by the group members. For a number of reasons, however, this method may be applied to Latvia's Russian-speaking population only with some reservations. Most important is a very low level of social activity. According to the New Baltic Barometer **III** survey, only 2 percent of Russians claim to be members of any public or nonstate-sponsored organization<sup>211</sup> (for Latvians this figure is 9 percent<sup>212</sup>). Alienation from the state remains the dominant tendency

<sup>209</sup> Rose 1997a, 15.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>212</sup> A prominent Latvian analyst Nils Muiznieks believes that to some extent this difference could be explained by the fact that the mass organizations with the largest member-

among the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. Passivity, insecurity, uncertainty about the future, lack of mobilization and fragmentation of the community are the most characteristic features.

There is no simple answer explaining why this is so. We will only point to some possible causes: The Russophone community of Latvia lacks strong social, political, and mental bonds which could have given it a sense of common purpose and shared destiny. It has no authoritative, charismatic leaders. On the contrary, it is highly fragmented and divided. The fast social changes going on around them, in which the majority of the nontitulars have played a passive role only, have left them bewildered and frustrated. Also, by the early 1990s the "indigenization" of the Latvian political elite had already become an accomplished fact and led to the marginalization of the Russians. Finally, one should not underestimate the strong desire of the vast majority of the non-Latvians to avoid open, interethnic confrontations. They know only too well what kind of horrors violent ethnic conflicts have led to in other parts of the former USSR. Generally, this trend has much in common with the Soviet model of relations between an individual and a state: avoidance of any contact with the state whenever possible.

During the perestroika period Russian intellectuals participated actively in the new social and protopolitical movements. However, while the social activity of Latvians was centered around the national liberation movement, the activities of the Russians were more in line with the mainstream democratization rallies in the rest of the then Soviet Union.

In the late 1980s some ethnically based cultural organizations were created within the Latvian Russophone community. The Baltic-Slavic Society of Cultural Development and Cooperation (BSO), established in July 1988, was the first association of its kind.<sup>213</sup> Initially, BSO included Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian sections, but at some point the two latter sections were transformed into separate organizations.

The "International Front of Working People of the Latvian SSR," or Interfront—established in late 1988, early 1989—was widely regarded as "the Russian organization." Indeed, the overwhelming majority of the Interfront supporters were Russian-speakers, and the organization

ships, the trade unions, comprise primarily teachers, doctors, and state servants, i.e. groups in which ethnic Latvians prevail. Besides, a considerable part of Latvia's NGOs are 'restored organizations', that is, heirs to those that existed before 1940 (e.g. student corporations). Also these organizations are dominated by ethnic Latvians. Nevertheless, taking even these factors into account, the differences in organizational activity among the various ethnic groups are striking.

213 Chicherina 1989, 201; Kudriavtsev 1990, 9.

strongly opposed the drive toward independence and all attempts to strengthen the position of the Latvian language in society. At the same time, the Interfront leadership consistently avoided the use of "Russian" rhetorics, sticking instead to internationalist slogans in accordance with the general Communist program of the organization.<sup>214</sup>

In the early 1990s, a high level of politicization characterized all minority-run and particularly all Russian organizations in Latvia. Some of them overtly supported the Popular Front (e.g. LORK), while others leaned towards the Interfront. BSO officially kept neutral.

Restoration of Latvian independence and its official recognition by Russia and the international community significantly changed the situation for Russian organizations in Latvia. The Interfront was outlawed and ceased to exist. At the same time, the Resolution on citizenship adopted in October 1991, as well as some other steps of a nationalistic nature undertaken by Latvian authorities undermined the position of LORK and other Russophone organizations that had supported the Popular Front. Gradually, also LORK switched to a position of moderate opposition toward the government. In February 1996 several prominent LORK leaders, together with three Latvian writers, signed a letter to President Ulmanis strongly criticizing the Latvian minority policy.<sup>215</sup> However, LORK and its allies never moved close to Interfront positions, nor did they questioned the independence of Latvia.

The most ambitious attempt to create a broad Russian organization was undertaken in early 1991. A small group of activists designed an organization called The Russian Community of Latvia (ROL). The guiding principles of ROL were solidarity, justice, subsidiarity, and the need to help Russians adapt to conditions of market economy in a Latvian national state.<sup>216</sup> The initiators of ROL declared that they did not intend to challenge the political powers that be but rather wanted to cooperate with them.<sup>217</sup> They also stressed the necessity of creating a firm economic basis for the community. For a while, ROL indeed managed to bring together leaders from many other Russian organizations and to launch several enterprises under its auspices, even a Slavic Bank.

Before long, however, internal squabbles weakened the organization and eventually tore it apart. These conflicts lasted for several years.<sup>218</sup> ROL branches in some Latvian cities, *in casu* in Daugavpils, declared

214 Kurakina and Tikhomirov 1991.

215 *Diena*, 7 February 1996.

216 Smekhov 1991,8-9.

217 *Baltiiskoe vremia*, 14 May 1991.

218 *SM-segodnia*, 27 February 1996.

their independence from the Riga leadership.<sup>219</sup> The economic activities of ROL practically collapsed, and it gradually became only one among several competing Russian organizations emerging in 1991-1995.

Some new attempts to create unity among the Russian organizations continued to be made. In particular, in February 1995 the Latvian Association of Russian Societies was established,<sup>220</sup> somewhat later, the Center of Russian Culture in Latvia, and the Russian Cultural Autonomy Association. However, none of these organizations has ever acquired a real mass membership or can claim to represent the entire Russian population of Latvia.

In 1993 an attempt was made to create an Association of Russia's Citizens in Latvia. However, the Latvian Ministry of Justice refused official registration of this organization on the grounds that its activities were considered to be in breach of Latvian legislation.<sup>221</sup>

Several predominantly Russian organizations focus primarily on human rights issues. The Latvian Human Rights Committee, founded in 1990, is the leading NGO of this kind. The Committee deals with legal consultancy and litigation, prepares and disseminates declarations and appeals concerning human rights problems in Latvia (in particular, publishes monthly surveys of the human rights situation in Latvian Russian-language media), and organizing mass actions like pickets and meetings. In 1992-1994, the Committee concentrated on legal aid to persons who claimed that their rights had been violated in the process of registering the permanent residents of Latvia. With assistance from the Committee several thousand plaintiffs won law suits against the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. In January 1995, the Committee was admitted to The Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme, F.I.D.H., and was later registered by the Latvian Ministry of Justice as a Latvian branch of this international organization.<sup>222</sup> Several leaders of the Committee are also active in the leftist Equal Rights movement, and the Committee is often blamed—not without reason—for mixing politics and human rights activities.

219 *Dinaburg*, 6 October 1992.

220 *Baltiiskaia gazeta*, 24 February 1995; *SM-segodnia*, 17 February 1995.

221 *SM-segodnia*, 10 September 1993.

222 *SM-segodnia*, 24 January 1995.

## **The Impact of the Russian Federation on Latvian Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration**

Russians in the Baltic states are often identified with Russia and even branded as "fifth columnists." Sociological surveys reveal that this point is ill-based. For most Russians Latvia and not Russia is their "home country." According to a British researcher there is not even a strong demand among them for closer ties with the Russian Federation.<sup>223</sup>

An important indicator of the feeling of belonging to Russia among Russophone communities in the Soviet successor states is the number of persons who have acquired Russian citizenship. Despite Russia's offer of citizenship to all citizens of the former USSR by registration, less than 9 percent of the Russian-speaking noncitizen population in Latvia have taken it, and many of those who have, did so on the eve of leaving for Russia. As pointed out on page 98, there is a striking difference in this respect between Latvia and Estonia. Apparently, the higher number of Russian citizens among the nontitular population in Estonia is connected with the compactness of the Russian communities in that country and their greater geographic separation from the Estonian communities. Most Russians in Estonia live in the capital and in the biggest cities of the Northeast. By contrast, the Russian population in Latvia is more evenly distributed throughout the urban areas (and, to a lesser extent, even in the countryside). Also, Russians with ancestral roots in the interwar state are much more numerous in Latvia than in Estonia. Thus, generally speaking, the Russian-speaking residents in Latvia are less Russia-oriented than are the Russophones in Estonia. Strong attachment to Russian language and culture does not necessarily imply a strong feeling of belonging to Russia as a state. Russia is definitely an important actor also in Latvian ethnopolitics, but an external one.

Relations between the nascent democratic state of Russia and the equally nascent independent states in the Baltics initially developed under the popular slogan of "For your freedom and ours." Boris Yeltsin's demonstrative visit to the Supreme Council of Latvia in August 1990<sup>224</sup> was a clear sign of support, and stood in sharp contrast to the negative attitude of the Gorbachev regime in Moscow. During this visit, Yeltsin spent many hours with the leaders of the Latvian Popular Front faction

223 Rose 1997b, 42.

224 *Baltiiskoe vremia*, 7 August 1990.

in the Latvian Supreme Council, and agreed to only one very brief meeting with representatives of the pro-Communist Equal Rights faction.<sup>225</sup>

In January 1991, Yeltsin came to Tallinn to sign treaties with Estonia and Latvia on mutual recognition of sovereignty. These treaties were immediately ratified by the Latvian and Estonian parliaments.<sup>226</sup> Many people in the Baltics believe that this move was crucial to stop the anticipated military invasion which had been prepared by the activities of Soviet OMON forces (special militia units) in Vilnius and Riga a couple of days earlier. Yeltsin also published an open letter to "The Peoples of the Baltics" expressing strong support for their independence struggle and also urging them to avoid interethnic confrontation.<sup>227</sup>

Russia was one of the very first states to recognize the independence of the Baltic countries after the abortive coup in August 1991,<sup>228</sup> thus leaving no choice for Gorbachev but to do the same, greatly alleviating the task of the Western democracies. The alliance between Russia and the Baltic states, however, was based on a temporary convergence of political goals rather than on a common ideology. In 1989-1991, the basic political conflict in the USSR ran between the regional elites (including the ethnic elites of the Soviet national republics) on the one hand, and the Soviet central authorities on the other. When the Soviet center collapsed, other interests and political alignments came to the fore.

After the 1993 parliamentary elections in Russia the two main opposition forces—the revived Communist Party and the various nationalist, "statist" alliances—became firmly established in the corridors of power. They actively used the topic of "the betrayal of compatriots abroad" as an effective political trump card against the Russian democratic leadership. Strict measures taken by Latvian authorities against the Russian-speakers in the field of citizenship and language policies, as well as persistent Latvian demands for the immediate withdrawal of former Soviet, now Russian, troops, also contributed much to the deterioration of Russian-Latvian relations. The main cause, however, was a crucial change in the strategic position of the Russian political elite: no longer in opposition to the Soviet Communist regime, it had become responsible for the development and the interests of the Russian state.

225 *Edinstvo*, 20-26 August 1990.

226 *LR AP Lemums* 1991. The text of the Latvian-Russian treaty was published in Russian in *Baltiiskoe vremia*, 17 January 1991.

227 *Baltiiskoe vremia*, 21 January 1991.

228 *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi* 1991.

In the long run, the Moscow democrats could not afford to leave the subject of "Russia's interests" to the opposition alone. Official Russian rhetorics on Baltic issues became increasingly aggressive. In the fall of 1992 Russia prodded the UN into sending a fact-finding mission to Latvia and Estonia to investigate alleged large-scale violations of the human rights of the Russian-speakers. The mission made some critical remarks, but on the whole did not confirm Russia's allegations.<sup>229</sup> Russian authorities also began to link the problem of the status and rights of the local Russians to the issue of troops withdrawal. Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev accused Western states of ignoring serious human rights problems faced by Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia. Threats to the Russians, Kozyrev said, justified the continued presence of Russian troops. Kozyrev also maintained that the attitude of the West greatly helped Russian ultranationalists like Zhirinovskii to strengthen their positions.<sup>230</sup> In the upshot, an active intervention from the side of Western governments and intergovernmental organizations facilitated the signing of a treaty on troops withdrawal in April 1994.

The most characteristic feature of Russia's policies toward Latvia at this stage was a virtual consensus across the entire political spectrum on the necessity of strong-arm policies aimed at the protection of the compatriots in the Baltics.<sup>231</sup> However, the implementation of these policies remained rather weak and inconsistent.

President Yeltsin adopted several decrees related to the protection of Russians outside Russia.<sup>232</sup> The Russian Parliament also discussed several declarations and law projects on the Support of Compatriots, but did not adopt any of them.<sup>233</sup> Several organizations and institutions affiliated with the State Duma, the Russian Government, or the President's Administration were established to deal with the problem of the compatriots. However, the authority and financial resources of these institutions, as well as the degree of coordination between them, were insufficient for the task they were assigned.

More than once the possibility of economic sanctions against Latvia and Estonia was put on the Russian political agenda, but no such sanctions were ever implemented. Already in 1994 the Russian MFA had pointed out that sanctions would punish also those whom Russia

229 Fall 1993.

230 Quoted in *SM-segodnia*, 8 February 1994.

231 See e.g. interview with one of the leaders of the labloko party, Viacheslav Igrunov, in *SM-segodnia*, 24 February 1995.

232 In particular, *Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi* 1994.

233 *Proekt Deklaratsii o podderzhke* 1994; *Proekt Zakona Rossiiskoi Federatsii* 1994. A new draft law was discussed by the State Duma in late 1997. *Proekt Federal'nogo Zakona* 1997.

wanted to defend.<sup>234</sup> In early 1997 the press service of President Yeltsin announced the adoption of a new concept of long-term policies toward the Baltic countries.<sup>235</sup> The main strategic goal of this concept was the elaboration of a constructive model for Baltic-Russian relations based on the promotion of regional economic integration and bilateral economic cooperation; the indivisibility of security; and respect for human rights and minority rights. For the first time since 1991, protection of the rights of compatriots in the Baltic states was officially mentioned only as a second priority goal, while the conclusion of "regional security guarantees" (to prevent the entry of the Baltic states into NATO) was singled out as the most urgent one.

Commentators in the liberal Russian press saw the adoption of this concept as a sign that "Russian-Baltic relations are no longer under the sway of political radicals." They also pointed to the clear commitment in the document not to use force or pressure in Russia's dealings with the Baltic states. At the same time, the commentators questioned the judiciousness of turning the problem of NATO expansion into the centerpiece of Russian-Baltic relations, and criticized the methods chosen for the protection of Russians in the Baltics as "hardly efficient."<sup>236</sup>

In any case, in 1996-1997 a new emphasis on business relations and attempts to exploit politically the neighboring states' strong economic dependence on Russia emerged as a clear trend in Russian policy toward the Baltics. Igor Iurgin, a member of the Russian governmental Council on Foreign and Defence Policies, maintained that Russian business must penetrate the Baltic markets as much as possible and create networks of joint ventures which may later provide an access to the markets of the European Union.<sup>237</sup> However, it is not clear to what extent the Russian political leadership may influence the investment strategies of Russian private business. The ongoing privatization in Russia will make its leverage in this respect ever-weaker. Russian businessmen who care about their profits will have dealings with Latvia in such areas as transit and banking regardless of what the Russian government thinks about Latvian policies toward local Russians. This point is often made semi-officially by Latvian politicians.

How have Russian policies toward the Baltics influenced Latvian nation-building? Three main aspects may be pointed out. First, Russia's actual policies, despite some noisy rhetorics to the contrary, have for the most part discouraged Baltic Russians from developing a

234 *Izvestiia*, 10 March 1994.

235 *Soobshchenie press-sluzhby* 1997.

236 *Segodnia*, 14 February 1997; *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 11 March 1997.

237 *Biznes un Baltija*, 21 November 1997.

"pro-Russian" orientation. Few Russian organizations—be they cultural, political, or human-rights oriented—have ever received much practical assistance from Russia. Revealing is the fact that in the summer of 1997 the Russian ambassador to Latvia signed a letter appealing for donations for making the Palace of Peter the Great in Riga a Russian cultural center, rather than pledging Russian authorities to support this project financially, as had been hoped would be his course of action.<sup>238</sup>

Second, frequent (and often clumsy) official Russian statements lashing out against the policies of the Baltic states have intensified lingering fears among the Baits that Russia harbors everlasting imperial designs on their region. Such statements confirm their fears that Russia is a major and permanent threat to their independence. In this sense, Russia's policies have been a serious impediment in the development of an intercommunity dialogue in the Baltics, convincing Baltic leaders that the local Russophones are an inalienable part of the Russian nation and not a community worth discussing with separately. These perceptions have been actively exploited by Baltic radical-nationalist forces. In other words, Russian statements often give Baltic nationalists a good pretext for ignoring the demands of the local Russians.

Finally, while the active position of Russia at the international arena on the issue of minority rights in the Baltic states has rarely been endorsed by Western countries, it has nevertheless drawn their attention to the problems of Russians in the Baltics and induced them to urge the Baltic governments to soften their policies toward their Russian-speaking population. The role of Russia in this process, therefore, must be regarded as ambiguous.

### Conclusions

The specific qualities of the ethnopolitical situation in Latvia since independence have been determined by a number of objective and subjective factors. In Latvia, the nationalist feelings which were widespread in practically all post-communist countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were stimulated by the country's peculiar demographic make-up. Many Latvians feared that if the prevailing demographic trends continued the Latvian nation might arrive at a point where it would cease to exist. Therefore, the new legal structures were first and foremost geared toward a strengthening of the dominant positions of the ethnic Latvians in society.

<sup>238</sup> 238 *SM-segodnia*, 30 June 1997.

At the same time, a constant pressure from European non- and inter-governmental organizations, combined with an almost total absence of Russophone political resistance, induced the Latvian leadership to adopt a somewhat more liberal attitude toward the nontitular groups than what they might otherwise have done.

In contrast to many other post-Soviet states, the politicization of ethnicity in Latvia was largely channeled into the adoption of legal acts, not into pogroms or other kinds of violence. Formally, these acts were unrelated to the ethnic factor. Even so, the ethnic domination of the Latvians was secured through a consistent process of "state restoration." This approach gained legal and political support from the international community. A crucial point was the restrictive solution to the citizenship problem which secured the titular nation a firm control over the political institutions. This control, in turn, made it easy to put into effect the desired solutions also in other areas, such as language policy and educational policy.

By leading the nationalist sentiments into legal, and legalistic, channels, Latvia managed to avoid violent ethnic conflicts. In fact, hardly any serious deterioration of ethnic relations at the street level could be registered at all. A survey which was conducted by the Danish newspaper *Weekendavisen* in 1991-92 analyzed how the public hostility of the ethnic Latvians toward the Russophones was related to their personal lives and preferences. It turned out that the number of Latvians who would accept the Russians "as neighbors, but not as co-citizens" was three times as high as the number of those who reversed these preferences, that is, those who supported equal rights for all permanent residents but who on the personal level would prefer to have contact with members of the their ethnic group only.<sup>239</sup> In other words, the average Latvian would be three times as ethnocentric in the election booth as in his daily life. Interestingly, in the Lithuanian part of the same survey these correlations were reversed.

At the same time, the covert legitimation of ethnic dominance in Latvia—through citizenship, linguistic legislation, cadre policy, etc.—created long-term problems for the development of the political system into a universal, inclusive democracy. There were few incentives in this system to search for effective interethnic dialogue.

Among the Russian-speaking population of Latvia centrifugal tendencies—in Schermerhorn's typology—are not strong. Of the various options open to the Russian-speakers in Latvia emigration and return to Russia are among the least popular.<sup>240</sup> Several surveys indicate that

239 Poulsen 1994,25.

240 See pp. 73-74.

large-scale emigration of Russian-speakers should not be expected. All in all, up to 10 percent of the non-citizens have chosen or will choose this option. The low number of persons who have acquired Russian citizenship, and the lack of consolidation around any "Russian party," also show the low popularity of this trend.

Instead, integration and accommodation are the most frequent choices of Latvia's Russian-speakers. Their centripetal tendencies do not, however, include a strong desire for full assimilation into an ethnocultural Latvian environment. Many Russophones choose what can be called "a Jewish model" of behavior: The current situation of Russians in Latvia has much in common with the traditional conditions under which Jews have been living in Europe (lack of political rights and land ownership rights, exclusion from state service, etc). The traditional "Jewish" response of industrious Russophone non-citizens is to engage in commerce, trade, and financial activities. The problems which they encounter they try to solve not by establishing effective social mechanisms but "by opening the purse." For example, rather than struggling for state-funded Russian-language education, children attend private schools or study abroad.

Another characteristic trend is the "European" orientation of a substantial part of the Russians in Latvia. In fact, Russian-speakers in both Latvia and Estonia are generally more in favor of joining the European Union than are ethnic Latvians and Estonians (66 percent vs. 52 percent in Latvia, and 78 percent vs. 59 percent in Estonia, in late 1996).<sup>241</sup> Many Russians seem to be more inclined toward an acceptance of liberal European values than are ethnic Latvians who are preoccupied with the problems of preserving their ethnic identity and are fearful of European "cultural intrusion." In pragmatic terms, also, a closer integration into Europe may increase the Russians' chances of competing with ethnic Latvians in Latvian society on an equal and equitable footing. Russian-speakers in Latvia who are oriented toward Europe may thus become a kind of social *avant garde* and play an important role in the process of integrating Latvia into Europe.

The "Jewish model" is compatible with the Latvian concept of nation-building as it implies that non-Latvians will not intervene into politics which basically will remain an arena for ethnic Latvians. Russophone businessmen will be concerned about political affairs only to the extent that politics affect their business. The "European model" runs contrary to "official" Latvian assumptions about Russian social behavior. This may perhaps explain why the European-oriented part of the Latvian political elite so far has failed to make use of this trend.

An external factor—the governmental relationship between Latvia and Russia—has to a significant degree influenced the ethnopolitical situation in Latvia. True, only a small part of the Russians in Latvia have taken Russian citizenship and the majority of them regard Latvia, not Russia as their fatherland. Still, the vicissitudes of Russian-Latvian relations, as well as the frequent changes in the political climate of Russia, have sharply influenced interethnic relations and political decisions in Latvia.

Under these conditions it comes as no great surprise that the political regime in Latvia has evolved in the direction of what an increasing number of researchers are calling "ethnic democracy," that is, a combination of certain general democratic principles with elements of ethnic favoritism. Graham Smith defines ethnic democracy as a combination of three elements: the core nation is institutionally pivotal beyond its numerical proportion within the national territory; individual civil rights are enjoyed universally; and certain collective rights are extended to ethnic minorities.<sup>242</sup>

A political regime based on the mechanisms of ethnic democracy may evolve further, into either "traditional," nonethnic democracy, or into ethnocratic structures and ever deeper ethnic segregation. Only time will show if any of these varieties will be realized in Latvia.

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