Zepa, B. Integration Policy in Latvia: Acquisition and Failures
In: Proceedings of internationa conference "Baltic States, Europe –Ethnopolitics of Memories and Histories" held in Kwansei Gakuin University (Osaka, Japan) p. 19-31 (2008)

Brigita Zepa

Integration Policy in Latvia: Acquisition and Failures

Integration policy: policy documents and practice

A series of research studies in Latvia over the last several years have focused on integration policy from various positions, both in theoretical and empirical terms, as well as from the position of evaluating policy in this area. These studies have made it possible to draw certain conclusions about successes and failures in this policy area. According to one of the authors, in 1998, of Latvia's Public Integration Concept, Elmārs Vēbers,[1] the idea of policies related to unity in Latvia's society emerged not in the late 1990s, when the conceptual document which, to a certain extent, served as a reaction to demands made by international organisations against Latvia as a European Union candidate country was drafted, but a full decade earlier, when Latvia began to deal with problems inherited from the Soviet regime in such areas as ethnic, cultural and language issues. The first step was to define the status of the state language and to introduce the status of Latvian citizenship. The law which declared the Latvian language to be Latvia's state language was adopted in 1989, the aim being to strengthen the positions of the language in the country. During the Soviet era, the status of the Latvian language in public life had deteriorated rapidly, particularly in the labour and government spheres. The Russian language became increasingly dominant. There was much debate in the context of public unity when the institution of Latvian citizenship was reinstated and the body of Latvia's citizenry was defined. A law on citizenship which was approved in 1994 identified naturalisation procedures for permanent residents who wished to become Latvia's citizens. Language and citizenship policies in these and other instances were often the result of a compromise among political forces after a great deal of debate. It must also be emphasised, at the same time, that many public organisations have monitored the implementation of these policies, and research institutions have conducted their research. The thing is that those who have drafted the relevant policies have been in no great hurry to study the conclusions which researchers have drawn. In the early 1990s, for instance, the Latvian Centre for Social Research found[2] that an absence of Latvian language skills would be a serious obstacle against the naturalisation of non-citizens. Despite this fact, Parliament added age limitations to the citizenship law which ensured that naturalisation would at first be open only to young people, with

[1] Vēbers, E.. „Vai teiksim ardievas sabiedrības integrācijai?" (Shall We Say Farewell to Public Integration?). In Pretestība sabiedrības integrācijai: cēloņi un sekas (Resistance to Integration of Society: Causes and Consequences) . Rīga: University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (2007).
[2] Zepa. B. "Public Opinion in Latvia During a Stage of Transition", *Quarterly of the Estonian Market and Opinion Research Centre*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1992, pp. 10-19. See also Zepa, B. "Valsts statusa maiņa un pilsoniskā apziņa" (Changes in the State's Status and Public Awareness", *LZA Vēstis*, No. 7/9, 1995, pp. 31-45.

the age limitations being expanded gradually and year by year. As could be expected, the number of naturalised citizens was not substantial during the first years when this process was in effect – just 6,993 naturalised citizens during the three years from 1995 to 1997, inclusive.[3] A national referendum in 1998 led to changes in the citizenship law which eliminated the age restrictions. The fact is that the long-lasting debates about the citizenship law from 1991 until 1994, the limitations on naturalisation, as well as the slow pace of naturalisation – all of these factors caused public tensions. These were exacerbated further by the very critical position which the Russian language news media took vis-à-vis government policy in this regard. It must be stressed that debates about language and citizenship policy have continued in Latvia since the country's accession to the European Union in 2004.

According to Vēbers, however,[4] Latvian society was not prepared for this idea, and people received it negatively and quite inadequately. Neither the public nor politicians were prepared to accept a democratic understanding of the foundations of their state, and nationalism was often seen as the only possible ideology which could bring the nation together.

Discussions between researchers and the public at large about these issues were interrupted when the discourse of ethnic policy in Latvia was taken over by announcements by politicians, as well as discussions with minority politicians. The approach to issues of ethnic policy were also substantially influenced by the way in which politicians reacted to the demands made by international organisations in advance of Latvia's accession to the EU.

The Public Integration Concept was drafted in 1998, and a Programme for the Integration of Society in Latvia was prepared in 1999. The conceptual document, it must be stressed, indicates that in the context of public integration, civic identity takes precedence over ethnic identity. Research has found, however, that this claim is not made in other policy documents.[5] The Programme for the Integration of Society in Latvia was drafted on the basis of the aforementioned conceptual document, supplementing that document with a list of specific tasks. The aim of both documents was to identify the primary tasks related to ethnic policy – the steps that had to be taken in order to ensure, on the one hand, lawful procedures in the area of ethnic policy that would allow Latvia to become an EU member state, while also, on the other hand, ensuring harmony among ethnic groups in society, as well as, simultaneously, the survival of ethnic Latvian values in the country.

When the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Programme for the Integration of Society in Latvia in 1999, it could be said that a specific period of integration policy design had ended, and a new period of government-approved policy implementation was beginning. The remainder of this paper shall be devoted to an analysis of three different aspects of public integration policy, with an evaluation of the policy's successes and shortcomings:

- A conceptual explanation of public integration policies;
- The role of social agents (mass media, political parties, political elite, NGOs) in public integration;
- Administration of public integration policies.

A conceptual explanation of public integration policies

---

[3] Naturalisation Board of the Republic of Latvia, data as at 1 January 2001.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[5] See Zepa, B. (ed.). Integration: Practice and Perspectives. Rīga: BISS (2006).

There are few ethnically homogeneous locations in the world, and because of this, researchers have used various theoretical approaches to explain the factors which lead representatives of various ethnic groups to feel a sense of belonging as citizens of one and the same country.

As was mentioned in the introduction, there were conferences, articles and books in Latvia during the 1990s which offered a theoretical review of the precepts which serve as the conceptual basis for ethnic policy. These include such concepts as "nation state," "nation," "nationalism," and "citizenship." At a 1998 conference which was devoted to the concepts of a political nation and ethnic policy, Justice Egils Levits of the European Court of Human Rights presented a report on traditions in the emergence of nations. He emphasised the presence of two different dimensions in this process. In France, one's belonging to the nation is determined by identification with the democratic political order which prevails in that country, but in other European nations such as Germany, there has been a need for indigenous residents to come to an understanding of their national and cultural community. The questions which Levits posed to Latvians were these: "Would it be preferable for Latvians to remain as a purely ethnically defined cultural nation? Is a nation of the Latvian state desirable or possible? Would it be more realistic and desirable to combine both of these indicators of a nation?"[6] Rogers Brubaker also compares the emergence of feelings of nationalism in Germany and France, he argues that feelings of nationalism can emerge before or after the establishment of a nation state. In Germany, such emotions existed before the nation state was created, and they served as a stimulus for the establishment of the state. In France, for its part, nationalist feelings emerged after the state was set up, emerging from government institutions, the civic community, and the sense of civic belonging.[7] Brubaker emphasises the idea that differences are based on the principle under which society is unified – in France, society is unified politically, and participation therein depends on citizenship. In that case, we can speak of civic nationalism. In Germany, society is unified on the basis of ethnicity, and this is an example of ethnic nationalism.[8]

Professor Rasma Karklins from the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Latvia has emphasised the idea that the functioning of a democratic country must be based not just on the relevant institutions, but also on a citizenry of an appropriate level of quality. Karklins reviews citizenship from the perspective of social citizenship, emphasising that in the American context citizenship is much more than legal status, there is the nation of „good citizenship", e.g. an individual is seen as socially valuable and responsible only if he or she goes beyond caring for their personal career and family, they must contribute to their community and fulfill their civic duties. Democracy can only survive if large part of citizens comply to this ideal [9]. In the some way writes famed citizenship researcher Derek Heater: „Citizenship is more than the label. He has no sense of a civic bond with his fellows or of some

---

[6] Levits, E. „Valstsnācija un kultūrnācija – frančus un vācu vēsturiskie modeļi" (State Nation, Cultural Nation: The Historical Models of the French and German Nation). In Pilsoniskā apziņa (Civic Awareness. Rīga: University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (1998).

[7] Brubaker (1992). Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 23.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[9] Karklins, Rasma (1998.) Good Citizenship. In: Pilsnisā apziņa. Riga, University of Latvia. Institute of Philosophy and Sociology.

responsibility for civic welfare is not a true citizen whatever his legal status. Identity and virtue invest the concept of citizenship with power" [10]

And yet analysis of public integration policy shows that in practice, nationalism and ethnic citizenship are more important than democratic citizenship in Latvia. Why have ethnic values taken such deep root that they do not make room for other civic values? Explanations of this have been proposed by various theorists. Thus, for instance, György Schöpflin has argued that the contemporary definition of a democratic nation is based on three pillars – state, ethnicity and civic society. Schöpflin believes that these elements have developed in a different way in different countries. In Western Europe, state and civic citizenship have been stronger, while in Central and Eastern Europe, ethnicity has been dominant in the emergence of nations. This has meant a less important role for state and civic identity. In Western European countries, nationalism has emerged in the wake of the existence of independent countries. This applies to nations such as Germany, France, England, Spain and Denmark. Nationalism there has been expressed in relation to economic and political changes in those countries, in the emergence of democratic institutions and the development of capitalism.[11] In Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, nationalism has been manifested as a battle for independent statehood, and in parallel to the battle for economic and political power, there has been the matter of the "battle for recognition" – an issue that has been enormously important in terms of ensuring that "big" nations accept and perceive new and emerging nations as being equal to them, that they appreciate the importance and uniqueness of the new nations' culture.[12] Ethnicity and its key elements – language and culture – become decisive values in bringing a nation together. Culture attaches specific meaning and moral norms to practices that have been established by the relevant community, it ensures the presence of ideas which ascertain a sense of community within the group. Meanings that are enshrined in culture help to explain things that are happening on the basis of common meanings that are encoded in ethnic culture – language, symbols, collective opinion and historical memory. All of this helps members of the community to feel and sense that they have a common world view, that they all come from one and the same world of thought.

Several decades ago, the fathers of identity research, Tajfel and Turner, recognised that identity is constructed by distinguishing one's own group as opposed to others, adding that this is a process which is enhanced by a need for a positive identity – one that can be developed by emphasising the negative properties of other groups,[13] or by pointing to injustices that may emerge from other groups.[14] A neighbouring ethnic (or linguistic) group can often serve as a stimulus for constructing an identity.

---

[10] Heater, Derek. (2004) Citizenship: The Civic Ideal in World History, Politics and Education, Third Edition. Manchester University Press; 3 edition. P. 182
[11] Kohn, H. The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origin and Background. New Brunswick (USA) and London: Transaction Publishers (2005), p. 4.
[12] Schöpflin, G. Nations, Identity, Power: The New Politics of Europe. London: Hurst & Co. (2000), p. 76.
[13] Tajfel, H. and J.C. Turner (1979). "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". In Austin, W.G. and S. Worchel (eds.). The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
[14] Taylor, D.M. and D.J. McKirnan (1984). "Theoretical Contribution: A Five-Stage Model of Intergroup Relations", *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 23, pp. 291-300.

Schöpflin speaks to the "powerful attraction of culture," one which any group feels vis-à-vis its own moral values. Groups will try to ensure that the same values are recognised by others. In answering the question of why ethnic identity remains so important in contemporary societies, Schöpflin explains that collective identity corresponds to human needs for security in the community, for solidarity in purposeful activities and communications. It is understandable, therefore, that ethnic communities seek to preserve themselves, their culture, their assumptions as to what is normal and natural, and their ability to ensure the ongoing development of their cultures. At the same time, however, it must be stressed that the conjoining of ethnicity and democracy is possible if ethnicity is not the only source of power in a democratic regime. As state and civic identity become stronger, this can create a more inclusive and tolerant arena for social action.

Schöpflin also argues that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are typically afraid of disappearing altogether, and this is based on historical memory of "political beasts." This has facilitated tensions between majorities and minorities. In Latvia's case, of course, this thought focuses on the very recent occupation which the Soviet Union instituted in 1940. The historical memory of the ethnic community of Latvians has, for instance, led to an explanation of Russia's foreign policies vis-à-vis Georgia in 2008 which is based on Latvia's own history. Russia's actions were seen as a potential threat against Latvia's independence, as well.

Other authors have argued that the importance of ethnicity as a social construct increases when links among social groups are weak. In that case, ethnicity functions as an element in structuring society (Anderson, 1983; Brass, 1985). When other institutional structures such as the civil society are weakly developed, various other kinds of resources develop and function in society. Ethnicity moves to the foreground because of its specific advantages – it is easily perceived by the masses, and it can quite easily be manipulated by the elite. Rothschild, for his part, has looked at how changes in society stimulate the importance of ethnicity in various ways. Rothschild argues that changes in society create a great deal of confusion in all groups of society, and this leads to collective ethnic fears.[15] Ethnic groups feel threatened in terms of the future of existence of their identity.

Similarly, Horowitz attaches much important to group psychology and competition among groups.[16] When the status of one group changes swiftly, ethnic conflicts can be the result. In Latvia's case, this applies to changes in the status of Latvians and Russians (Russian speakers). In the Soviet Union, Russians could consider themselves to be the majority, while Latvians had to accept a minority status. In independent Latvia, by comparison, Russians have become a minority, while Latvians have the status of the majority.

Empirical research shows that many Latvians still think that their group is under threat.[17] This is expressed through concerns about the status of the Latvian language, and through the fact that Latvians do not always feel themselves to be the majority in

[15] Rothschild, J. (1982). Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework. New York: Columbia University Press.

[16] Horowitz, D. (1985). Ethnic Groups in Conflict. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[17] Zepa, B., Šūpule, I., Kļave, E., Krastiņa, L., Krišāne, J. and I. Tomsone (2005). Ethnop olitical Tensions in Latvia: Seeking a Solution to Conflict. Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, Rīga, pp. 1-72.

Latvia. A concept designed by Estonian sociologists can be used to compare the development of societies and ethnic composition in Latvia and Estonia, and it allows us to say that Latvians feel themselves to be a threatened majority.[18] An analysis of the attitudes of Latvians and the specifics of their social identity shows that Latvian attitudes, when compared to those of Russian speakers in Latvia, are in many cases more similar to the positions which are taken by minorities.

The Estonian researcher Veronika Kalmus has observed that ethnic minorities have a more distinct identity with their ethnic group than is the case with ethnic majorities.[19] The same tendencies can be seen in Latvia, too. Latvians far more than Russians identify with their ethnic group. Latvians tend to be more closed off, they have fewer contacts with people of other nationalities, and they feel more threatened. Russian speakers in Latvia possess some of the properties that are typical of the majority – openness toward others and more in the way of contacts with people of other ethnic groups.[20]

The influence of newspapers on the process of society integration

Analysis of press publications focused on media discourses and their possible influence on the shaping of identities as events which are important in terms of ethno-policy have been discussed between 1990 and 2005. These include the approval of the declaration of independence in May 1990, the restoration of Latvia's independence in August 1991, the approval of the Law on the State language in 1999, the referendum on EU accession in 2003, and ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2005, among others.

Generally speaking, the discourses used in Latvian and Russian language newspapers are radically different, and they shape different collective identities among those who read Russian language newspapers and those who read Latvian newspapers. The gap between these media spaces promotes a separation between the two ethno-linguistic groups, making it difficult to ensure mutual discussions, exchanges of views, and the shaping of unified identities. The gap is closely linked to the polarisation of political identities, because political parties, too, represent the interests of one or the other group. The ethnic interests of parties dominate over ideological differences related to economic, social and other issues. Both the Latvian and the Russian language press those who think differently are marginalized in terms of discourse, depicting them as individuals who do not represent the majority views of the public and discrediting them as being selfish, criminal or radically nationalist.

After The Declaration On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia (May 4, 1990) the Latvian and Russian language press mostly published various official pronouncements, along with appeals and declarations, from the Supreme

---

[18] Kalmus, V. (2003). "Is Interethnic Integration Possible in Estonia? Ethno-Political Discourse of Two Ethnic Groups", *Discourse & Society*, Vol. 14(6), pp. 667-695. London: Sage Publications.
[19] Bratt, C. (2002). "Contact and Attitudes Between Ethnic Groups: A Survey-Based Study of Adolescents in Norway", *Acta Sociologica*, No. 45(2), pp. 107-126.
[20] Hewstone, M. (2002). "Intergroup Bias (Social Prejudice)", *Annual Review of Psychology*.

Council, as well as political parties (mostly the CPL (The Communist Party of Latvia) and the PFL (The Popular Front of Latvia) and public organisations.

Latvian language newspapers

In Latvian language newspapers, everything that was characteristic of the Soviet system was described in very critical or sarcastic terms. This vividly marked out a discursive strategy that was aimed at constructing a new civic identity. One way to construct an identity was to activate links to the pre-war Republic of Latvia. Newspapers printed a great deal of information about the pages of Latvian history which had been hushed up during Soviet times – the period of independence between 1918 and 1940, as well as the repressions of the Soviet regime. Historical events are of great importance in the discourse of independence, because defenders and opponents of independence use them to justify their positions and activities, albeit with differing interpretations.

The interwar period was particularly important in the creation of a new identity, because it made it possible for people to establish positive identification with the independent country of that time.[21] It was stressed that this was the only period of time in which Latvians had their own independent state, thus justifying and enhancing the efforts of the so-called Latvian Renaissance to achieve independence. The first republic was largely presented in idealistic terms – as a period of general growth, one in which Latvians gained accomplishments in the economy and in other areas.

The focus on the interwar period republic was very specific in Latvian language newspapers, helping to create the impression that as soon as the USSR was gone, Latvia would once again become this first independent Latvian state, one populated primarily by Latvians, with relatively few representatives of other nationalities. Wealthy farmers would work their small farms, they would export butter and pork to Western Europe. There would be no major industries to pollute the environment.

In contrast to the interwar period of independence, the years of Soviet authority were depicted in a very negative light, thus destroying the identity of the Soviet individual and establishing a new civic identity in its place. The crass rejection of the Soviet era and all that was characteristic of it – this was a typical foundation and the most vivid manifestation of the new identity.

Along with the rejection of all that was Soviet, the Latvian language newspapers also started to shape the image of Latvians as a nation which belongs to the developed Western world. Newspapers presented a powerful orientation toward Western Europe, the United States and other countries with democratic systems, market economies with private companies, competition, and a wide diversity of products. There was an emphasis on the contrast between these countries and the Soviet Union:

---

[21] The theory of social identity says that it is important for people to belong to groups which are positively judged by other groups and, especially, by members of the group in question. See Taifel, H. and J.C. Turner (1979). "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". In Austin, W.G. and S. Worchel (eds.). The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations. Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Cole.

"… The reality of Soviet life among Latvians exacerbated efforts, at least in the world of ideas, to emphasise their belonging to the community of European nations without any hesitation. Of course, the Baltic Republics were far more Western than the rest of the empire." (Atmoda, (Awakening) 29 May 1990)

Latvians often perceive processes of change as a return to "normalcy" – a "normal" state, "normal" everyday lives, and "normal" economic development.[22]

The ethnic, civic and political identity of Latvians was strengthened through reports about leaving the USSR as an independent country, as well as the <u>return</u> of the Latvian nation into the Western political, cultural and economic arena. This stressed the historical rights of the Latvians, also legitimising the processes aimed at establishing an independent state.

Of similar meaning was the frequent discussion of Soviet repressions. The feeling among Latvians that they had been hurt was strengthened as a component of ethnic identity. Newspapers wrote about the right to compensation – compensation at the expense of other nationalities, in some cases.

The Latvian language newspapers largely spoke to Latvians alone, referring to Latvians as "us" and "the people", and thus creating the impression that Latvians, as an ethnic group, represented the numerical majority in society and that all Latvians have the same views and attitudes. An ethnic identity was constructed for Latvians, stressing that all people of Latvian origin have certain positive properties – they are hard-working, polite, well educated, able to deal with difficulties, patriotic and musical.
It was also stressed that Latvians are a nation of farmers – all Latvians were farmers in the recent past, and they want to live in single family farms and work the land, as was the case during the rule of pre-war President Kārlis Ulmanis.

When writing about all of the residents of Latvia – both Latvians and members of other nationalities, the phrase that was usually used was "the entire Latvian nation." People from other ethnic groups, however, were often depicted in negative terms, publishing many scornful epithets. Often all non-Latvians were called migrants, thus depicting the very diverse community of Latvia's residents as a single mass. Properties attributed to this mass were the dominance of material interests over spiritual interests, the search for one's own good, as well as disrespect against Latvians and the Latvian language and culture.

Russian language newspapers

A review of the Russian language newspapers that were published After The Declaration On the Restoration of Independence (1990) shows that there were radical differences between the Communist Party newspaper *Советская Латвия* (Soviet Latvia) and the Interfront newspaper *Единство* (Unity) on the one hand and the newspaper *Советская Молодежь* (Soviet Youth) on the other. The first two newspapers stood firmly for Latvia's remaining in the Soviet Union, while *Советская Молодежь* was more likely to support the restoration of Latvia's independence. This

[22]   Stukuls Eglitis, D. (2002). Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity and Revolution in Latvia. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

newspaper did not stress threats against Russian speakers, although it did print critical reviews of important events of the day.

In the Russian language newspapers, authors predicted an inevitable exacerbation of interethnic tensions, writing far more often about the concept of "national harmony" and emphasising its importance in preserving the public peace. Readers were called upon to promote equality among Latvian residents of various nationalities. This challenge was particularly addressed to The Popular Front of Latvia and those who supported its views. These political forces were often described as "fomenting interethnic hatred," with the newspaper stressing the friendly and favourable relationships which existed among various elements in society before the processes of independence began

I cannot understand what's happening in this country, in the Baltic Republics? People of all nationalities used to live in friendship. No one kept anyone else from speaking his or her native language. Now, however, Russians are being accused of destroying national culture and national languages.") (*Единство*, 21-28 May 1990.

It must be stressed here that the Russian language newspapers hardly ever used the word "renaissance", which was common in the Latvian press. This can be explained by virtue of the fact that the concept of the "Latvian national renaissance" was used to describe processes at the centre of which there were ethnic Latvians. People of other nationalities could not identify themselves with these processes. The concept of "renaissance" also includes a very positive evaluation of ongoing processes. Russian newspapers, by contrast, were dominated by a very critical view of events.

The Russian language newspapers, unlike their Latvian language counterparts, devoted far greater attention to economic issues, analysing the situation and making predictions about the future economic development of the republic. Russian language newspapers were full of negative statements about the Latvian economy if the country were to split off from the Soviet Union – in most cases, a severe economic crisis was forecast. Newspapers stressed the fact that the Latvian economy was very closely linked to those of the other Soviet republics, both in terms of receiving raw materials and in terms of selling ready-made products. Russian newspapers printed much more information about the shortage of various products, particularly groceries, in the country's shops, arguing that this was an absolutely unacceptable situation, one that would only worsen if the country were to continue to move along the path of leaving the USSR:

The Supreme Council of the republic has in fact, set off on the course of restoring the bourgeois Republic of Latvia. (..) This is a political adventure which will cause great harm to the nation – unemployment and a lack of social protections for the poor. Without its own resources of raw materials, the republic may find itself in a difficult situation – industry and factories will close down, there will be problems with fuel and electricity. (*Советская Латвия*, 15 May 1990)

Unlike Latvian newspapers, which published a great deal of ceremonial information about the approval of the Latvian declaration of independence and stressed its historical importance, Russian newspapers devoted far less space on their pages to this event. There were brief reports of the fact as such, but there was no reportage about the procedure whereby the declaration was approved.

Most Russian language newspapers argued that the declaration was unlawful and unconstitutional, that it was an attempted coup, and that a referendum must be organised before any such decision could be taken:

"*It is not the stupid politicians but the people who must take this decision, take a precise decision in accordance with universally recognised legal norms.*" (*Советская Латвия*, 22 May 1990).

The newspaper *Советская Молодежь* took a different position from that which was presented in the other Russian language newspapers. Generally speaking, it offered its support to the restoration of independence, but its coverage was far less euphoric than that which was presented in the Latvian newspapers. There were also criticisms of what was happening:

"*Independence, the need for which has been discussed for such a long time, has been declared. I hope that readers will carefully peruse every word in the approved declaration and that this will, to a certain extent, reduce tensions and fears which have to do with a lack of knowledge about the document which has been published for the first time today.*" (*Советская Молодежь*, 8 May 1990).

These examples show that the Latvian and Russian language news media offer radically different presentations of history and of contemporary events. The Latvian language mass media praised the interwar period of democracy in Latvia and promised that upon regaining independence, Latvia would return to the community of Western nations while ensuring economic growth and welfare. The Russian language media praised the Soviet regime and threatened negative consequences in economic and interethnic terms should Latvia leave the USSR. Differing interpretations of history serve to produce different collective memories in various groups in society. At the same time, this has been effective in helping Latvians and Russians to strengthen their identity, although that also means that the two groups have been positioning themselves against one another. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this created an increasingly stable gap, one that would be deepened in future years by ethnic policies related to the state language, citizenship, education and integration.

The Political Parties and Elite as Agents for Public Integration

Ethno-political polarisation among political parties: election results

Many experts in the area of the civil society emphasise that the lack of effectiveness in national integration policies can be blamed on political parties and politicians who, in the struggle over political power, make vast use of ethnic and linguistic belonging as an effective form of political capital, thus polarising society. This is confirmed through analysis of election results. In comparing the dynamics of the electorate of political parties during the last four parliamentary elections, one sees that among the parliamentary parties, the ones which have a heterogeneous electorate – ones which receive support from Latvians and Russian speakers – are disappearing. With each election, the trend of each party's range of voters becoming more and more homogeneous is becoming more distinct, with parties attracting only Latvians or members of ethnic minorities. The most typical example of this is For the Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement. Since the 1993 parliamentary election, it has always been supported almost exclusively by Latvians,

with no more than 2-3% of Russians voting for the party. The electorate of other influential and more recently established parliamentary parties also tends to be homogeneous. Among those who voted for the People's Party in the 2002 election, for instance, 94% were Latvians. The Latvian Alliance of the Green Party and Farmers Union, too, received 95% of its votes from Latvian. 91% of the supporters of the New Era party and the First Party of Latvia were Latvians. These are, with good reason, called Latvian parties as a result of the ethnicity of their supporters. The party alliance For Human Rights in a United Latvia is the greatest representative of minority interests, and 72% of its supporters are members of ethnic minorities.

Latvia's Way can be distinguished from amongst other parties as a party with an ethnically heterogeneous electorate and also as a party which served in Parliament for a long period of time (the 5th, 6th and 7th Saeima). The party received votes from 12-14% of voters. We can assume that ethno-political polarisation among political forces dictated the polarisation of voter choices on the basis of the ethnic principle, and this kept non-Latvians from voting for Latvia's Way, choosing instead to plump for minority parties. The battlefield of Latvia's political parties has a strictly defined ethnic boundary to separate those parties that are supported by ethnic Latvians and those that are supported by others. This is not a trend which appeared instantly – it has been developing over the last 14 years in the context of ethno-political issues (the citizenship law, the naturalisation procedure, the law on the state language, minority education reforms). This has created a situation which ensures that few parties have an ethnically heterogeneous electorate, and changing this situation will certainly be quite complicated.

Ethno-political polarisation among political elite: attitudes

According to Burton and Higley,[23] there are three types of national elites:
1) An elite that is split up, competitive and not unified, one that has no roots and experiences internal conflicts – sometimes violent ones. These are elite groups which cannot co-operate. There is mistrust among them, and they can be split by political, economic, ethnic, racial, religious or cultural specifics;
2) A totalitarian and ideological unified elite that is based on a single ideology – an example of this was seen in Germany and the USSR in the 1930s;
3) A pluralistic and competitive elite, or a consensually unified elite. Members may have different views about political issues, but they do not tend to hold extremist views which could create a conflict. Such elites are typical of modern democracies.

Researchers of the elite such as Steen[24] insist that an elite can operate successfully only if there is trust amongst its members, if members with different ideological views can debate their ideas and compete among with one another, and if, at the same time, everyone accepts the "rules of the game" of democracy. This is an elite which is integrated into political positions. Among conflicting elites, there is mistrust. There are doubts about the elite groups and their competence. If there are ideological differences, this mistrust is also focused on those who take decisions.

---

[23] Higley, J. and M. Burton (1997). "Types of National Elites in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe", *International Politics*, Vol. 34:2, June 1997, pp. 153-168.
[24] Steen, A. Between Past and Future: Elites, Democracy and the State in Post-Communist Countries. A Comparison of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Ashgate: Gower (1997).

The results of a study of the elite that was conducted in Latvia[25] allow us to review the level of trust among the elite. This allows us to determine the importance of the ethnic gap and to know which issues are the ones in which this gap is manifested most clearly. Third, by comparing the results of studies conducted in 1997, 2000, 2003 and 2007, we can focus on changes in political attitudes, also looking at how the ethnic gap has developed.

Trust among the elite

Studies of the elite make it clear that there is distinct mistrust in Latvia when it comes to the political elite. In surveys (1997, 2003, 2007) it was found that more than one-half of members of the elite (including members of Parliament) agreed with the view that *"most politicians cannot be trusted to do what they think would be best for the state"* and that *"people in important government jobs usually think about their own benefits more than they think about the public good."* This view was supported less often among government ministers and civil servants – only one-quarter of respondents or so signalled agreement. 80% of respondents accused leaders of short-sightedness – *"there are very few people who clearly know about their interests over a longer period of time."* It must be stressed here that these views did not change between 1997 and 2007. It turns out that politicians only trust other members of their parties, while accusing others of incompetence and selfishness. This suggests that when Latvian politicians come together in parties, that is usually the result of the interests of the relevant group, while other parties are seen as competitors in pursuit of those interests. This is not competition among different models of political ideology – ones which offer different models as to the development of society. Instead, there is competition among group interests.

If we compare the views of Latvians and non-Latvians with respect to trust in the elite, then we see that non-Latvians are more critical than Latvians are. The biggest differences in opinion are found in response to the statement that *"most politicians cannot be trusted to do what they think would be best for the state"*. 65% of non-Latvian members of the elite agree with that statement, as opposed to 54% of Latvians. When it comes to the selfishness of politicians, views are not as diverse – the statement that *"people in important government jobs usually think about their own benefits more than they think about the public good"* was supported by 47% of the Latvian elite and 52% of the minority elite.

Table 1. Trust among the elite
% of all respondents

	1997	2000	2003	2007
Most politicians cannot be trusted to do what they think would be best for the state	49	53	54	51
People in important government jobs usually think about their own benefits more than they think about the public good	45	55	48	48

---

[25] Here we refer to studies of the elite that were conducted in 1997, 2000 and 2003. The methodology was developed under the leadership of Anton Steen, a professor at Oslo University. 300 people were interviewed in 1997, 285 were surveyed in 2000, and 280 were interviewed in 2003. Respondents were high-rank politicians, as well as representatives of the creative professions, science, business and government.

A comparison of the results of the three studies (1997, 2000, 2003, 2007) shows that there have been no positive changes in terms of mistrust in the elite. This is particularly true when it comes to understanding the interests of the state. Between 1997 and 2003, the percentage of respondents who agree with the statement that *"most politicians cannot be trusted to do what they think would be best for the state"* actually increased.

Views of the elite vis-à-vis ethnic relations in Latvia

Between 1997 and 2003, the percentage of members of the elite who think that a confrontation is possible declined, but according to 2007 percentage of respondents who predict confrontation increased again. Floating numbers of respondents in different surveys supported the view that *"Russians who live in Latvia are completely loyal to our country"*.

Table 2. Views of the elite with respect to ethnic relations and the loyalty of minorities

% of all respondents

	1997	2000	2003	2007
A confrontation between ethnic groups is possible	16	19	9	16
Russians who live in Latvia are completely loyal to our country	-	21	27	24

A survey of members of the political elite show that the views of the Latvian and the Russian speaking elite are most diverse when it comes to issues related to the rights of minorities – 60% of non-Latvians and only 5% of Latvians admit that this is a serious problem. This shows that on the one hand, Latvian politicians do not think that issues of minority rights are of importance among other problems. On the other hand, ethnic policy is the specific issue that is used to manipulate with the votes of viewers and to polarise their choices.

Political party ideas about the future of public integration

The representative of the radically nationalist party[26] thinks that ethnic policy and naturalisation rules must be as strict as possible, because otherwise people who are opponents to Latvian statehood find it easier to become citizens. Because the proportion of ethnic Latvians in Latvia has declined, the awarding of citizenship to non-Latvians should be limited through naturalisation quotas – comparing the number of newly naturalised citizens to the number of newborn Latvians, and assessing each case of naturalisation individually.

According to radically nationalist politicians, it is necessary to strengthen the policy of speaking the state language in everyday life, emphasising an increase in the speaking of the Latvian language. They think that as the speaking of Latvian increases and stabilises in Latvia, other integration-related issues will be resolved too

---

[26] Everything for Latvia

– education reforms in minority schools, as well as the issue of new citizens and their Latvian language skills.

Representatives of the conservatively nationalist party[27] also say that rules for naturalisation must be made more strict, and the awarding of citizenship should be an exception, not an everyday phenomenon. They add, however, that limitations on naturalisation should not apply to those who have arrived in Latvia since the restoration of its independence.

These politicians don't support any attempt to amend the basic principles of the Latvian Constitution, and that applies to proposals that non-citizens be allowed to vote in local government elections and that the positions of the state language be weakened in various areas of public life and governance. Latvian is and will remain the only state language, and it must be spoken to a level where there are no situations in which it becomes necessary to speak a different language. For that reason, most classes in minority schools should be taught in Latvian.

The representatives of the conservatively nationalist party say that people should not be judged on the basis of their ethnic origins, but instead on the basis of whether they accept the rules of the game in Latvia and try to become included in society. It has to be stressed, however, that ethnic integration is just a small part of public integration, and more attention must be devoted to the economic aspects of integration and public welfare.

Representatives of centrist parties[28] argue that the naturalisation process must continue at the current pace, but perhaps it could be speeded up because the issue is still far too political, and comparatively large numbers of people are still excluded from political processes.

According to politicians of centrist parties there must be more work on bringing the state language to life, which could be achieved through special programmes and a focus on those territories in which few people speak Latvian. Minority school reforms are one aspect of this policy.

Representatives of centrist parties also say, however, that if we are to facilitate integration and various related process, there must be understanding, tolerance and more dialogue among groups in society. It is necessary to explain things that are happening and to talk about how processes are developing. There should be no populist slogans and polemics about them, because that drives people crazy and makes it hard to know how the situation will end up.
Some representatives of centrist parties call for more attention to public welfare and social issues, as opposed to the ethnic aspect. Social issues can bring society together, and if they are resolved, other problems will be resolved, too. These people think that ethnic conflicts will disappear when the economic situation in Latvia is evened out to a greater degree.

---

[27] For the Fatherland and Freedom/Latvian National Independence Movement
[28] New Era party, First Party of Latvia, The Latvian Alliance of the Green Party and Farmers Union, People's Party, Latvian Way

Representatives of minority parties[29] say that first of all there has to be a shift in public thinking about the essence of integration. The dominant idea now is that only non-Latvians need to integrate into Latvian society, but integration is not a one-way street for just one segment of society. Rather, it involves co-existence and interaction, including respect toward the representatives of other nationalities, as well as the need to learn about the language and culture of the other nationalities.

There are two communities in Latvia right now – those who speak Latvian, and those who speak Russian, and representatives of minority parties think that dialogue between the two groups represents a set of activities which involve an attempt by Latvian speakers to explain their position and to get Russian speakers to accept it. Latvia's society, however, must become a community which brings the two sides together and facilitates bilateral dialogue in the true sense of the word. Russian, moreover, should be granted the status of an official minority language, as opposed to a foreign language.

Representatives of moderate minority parties think that more attention must be devoted in future to the non-governmental sector, reducing the influence of political parties and politicians on same. Integration would move in a positive direction if politicians stopped doing purposeful or sub-conscious things which affect integration in various ways, and if public organisations were more involved in working with people and offering them consultations.

On certain issues, representatives of the radical minority parties[30] and have more radical views. They think that naturalisation requirements should be made easier if public integration is an issue. They want automatic citizenship for anyone who has been born in Latvia, and they want easier naturalisation terms for older people, arguing that the existing process is too hard for them. When it comes to the Latvian language and other languages, they don't deny that people must learn the Latvian language, but there must be equal status for the Latvian and Russian language in the public sphere.

In future, according to these members of the elite, the rights of non-citizens must be expanded, particularly in terms of allowing them to vote in local government elections. More attention must be devoted to implementing the requirements of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and norms about minority rights must be addressed in Latvian law. If minorities and non-citizens are denied their rights, that excludes them from society, and that is in violation of the principles of democracy and makes it impossible to talk about public integration. They add that integration is not a forced process – it must be a natural and gradual one.

The role of NGOs in integration

There are many public organisations in Latvia – ones which deal with culture, education, analysis or the civic society – which directly or indirectly affect public integration. Representatives of minority NGOs admit that the Latvian language must be the state language and the language of communications among ethnic groups, but

---

[29] Motherland alliance, People's Harmony Party, New Centre
[30] Latvian Socialist Party, The party alliance For Human Rights in a United Latvia

they also stress that the Latvian language, as a value, is perceived differently among various ethnic groups. Whilst recognising the Latvian language as the state language, it is important to maintain tolerance vis-à-vis other languages and cultures, say these people. Otherwise, there could be a negative counter-reaction among those who belong to other cultures. NGO representatives admit that the Latvian language is a resource for promoting understanding and contacts, but they also insist that the Latvian language and culture cannot serve as a cornerstone for integration: *"The role of the Latvian language in the integration process is only a positive role, because given that Latvia's indigenous population is made up of Latvians, it is a positive thing if members of all nationalities begin to understand the Latvian language. That, accordingly, breaks down barriers, reduces distrust and everything else. That is a good thing. At the same time, however, this must not be exaggerated. Integration cannot be based on the Latvian language and culture."* NGO leaders stress the role of the Latvian language in establishing a civic society: *"The Latvian language is absolutely important for the integration which is known as 'participation in shaping policy', and this is not possible without the Latvian language. Without the Latvian language, no minority group can take part in the process of planning or influence, and that means that the group is marginalized. I think that in the process of shaping national or statehood-related identity, the Latvian language is extremely important."*

In talking about their own organisations role in integration process, representatives of NGO often say that they want to promote harmony in society. When talking about the accomplishments of other NGOs, however, there is often the view that such organisations promote greater activity among radical forces, as well as a split in society.

"These activities of the Headquarters[31] – they have not allowed the organisation to present itself in a positive way. Rightist radicals became stronger. Why does this happen. Rightists become stronger, and then leftists say 'oh, so that's the case.' Perhaps more precisely, they say 'the Russians are coming.' Then the Latvians say, 'oh, the Russians are coming? Latvian, don't give up!'"

"The problem of integration as such is handled in the sphere of public organisations at least to the extent of 70%. That's where people preserve their ethnicity, that's where there is interaction. There are various problems such as education, and each organisation tries to resolve them."

When NGOs try to promote integration, they work in several different directions. Cultural organisations stress that they help each specific ethnic group to preserve its cultural heritage. Representatives of cultural NGOs think that NGOs are intermediaries which ensure the integration of people from the relevant ethnic group into Latvian society (this includes the process of naturalisation), and also ensure that the group is distinguished among others and maintains its culture and traditions.

"I think that it is the job of the non-governmental sector to promote this co-operation among various organisations, among organisations which tend to work just with one or another ethnic group. I think that this is something that certainly needs to be done."

Analytical NGOs in particular, but also other organisations also work on promoting links between society and political forces. The main job for an NGO is to supervise

---

[31] Russian Schools Defence Headquarters

the work of government institutions, to co-ordinate criticism of that work, and to develop alternative solutions.

"The NGO is doing work that the state has not done, even though we have not been delegated this task. We are at the beginning of the process, we are working on it." (Golden Ball of Yarn)

"NGOs are a life preserver for Latvian society. Politicians and the entire political system have been compromised. Politicians are elected once every four years, and then it turns out that there are no controls at all in the hands of society. First of all, people choose party lists, not politicians. You can accidentally be on a list whose members are elected to Parliament."

Minority NGOs offer various cultural programmes which are of interest to people of various age groups and interests. When people attend such events, they communicate within their own ethnic group, which is very important given the alienation of modern urban life.

"We have a social centre, it is a community and a different organisation. It has existed for the last 15 years. We have programmes for people of all ages – musical and cinematic clubs. We bring in lectors, there's live music. We bring in only knowledgeable professionals so as to ensure quality. These events are not just for Jews, different kinds of people attend – there are no limitations."

Representatives of analytical organisations say that the role of NGOs is becoming stronger in society, but right now it is weak and insufficient. The same is said about the readiness of people to become involved in NGO work. Respondents think that these problems will be resolved over the course of time, and in the near future, NGO work might improve, and the role of the organisations may become more important.