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Regime Change, Historical Memory and Ethnic Identity

In his outstanding book, “Remembering War: The Great War and Historical Memory in the 20th Century,”¹ Jay Winter writes that over the course of the last 100 years, there has been a substantial increase in interest about history, and that there have even been several cases of “memory boom.” The first wave of historical memories occurred at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, and this facilitated the emergence of new collective identities – particularly national identities, but also social, cultural and individual identities. The second wave, which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, was in large part a form of remembrance of World War II and the Holocaust.

Winter writes that among other reasons for why there is interest in history today, there is the fact that “for some there is a nostalgic yearning for a vanished or rapidly vanishing world, for others it is a language of protest, seeking out solidarities based on common narratives and traditions to resist the pressures and seductions of globalization, for others still it is a means of moving away from politics.”²

If we think about what encourages people in Latvia to focus on historical memories today and why the last two decades have been rife with discussions about such subjects, we can make reference to what Winter had to say about the first, second and third “memory boom.” Among those circumstances which have stimulated historical memory in Latvia, there is not just the strengthening or new emergence of national and other identities, but also the desire to speak frankly about twists and turns in history, about phases and events of history that were taboo during the Soviet period. These included the repressions of Stalinism and the Soviet regime (mass deportations, forced collectivisation, nationalisation of private property, etc.), the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940, and the period of independence which existed in advance of that occupation.

At the same time, it is interesting that according to Winter, the historical memories of younger generations often encourage people to turn away from politics. In Latvia, it must be said that one of the most typical elements in the historical memories of the *post-occupation generation* is the generation’s close links to politics. This can be seen in the fact that institutions of government have commissioned explanations of history that were not possible during the totalitarian Soviet regime, as well as historical memories from members of the public, in which relationships of power (subordination, captivity, offences) are the dominant dimension.

¹ Winter, J. (2006). *The Great War and Historical Memory in the 20th Century*. Yale University Press.

² *Ibid.*

Baiba Bela-Krūmiņa, a researcher of Latvian life stories, writes in her dissertation³ that regime change created an enormous amount of interest in history in Latvia. The public arena was oversaturated with historical memories. At the same time, however, people typically mistrusted historians, because they knew that during the Soviet occupation, historical events had been interpreted in ideological terms, and documentation has been forged. An alternative method for recording and creating history became very popular – that was the collection and analysis of life stories. The philosopher Maija Kūle wrote about the deepest structures of social thought and sense of the world in Latvia of the 1990s, considering the myths which existed about the importance of the past in Latvia's cultural space.⁴ These myths were based on the belief that a true Latvian identity must be sought out in the past, and there were efforts to understand the present day primarily against the background of the past and in its context. This thinking also existed in politics – the state was being *restored*, and the ideas, symbols and ideology of the state were all found in the past. Even the Constitution of 1922 was reinstated more or less unchanged (the other Baltic States approved a new fundamental law, as opposed to reinstating the old one). Latvia differs from other countries in the post-Soviet bloc in that it is enormously overcome by the past. Historian Irēne Šneidere, an analyst of important events in society and politics, has written that recent history is being glorified in Latvia.⁵ One can agree with the sociologist Tālis Tisenkopfs, who has also noted the enormous level of interest in the past, in arguing that “life stories in Latvia ensured several important social functions. They mobilised ethnic self-understanding and shaped new identities, both individual and collective.”⁶

Interpretation of the term “collective memory”

The term “collective memory” was coined by the French scholar Maurice Halbwachs, but the study of this phenomenon really began when Emile Durkheim started to consider the role of religious rituals in the emergence of social communities. The two scholars established a tradition in which the concept of collective memory emphasises the social dimension. Collective memory is seen as the result of interaction between a social environment and the individual. In the latter half of the 20th century, the study of collective memory was supplemented by so-called interactionists – specialists who explain collective memory as a process of interaction between individuals and social agents. An even more recent explanation of collective memory is offered by constructivism, which views collective memory as a social construct created under the influence of the interests and values of various social agents. In recent years, researchers have also been focusing on discourse analysis, which emphasises the aspect of power structures in the constructing of collective memory.

³ Bela-Krūmiņa, B. (2004). “Dzīvesstāsti kā sociāli vēstījumi” (Life Stories as Social Messages), doctoral dissertation, p. 50.

⁴ Kūle, M. (1996). “Cilvēka situācija Latvijā” (The Human Situation in Latvia), conference materials from the conference “Cilvēksituācija. Latvija 90. gadi” (The Human Situation. Latvia. 1990s), p. 13.

⁵ Šneidere, I. (1996). “Vēsture un sabiedrība: pagātnes izpratne sabiedrības attīstības lūzuma brīžos” (History and Society: Understanding the Past at Breaking Points in Societal Development), conference materials from the conference “Cilvēksituācija. Latvija 90. gadi” (The Human Situation. Latvia. 1990s), p. 33.

⁶ Tisenkopfs, T. (1993). “Dzīve un teksts: biogrāfiskā pieeja sociālās zinātnēs” (Life and Text: A Biographical Approach to the Social Sciences), *LZA Vēstis*, No. 5, 1993, Section A, pp. 1-8.

When seeking a theoretical explanation of the concept of “collective memory,” researchers usually follow along with the traditions of Durkheim and Halbwachs, both of whom put the emphasis on the social nature of collective memory. In his “Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,” Durkheim analysed religious rituals to show that they help people to link the past and the present in their memories. This, in turn, serves as a cornerstone for the emergence of a sense of community and identity in a group, and that helps to ensure group solidarity. A student of Durkheim’s work, Barbara A. Misztal, has argued that “Durkheim’s belief that every society displays and requires a sense of continuity with the past and that the past confers identity on individuals and groups allows us to see collective memory as one of the elementary forms of social life.”⁷ Misztal also emphasises the role of memories in the emergence of group solidarity: “The degree of group solidarity, created through remembering together, depends on the mythical properties of the group’s memories, especially their ability to vitalize energy and arouse emotions.”⁸

Halbwachs believes that an individual’s memories are based on his or her belonging to a group. Memories are not based on the ability of an individual to reflect events. They emerge from human consciousness in interaction with the surrounding society and its social order.⁹ One student of Halbwachs’ work has written that “every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.”¹⁰ Halbwachs differentiates between *history* and *collective memory*: “History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an ‘organic’ relation – the past that is no longer an important part of our lives – while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities,” he has argued.¹¹

In accordance with Halbwachs’ explanation, collective memory is not based on the work of professional historians. Instead, it is based on the overlapping influence of various agents – the mass media, family traditions, messages about the origins of the state that are disseminated during national celebrations, and other historical events, as well.

Contemporary authors who write about collective memory write about its role in the preservation of links to history and to the emergence of collective identities of the present day.¹² In this, their thinking is similar to that of Durkheim and Halbwachs. Many researchers have argued that the memories of the past have an influence on the events of the present: “Images of the Vietnam war limit support for American military activities; memories of the Nazi period constrain German foreign and domestic policy; recollections of dictatorship shape the activities of transitional and

⁷ Misztal, B. (2003). “Durkheim on Collective Memory”, *Journal of Classical Sociology*, Vol. 3(2), p. 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁹ Halbwachs, Maurice (1992) ‘The Social Frameworks of Memory’, in Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, L.A. Coser (ed). Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 38.

¹⁰ Savage, K. “History, Memory and Monuments: An Overview of the Scholarly Literature on Commemoration.” See <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/resedu/savage.htm>. Last accessed 1 October 2008.

¹¹ See Olick, J.K. International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, 2nd ed., p.7

¹² Olick, J.K. (1999) “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures”, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Nov. 1999), pp. 333-348.

post-transitional regimes from Eastern Europe to Latin America; and Watergate has become the perennial reference point for all subsequent scandals in Washington.”¹³

George Schopflin, a distinguished student of Eastern Europe, has written that memories are needed so as to create a specific framework for the experience of the present day and for the structuring of the future: “A society without memory is blind to its own present and future, because it lacks a moral framework into which to place its experiences.”¹⁴

Another tradition related to the research of collective memory is based on interactionism. Representatives of this tradition include Gary Alan Fine and Aaron Beim, who have argued that collective memory must be seen as a process in which interaction among social actors is of decisive importance. This is a process of interpreting and exchanging concepts and meanings, and this serves to create new meanings, too. Fine and Beim believe that Halbwachs has explained collective memory as a result, failing to point out the way in which it is formed. They argue that if collective memory is viewed from the perspective of interactionism, that makes it possible to describe it as a process: “Collective memory is produced through symbolic interaction.”¹⁵ Still, even the representatives of the idea of interactionism recognise the social nature of collective memory – the effects which social context, agents and groups have on interactions and interpretations of meaning. The perspective of interactionists makes it possible to understand the constant development of collective memory: “Collective memory is a living concept, linked to the behaviours and responses of social actors who generate meanings.”¹⁶

Since the publication of “Construction of Social Reality” by Berger and Luckman, many researchers have developed the perspective of constructionism further in terms of concluding that collective memory is “constructed.” In analysing this process, researchers have argued that this is, among other things, a battleground for politics: “Societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind – manipulating the past in order to mould the present.”¹⁷

Wulf Kansteiner conceptualises collective memory as the result of interaction among three types of historical factors – the intellectual and cultural tradition which frames all of our representation of the past; the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions; and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interests.¹⁸

“Cultural trauma” is also often used in the construction of a community’s collective memory. The concept has been explained by a group of authors as “a phenomenon of

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Schopflin, G. (2000). *Nations, Identity, Power*. London: Hurs & Co., p. 74.

¹⁵ Fine, A.G. and A. Beim. (2007) “Introduction: Interactionist Approaches to Collective Memory”, *Symbolic Interaction*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 1-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷ Kammen, M. (1993). *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*. Vintage.

¹⁸ Kansteiner, W. (2002) “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies”, *History and Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (May 2002), p. 180.

collective consciousness, which appears as an effect of social events that have threatened group existence. These events are reflected in the collective memory of the group as a painful and dramatic loss of the identity and significance.”¹⁹ Eyerman has argued that trauma leads people to view history from a different perspective and to reinterpret the past in a way which satisfies the needs of the present.²⁰

Life story researchers in Latvia, too, have identified “cultural trauma” as a dimension in collective memory, arguing that it has had a significant influence on attitudes toward present-day situations and processes such as the ethnic composition of Latvia’s population, relevant policies, etc.²¹

Method

In this article are used results, which are obtained in several research projects, provided by Baltic Institute of Social Sciences: “We. Celebrations. The State. A Sociological Study of How National Holidays are Celebrated” (2008), “Integration Practice and Perspectives” (2006), “Regime change and State Consciousness” (1994).

1. Mass media analysis

The role of mass media (newspapers, TV, Internet portals) in constructing the discourse of the national holidays (2008)

Mass media has important role in reflecting and constructing the discourses of the holidays. Many people face the celebratory events only in a mediated way – through mass media. In order to get insight into how mass media reflects the events of the holidays and what is their constructed discourse in relation to holiday celebration, as well as national identity and sense of belonging to Latvia a separate part in the project is devoted to the study of mass media. In media analysis a special attention is given to discursive differences between media in Latvian and Russian languages.

Holiday discourse in newspapers

Three Latvian and three Russian newspapers were chosen for the analysis. Media analysis was conducted for the time periods with important national holidays – May 1, May 4, November 11 and November 18. Several newspaper issues both before and after those holidays were also included in the research.

The Role of the Press in Constructing Collective Identities (2006)

In this research project, the approach of critical discourse analysis is used to analyse the press. The aim is to study the way in which collective identities are constructed. At the centre of critical discourse analysis (CDA), there are various roles performed by discursive actions in terms of shaping and maintaining unequal power relations among various social groups, between men and women, and among national, ethnic, religious, sexual, political and sub-cultural groups. CDA reviews battles which are

¹⁹ Alexander, J.C., Eyerman, R., Glesne, B., Smelser, N.J. and P. Sztopka (2004). *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkley: University of California Press.

²⁰ Eyerman, R. (2002). *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

²¹ See, e.g., Boldane, I. and A. Snitnikovs. (2006) “Is Cultural Trauma an Impediment to Society’s Integration?”, <http://www.politika.lv/index.php?id=15655>.

manifested when one discourse is given privileges and others are marginalized, thus also affecting the positions of individuals and groups that are involved in discourse.

CDA takes into account the situation, the status of participants, time and place, as well as other social factors – participation in groups, age, socialisation, as well as psychological factors which are of great importance in creating texts. When conducting this analysis, one must take into account the psychological, cognitive and linguistic factors that were the foundation for the creation of the text. These factors shape structures or ‘frames’ and ‘schemata’ which help to structure and perceive reality. Wodak defines the concept of frames as general models which bring together our overall knowledge about that or another situation. Schemata are concrete models for realization of a specific situation or text. The concept of strategies is closely linked to these concepts. Strategies are used in pursuit of goals, but that does not mean that participants in discourse are always aware of those goals.²²

Press analysis was conducted with respect to periods of time when there were public and media debates about issues of ethno-policy. Three Latvian language and three Russian language newspapers were chosen for analysis during each period of time

For each period of time, researchers selected articles which had to do with the important ethno-political events. In analysing these articles, researchers focused on the way in which ethno-political processes were reflected, as well as on the way in which the newspapers described important participants therein – political parties, non-governmental organisations and international institutions. The main dimensions of analysis to be considered were the content of the discourses and the discursive strategies that were applied.

2. Study of inhabitants’ civic values, attitudes, representation of collective memory and celebration practices (2008)

The main focus of this section is on inhabitants’ civic values, attitudes, representation of collective memory and celebration practices of the national holidays. In order to fulfil these objectives focus group discussions involving various groups of respondents were carried out. Objective of the focus group discussions: the study of social practices, memories and opinions about national holidays in various social and ethnic groups, as well as identification of common holiday discourses. Participants were recruited according to the age and sex quotas to represent the different generations and ages. There were four discussions in Latvian and four in Russian accordingly to the native language of the respondents.

3. Regime change and State Consciousness (1994)

Attitudes measurement toward regime change and history.

Empirical and interpretative research of collective memory

1. The influence of newspapers on the process of collective memory construction (1990)

²² Titscher, S., Meyer, M., Wodak, R., and E. Vetter. (2000) “Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis”. London: Sage Publications, pp. 155-156.

After the approval of the Declaration of Independence (1990) the Latvian and Russian language press mostly published various official pronouncements, along with appeals and declarations, from the Supreme Council, as well as political parties (mostly the LKP and the LTF) and public organisations.

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.²³ 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:

²³ 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*, 29 May 1990)

Latvians often perceive processes of change as a return to “normality” – a “normal” state, “normal” everyday lives, and “normal” economic development.²⁴ The ethnic, civic and political identity of Latvians was strengthened through reports about leaving the USSR as an independent country, as well as the return 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.

A review of the Russian language newspapers that were published at that time shows that there were radical differences between the LKP newspaper *Советская Латвия* and the Interfront newspaper *Единство* on the one hand and the newspaper *Советская Молодежь* 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 newspaper did not stress threats against Russian speakers, although it did print critical reviews of important events of the day.

²⁴ Stukuls Eglitis, D. (2002). *Imagining the Nation: History, Modernity and Revolution in Latvia*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

In the Russian language newspapers the Russian speaking population is depicted internationalist contrasting to the growing nationalism of Latvians. It is stressed, that Russian-speakers do not sort people according to their ethnic background. Russian newspapers mostly show their readers as simple and hard-working persons. Comparatively often veterans of war and work are mentioned, their feelings about actual processes are portrayed.

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 ethnic groups. This challenge was particularly addressed to the LTF 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)

2. National Holiday discourse in the mass media

May 1 is a holiday with deep traditions of celebration in Latvia. Between the two world wars, this was a holiday where the concepts of social democracy were manifested. During the Soviet era, May 1 was extensively celebrated as the international day of worker solidarity. The law on state holidays in Latvia now states that May 1 is to be observed as the date on which the Latvian Constitutional Convention was convened (1920) and also as Labour Day.

May 4, Day of The Declaration On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia. The date when the Soviet Latvian parliament declared the reestablishment of independence in 1990

Day **November 11**, which is known as Lāčplēša Day and is Latvia's version of Veteran's Day. The day is established in honour the victory over Bermont's army on November 11, 1919, when independence of Latvian state was defended.

November 18, the date on which the Republic of Latvia was established in 1918.

May 1. The date when the Constitutional Convention of the Republic of Latvia

Mass media reports devoted to national holidays and celebration of same serve to construct collective memories and identities. This is seen in the way that the mass media present the historical context of a holiday, as well as in the way that the behaviour and mood of people who are attending the celebrations are presented.

May 1 is the only state holiday which was celebrated both in Soviet times and after the restoration of Latvia's independence. Since the restoration of independence, May 1 has been celebrated as Labour Day in Latvia, as was the case between the wars, but public attitudes vis-à-vis the day are quite contradictory. Attitudes are based in large part on the collective memories which have been preserved quite well about May Day traditions during the Soviet era. The Russian language newspapers are not shy about recalling emotional associations with the Soviet celebration of May 1, thus constructing a link to the Soviet era in the collective memory. Latvian language media outlets are more likely to treat the holiday in an ironic way, thus seemingly reducing the importance of these historical associations.

There was not very broad celebration of May 1, one of the event was meeting of Social Democrats. Newspapers noted that the meeting was organised by the Socialist Party (SP). Articles stressed that the few people who took part in the event were mostly elderly. This indirectly suggested that the event was a marginal one. Latvian newspaper *NRA* also noted that the participants were Russian speakers, thus telling its readers that their group (Latvians) did not organise the event. There were indirect suggestions that organisers were manipulating the audience. The meeting and participants were discredited and seen as rather laughable and childish. *NRA* emphasised the fact that those who were present were drinking alcoholic beverages, thus eliminating discursive power of the meeting and the march, as well as the ideas which were expressed. The article Latvian newspaper *NRA* was mostly sarcastic: *"Pensioners sat in the sun on park benches to warm their frozen limbs in the cold and damp weather with something more stimulating"* (*NRA*, 2 May).

Several newspapers recalled the demonstrations which were held on May 1 during Soviet times. Russian newspapers *Chas* and *Vesti Segodniya* used Soviet-era terminology – “the date of international solidarity among working people”, thus creating a link with the Soviet regime. The Russian newspapers which dubbed the holiday “the date of international solidarity among working people” presented photographs with posters bearing Soviet-era slogans such as “*Peace, Work, May*” and “*Long Live May 1!*” (*Telegraf*, 02 May). The newspaper also suggested that the event was focused on the past and not particularly important by focusing on the place where the meeting was held and by continuing Soviet-era ideological positioning: “*Speakers denounced Latvia’s capitalist regime*” (*Telegraf*, 2 May). Articles often mentioned the events of May 8 and May 9²⁵ that were in the future. In Victory day celebration usually participate a lot of Soviet Army veterans with their friend and families and it is a way through memories to strengthen Russian identity in Latvia.

Most of the reporting on May 1 focused on Labour Day, and only a few articles mentioned in passing the fact that May 1 is also the date when the Latvian Constitutional Convention was convened.

May 4, The Declaration On the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia (1990)

The way in which the May 4 holiday was presented in the Latvian and the Russian press was very much different. For example, Russian newspaper *Chas* printed a front page photograph of young people in folk costumes dancing folk dances at the Freedom Monument. The caption listed the main elements of the holiday.²⁶ The events were described with much alienation, as if they had taken part in some other country. The participation of local residents was not mentioned at all (“... *the state celebrated...*”), thus leaving the impression that the holiday was not meant for the newspaper’s readers: “*Yesterday was a holiday in Latvia. The state celebrated the 17th anniversary since the signing [sic.] of the declaration of independence. The capital city was decorated with flags, banners and pennants in the colours of the flag*” (*Chas*, 5 May). May 4 was also mentioned in the weekly review of events in *Chas*, which was printed on the commentary page. One paragraph drew parallels between the 17th year after the proclamation of the declaration of independence and the 17th year after the establishment of the Republic of Latvia in 1918. Russian journalist²⁷ insisted that the level of welfare in 1935 was better than was the case in 2007, even though back then people had to overcome the losses of World War I. In 1990, he wrote, Latvia was one of the wealthiest Soviet republics, but now, 17 years on, it had more dissatisfied and impoverished residents than had been the case during the first period of independence. Thus the author expressed criticisms of events since the restoration of Latvia’s independence, focusing particularly on the country’s

²⁵ During Soviet Union's existence, the [May 9](#) Victory Day was celebrated throughout USSR and in countries of the [Eastern Bloc](#).

²⁶ *Chas* also printed false information about the meaning of May 4, making reference to “(..) *the ceremonial meeting at the Saeima in honour of the date when the Constitutional Convention was convened and the independence declaration of Latvia was proclaimed*”. The anniversary of the Constitutional Convention, of course, was on May 1.

²⁷ Leonīds Fedosejevs

economic and social policies, moreover the economic and social comparison is given in very subjective way.

The Latvian language press, by contrast, was dominated by uplifting descriptions of the decisive vote that was taken on May 4 and the great emotions which that day involved. In Latvian language newspapers celebration of May 4 was shown as event for Latvians only. For example, organisers of the holiday, in talking about their plans, stated several times, both directly and indirectly, that May 4 is a holiday for ethnic Latvians, not all of the people of Latvia: *“The Latvian today is observant and spoiled. (...) We want to involve the Latvian in the preparation of this event, which has as its concept ‘The River of Destiny’. Your river of destiny and mine. Latvia’s river of destiny.”* (Latvijas Avīze, 5 May)

November 11, Lāčplēša Day

The historic origins of Lāčplēšis Day and the way in which the day is commemorated are presented very differently in the Latvian and the Russian language press. In the former, the emphasis is on the historical importance of the defeat of Bermont’s army in ensuring the national independence of Latvia, while the Russian language press seeks to reduce the role of Latvian military forces in these battles. In the context of events of the past, the Russian language press also poses rhetorical questions about the loyalty of ethnic Russians toward the Latvian state in the context of present-day politics. It can be seen here that one and the same historical events serve to construct different collective memories.

Latvian language newspapers stressed unity and patriotism, insisting that people from very different social and age groups were taking part: *“(..) One could see elderly people, as well as families with children and young people. One could hear both Latvian and Russian being spoken”*, and *“This is a holiday which consolidates people and brings them closer together”* (Diena, 12 November). The Latvian language press idealised and exaggerated unity and patriotism among the people on Lāčplēša Day, trying to create the impression that absolutely everyone was proud of the National Armed Forces: *“National excitement on Lāčplēša Day: Proud of the Soldiers”*, as well as *“Children were truly interested in the handsome soldiers, and they asked constant questions about soldiers and the Latvian Army”* (NRA, 12 November).

The Russian language newspapers, however, insisted that there was an ethnolinguistic gap in society: *“The events of 1919, which everyone is supposed to remember on November 11, do not pose any questions even in our split society”* (Telegraf, 12 November). Writing about a parade staged by the National Guard in Daugavpils, another author contrasted groups in society and the state: *“Who said that we would march under the flags of the Latvian Army even in the case of war? We took an oath in one country, and few of us has any plan to go to the other side. I am not even speaking of non-citizens – how can anyone defend a country which does not consider you to be a human being, one which has taken away many of your rights. (...) I had to laugh at the little soldier who seriously thinks that I will march under the flags of the Latvian Army and go to war against my brothers in Russia and Belarus”* (Vesti Segodniya, 12 November).

Telegraf also claimed that the liberation battles in Rīga in 1919 were the first time when all of the residents of the capital city stood together irrespective of age and nationality. Only *Chas* printed precise numbers about the size of the opposing forces. *Vesti Segodniya* chose to publish a biographical report on Bermont-Avalov, offering a different interpretation of what happened in 1919: “*This was against the background of hysterical rejoicing about the ‘heroic defence of Rīga’ in 1919 – something which was ensured almost exclusively by a British-French naval squadron*” (*Vesti Segodniya*, 12 November).

November 18, The date when the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed

November 18, the date when the independence of the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed in 1918, is the central state holiday. The Latvian press makes use of historical symbols and myths in an effort to strengthen collective memory and the sense of belonging to the state. Typically, the holiday discourse in the Latvian language press does not overstep ethnic boundaries – Latvians address Latvians. The Russian language press seemingly denigrates the importance of the holiday, devoting more attention to accidents, examples of carelessness, and shortcomings in the way in which the holiday is organised. The Russian language press clearly is in no hurry to use the national holiday as a way to strengthen legitimising identity among Russian speakers in Latvia. At the same time, the Russian language press did emphasise the fact that President Valdis Zatlers spoke to all of the people of Latvia during his November 18 address, not just to ethnic Latvians.

The Latvian press mostly presented the November 18 holiday in a positive light, while the Russian language newspapers focused far more on negative phenomena in the holiday proceedings. Russian newspaper *Vesti Segodniya*, for example, tried to link the fact that 13 people had perished in fires over the weekend to the state holiday: “*While local residents celebrated the holiday, fire-fighters battled the flames and counted up the dead*” (*Vesti Segodniya*, 20 November). The same newspaper also devoted a brief article to garbage in the city after the November 18 celebration: “*The postscript to the holiday – piles of trash in front of the Occupation Museum, trash cans stuffed to the rim, crumbs of sandwiches scattered in a 10 metre radius around them – that is just a small image that could be seen yesterday at City Hall Square*” (*Vesti Segodniya*, 20 November). *Vesti Segodniya* devoted a separate article to the fireworks. The headline: “*Inflation Ate a Minute of the Fireworks*” (*Vesti Segodniya*, 20 November). The paper reported that despite the large number of people who were there, only five people were detained. It also noted that the fireworks were very brief and hard to see: “*On what may be the most important holiday in Latvia, the fireworks boomed for only four minutes. (...) Those residents and guests of Rīga who missed just a few minutes simply lost the chance to see the many colours of fire*” (*Vesti Segodniya*, 20 November). Only *Vesti Segodniya* and *Chas* published a telegram sent to President Zatlers by Russian President Vladimir Putin on the occasion of the holiday.

The Latvian language press brought up the subject of patriotism – how oppressed or powerful it is in Latvia, how it can be inculcated into young people. Several authors focused on patriotism among Latvians, not among all of the residents of Latvia. Newspapers printed several patriotic portraits of ordinary individuals. Representatives of the “Everything for Latvia!” party were presented as experts on

promoting patriotism on several occasions in Latvian newspaper *NRA* and *Latvijas Avīze*.

There were also articles in the Latvian newspapers which focused on links to historical events in 1918. *Diena* reported on the photographer who took the only known picture of the event at the Latvian National Theatre where the new state was proclaimed. Historical links among generations were emphasised in an article about the Latvian national flag – a flag which was sewn during the first period of independence, hidden carefully away during Soviet years, and brought out again during the period of the National Renaissance. *Latvijas Avīze* offered its readers several reviews of historical events.

Only the Russian language newspapers mentioned, regarding The president's address, the fact that the president was speaking to all of Latvia's residents: *"At the conclusion of his address, the president called on everyone – both politicians and members of the public – to prepare for change. What is more, this statement was addressed not only to representatives of the titular nation"* (*Telegraf*, 20 November). Previous president of Latvia usually used to speak to Latvians (what in Latvian means Latvians as ethnic group only), that fact was very negatively perceived among Russians.

3. National holidays and historical memory

People in the focus groups in which the discussion was in Latvian often shared their memories about what happened on May 4, 1990 – the proclamation of the declaration of independence, their emotions on that day, and their presence at the most important events or the watching of those events on TV. Respondents, largely in the Latvian language groups, remembered the events and processes under which Latvia regained its independence very vividly and, in some cases, with quite a bit of pathos. *"I really link the 4th of May with myself and my presence in Latvian history more than with anything else. (...) It's part of me and a few other people who have common memories about that time when May 4 occurred. (...) I remember myself on May 4 to a great degree."* (Latvian)

In Russian speaking groups, several respondents indicated that May 4 and November 18 are identical dates in terms of what happened on each of them – Latvia won its independence. Some respondents could not understand why the achievement of independence is celebrated on two different dates. In-depth analysis of statements shows that among Russian speaking residents of Latvia, discourse considers both dates to involve obtaining independence: *(...) Independence was proclaimed in 1918, so why do we need two different days, also one in 1990. The occupation ended, they believe, and independence was already proclaimed in 1918. I see no point to this May 4."* (Russian)

[In reference to May 4] *"The second proclamation – the first one was on November 18, after all. The second one was on May 4, right? That's the situation, right?"* (Russian) *"Because the state was established on May 4 as a state, but on November 18 a document was signed on a free Latvia. I believe that the establishment of the state is stronger, and no matter how much we might not want that, I hold May 4 as a holiday to be higher than November 18. Freedom could be obtained in 1917, in 1910, perhaps at some other time, but there is only one May 4."* (Russian)

(..) “ *Independence day arrived one day, a little group of people took a decision, and that was all. A little group of nationalists emerged. The Soviet Union collapsed, and all of the unified nations started to stand against one another, because as a result of propaganda, someone said that Jānis must hate Ivan and vice versa, even though they used to work for the same company and were good friends and colleagues. A little group of idiots established the mass media, they only broadcast negative information, and that is why people have a very negative attitude toward November 18 specifically*”. (Russian)

This latter statement reveals several causes which serve to establish and influence attitudes vis-à-vis state holidays. Russian speaking respondents believe that the restoration of independence had a destructive effect on ethnic relations, and the media have played a role in creating hostility in such relations.

Russian speaking respondents tend to question whether their knowledge is valid. Typically they use the strategy of excuses, pushing the responsibility on a non-specific subject which has not done enough to explain things and educate people. “*No one has explained to the Russian speaking people of Latvia what May 4 means, what kind of document was signed back then.*” (Russian)

“*The second proclamation – the first one was on November 18, after all. The second one was on May 4, right? That’s the situation, right?*” (Russian)

There is more knowledge about November 18, the date when the Republic of Latvia was proclaimed, than there is about May 4. Among Russian and Latvian respondents, people recognised November 18 as the date when the establishment of Latvian statehood is celebrated, and people say that is the main element in identifying the holiday. “*Each country probably has such a date, an independence day. We have November 18.*” (Latvian)

“*Of course I am happy about this country, that it has a specific birthday.* (Latvian)
November 18 is the anniversary of the proclamation, while May 4 is the date when a document was signed.” (Russian)

4. Historical memories and attitudes toward state holidays

The level of understanding among local residents about May 4 and November 18 as the most important state holidays in Latvia is relevant to ways in which the issue is interpreted. Participants in Latvian language focus groups offer a priori acceptance of November 18 as the most important state holiday in Latvia, with little in-depth discussion of historical events which have to do with the proclamation of the state. In Russian speaking groups, however, historical issues were brought up every single time. There is no reason to believe that people in those groups are unaware of what happened in Latvia on November 18, 1918. In each group, some respondents offered concrete responses as to what happened on that date, and this indicated very different interpretations of historical events. In all groups, however, there were also people who told their own *stories* about November 18 in Latvian history. Here are two such stories: “*About May 4 – no one here has cited the year! No one has cited the year for November 18, either!*”

[Moderator] **Who can state the year?**

“1818.”

“*What’s more, I think that Uncle Lenin turned Latvia into a country, but for some reason the monuments are being removed. (..) After all, he signed the directive on Latvia’s freedom?! [This last was said in a questioning voice.] If there hadn’t been Lenin, who granted freedom to Finland, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, then what*”

would we have now – Courland? But we took down all the [Lenin] monuments! He should be lifted up. [Respondent laughs] And the Latvian riflemen protected him willingly. I have a neighbour in my building, a Latvian woman, a repressed woman who returned from Siberia and went to work at our pedagogical institute. Somehow we once got into a quarrel. A week later, however, she apologised to me and brought me a pile of literature which showed that what I just said was true. “(Russian)

The other example:

[Moderator] **“How important an event in Latvian history do you think November 18 is?”**

“November 18. The truth is that it was not on November 18, but as far as I know on November 15 that Anton Pavlovich von Lieven was injured. Anton Pavlovich von Lieven was a project of [Andrievs] Niedra²⁸. He was very seriously injured and could not take part in negotiations with our British allies about turning over Rīga. There were two governments in Liepāja and Cēsis, and the question of which would become the government in Rīga was at an equal level – one of them or the other. The fact that an important participant in the negotiations was injured – this very visible person from Liepāja – led to the situation in which the government that was in Cēsis became the government in Rīga. This is the date that is celebrated. To tell you the truth, at that time both governments were equally important. (..) If Lieven had been a few metres away from the explosion, perhaps we would now say that Niedra was our founder. There was an accident, in other words. (..) But the Almighty decided that we would have a better life with the boys from Cēsis than those from Liepāja. Every event of this type can be seen as another manifestation of God, how He leads us, how people think, but God does. That is how we should refer to everything.” (Russian)

From one side, Russian speakers in Latvia have different interpretations of what happened on November 18, from another side, very different levels of historical knowledge is seen in their doubts about the year in which the historical events of May 4 and November 18 occurred. It is characteristic that a lack of interest about history, the idea that historical events have been unimportant, and the use of critical interpretation in schemes of argumentation are used by respondents to reduce the pathos of the holiday and to justify their neutral and sometimes ignorant attitude vis-à-vis the holiday and their refusal to celebrate it.

“I think that November 18 was the date when an agreement was signed on Latvia’s independence. When was it signed? It is quite hard for me to say.” (Russian)

“If you think about it, then the country needs this holiday, and I don’t always personally think too hard about why this is a holiday, I just accept it as it is. The state celebrates the fact that it is seen as a country in which the rule of law prevails. As a citizen, I feel that very much, and perhaps it is not necessary for me to dig around in history. That is why other state holidays also don’t seem that important to me.” (Russian)

In various contexts of the arguments presented by Russian speaking respondents who are trying to justify their weak level of knowledge about November 18 and its importance in Latvia history, one sees an attempt to transfer responsibility for this to “someone else” – the state, ethnic Latvians or schools. These tend to be highly generalised statements:

“There’s no information about November 18. When we celebrated November 7, we knew about it well in advance. Propaganda was effective, and we celebrated, but we don’t really know about the meaning of November 18. (Russian)

²⁸ See p. 27

My six-year-old son also doesn't know what November 18 is, and I am just terribly thankful to the state that he doesn't know anything. When I was his age, I knew what May 1 and May 9 were. He doesn't know, he thinks it's my name's day. And for the time being I haven't explained this holiday to him, because the state has not gone to the effort of explaining to all of its residents what this date of November 18 means. When my son asks why we are watching fireworks, I tell him that it's because of my name's day. Someday surely someone at school will explain to him what this holiday means.” (Russian)

Participants in focus group discussions, and particularly those that were conducted in Russian, emphasised the need for long-term explanatory work so as to shape people's understandings about the meaning of the state holidays, give them greater motivation to take part, and strengthen the habits and traditions of celebrating the holidays in a larger segment of the population.

“Because it [November 18] is a specific brand, and it requires work. What you said about November 7, that didn't happen over the course of 10 years, but I think that our state has devoted comparatively little attention to it.” (Russian)

An important aspect of the historical context is that historical memories construe the understanding of state holidays today, and the same can be said about attitudes toward the state and those who are in power. Respondents said that of great importance in forming an understanding of holidays is the set of individual historical memories and myths which become integrated into the collective historical memory and myths. Very powerful positive influence is ensured by the presence and participation of the individual, whether directly or indirectly via social networks, in those historical events which relate to specific state holidays. People who took part in the 1991 barricades or actively took part in the events of May 4, 1990, remember powerful emotional experiences, and these continue to influence the extent to which they feel a sense of celebration. Respondents who took part in those events have a clearer understanding of the May 4 holiday, and their statements include linguistic constructs which indicate a sense of community with other Latvian residents who were also involved in the events.

“Those of us who saw that ceremonial and decisive moment when the vote was taken (...) we saw how the people reacted when the vote was affirmative. Those emotions pass through all of the years on this date [May 4]. That is important for me personally.”(Latvian)

“The day when Latvia regained its independence and it was announced on May 4, my wife and I arrived in Moscow specifically on that day, and we heard about it there. We felt so very uplifted and joyous.” (Russian)

“We watched television, but we had to work that morning, after all, and during breaks we turned on the TV to see what was happening. And then we had to go back to work. I still remember how we ran back and forth, how we wondered whether it would happen or not.” (Latvian)

Family and school – where understandings of state holidays originate

The family and the school are traditionally seen as the two primary agents of an individual's socialisation. The group discussions involved several respondents with children of preschool or school age. The parents said things to indicate that families seldom talk about the historical events which relate to state holidays, and that is particularly true in Russian speaking families. Among Latvian speaking families too, however, such discussions tend to be of an incidental nature.

“In our family – I have a grandson who is of a thoughtful age, for instance. He’s 12 years old, and we watch these shows together if they’re on television. We talk about all of it, and it’s interesting to him. He asks questions, and try to ensure that as he grows up, he knows what May 4 is.” (Latvian)

In both the Latvian and the Russian language groups, there was a tendency to delegate the responsibility for shaping an understanding about the meaning of state holidays among children to kindergartens and schools. People insisted that educational institutions are responsible for the patriotic raising of children and for their political socialisation.

“Latvia basically doesn’t have any ideology, young people are directed in specific directions, and that is the right thing to do. In the kindergarten, there are little flags and the like, and just try to refuse to do something! From the very beginning children are told that November 18 is a holiday. But why should we ourselves [do the same]?” (Russian)

“I think that at school it is invaluable. That means that the family is important, of course, but the school is enormously important.” (Latvian)

There were others who expressed quite the opposite view – that the political socialisation of children cannot be the responsibility only of schools. Families, said such respondents, must work together with schoolteachers on this subject. The experience of focus group participants, however, showed clearly that kindergartens and schools play a very important role right now in establishing habits related to the celebration of state holidays:

“Look, she is five years old. Perhaps she does not yet understand that the holiday is November 18 as such, but she does get up on stage to read a poem at the microphone (...) I can’t think of anything that is written in Russian that is dedicated to November 18. That is a bad thing, given that 40% of the population are Russian speakers.” (Russian)

Parents offered several arguments in support of their passivity in educating their children and shaping traditions of holiday celebrations. First of all, respondents think that the issues are too complicated to explain to a child in an understandable way.

“I can say that I have not gone into any great depth in trying to explain the meaning of May 4, because it is so complicated for small children. First of all, we have November 11 and November 18. Those are dates which are close to one another, and even that confuses the kids – they can’t remember whether Lāčplēsis fought on November 18, whether it was Lāčplēsis or a victory. It is all quite confusion even for teenagers and children who are of a more mature age. If you bring in May 4, too, particularly among small children, then you get sort of a porridge.” (Latvian)

Second, parents – and particularly Russian speakers – feel no real motivation to explain Latvian history to their children.

“Whatever the child is told, the child is told. I have no plan to speak in favour or against this. We do not discuss this holiday [November 18] as a fact in our family. It’s simply a holiday with fireworks, we don’t go into in-depth explanations.” (Russian)

As the comments of these respondents are analysed in the context of what else they said in the focus group discussions, one sees that these participants are not pleased with the state’s ethnic policies. They are unhappy with social protections and material welfare, they lack a sense of belonging in the country’s community. On the contrary, they say things which indicate that they are alienating themselves from the community.

Third, analysis of the way in which respondents in the research understand state holidays and the reasons why they are celebrated shows clearly that some parents lack knowledge about history. They become confused because of differing interpretations of history, they do not feel convinced of their knowledge, and the official interpretation of history in Latvia is often not in line with their ideological beliefs.

5. Latvians and Russians: Interpretation of Regime Change

As the state status has been changing (1991) political system has undergone changes as well: totalitarian regime was replaced by parliamentary power. Therefore a question is logical, to what extent is this system supported by the masses: Latvians, non-Latvians, citizens and non-citizens. One of the moments forming the attitude towards today's ideology, politics is the historical experience formed in the high level of economic development and high cultural level, or the international policy promoted the development and friendly relations between the nation.

In the opposite to official policy there existed also such opinion that if Latvia would be an independent country, like Finland, its economy would have been much more stronger and the standard of living of the residents of Latvia would have been much higher. These two opinions were widely spread in the soviet time. Of course, in totalitarian regime there were no possibilities for sociological study of these opinions.

The results of the survey carried out in May 1994 show that also at that time the opinion was discussed about Latvia's possible fate after 1940: in USSR or as an independent country. Latvians think that the development of Latvia would have been more successful if it would stay independent, but non-Latvians more support the opposite opinion – only because Latvia joined USSR it secured its development.

Table 1. Regime Identity: attitude towards various opinions by nationality, citizenship, education, social status, age

Cramer correlation coefficient v

Statement	v	v	v	V	v
Just due to the help of the republics of USSR, Latvia had reached such a high level of development of economy in the soviet times	<u>.36</u>	<u>.23</u>	.06	.10	.08
Soviet international policy promoted development of the nations and friendly relations between the republics	<u>.32</u>	<u>.21</u>	.09	.09	.06
Exactly due to the newcomers Latvia could restore the destruction brought by the war and reach today's high level of development	<u>.42</u>	<u>.23</u>	.06	<u>.10</u>	.08
The newcomers have done more harm than good, the living standard of the native population have become worse	<u>.37</u>	<u>.20</u>	.07	.09	.07
If Latvia would have stayed stay independent country like Finland in 1940 the standard of living would be	<u>.25</u>	<u>.14</u>	.05	<u>.11</u>	.06

much higher					
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Source: Zepa, B. Paulins A., *Regime change and sense of citizenship. (Latvia case) Paper presented in Second European Conference for Sociology European Societies: fusion or fission. 30 August – September 1995 Budapest, Hungary*

In the soviet period so called economical migration was promoted in Latvia by Communist leadership, it was drawing in the labor force from other republics of USSR in order to build new industrial enterprises and foster Russification in Latvia. Migration became one of the most urgent social problems in Latvia and opinions on this problem polarized sharply. The results of the survey of 1994 showed that two thirds of Latvians negatively estimate the role of newcomers in Latvia, but the opinion of Russians is absolutely opposite: three fourth express the opinion that newcomers have furthered the development of Latvian economy, at the some time more than one half of non-Latvians agree that if Latvia would have stayed independent country like Finland the standard of living would be much higher. These results show that the opinion of Latvians and non-Latvians about the events of soviet period differ sharply. They also differ sharply among citizens and non-citizens (see Table 1.) The results of the survey of May 1994 show that the opinion of Latvians and non-Latvians and citizens and non-citizens about political stereotypes differ sharply, but much less this opinion is influenced by educational level, social status and age. It testifies that opinions connected with Latvia's soviet period mostly differs among Latvians and non-Latvians, citizens and non-citizens.

General discussion

The Latvian and Russian Press: Constructing a Legitimatising Identity and an Identity of Resistance

In 1990 and 1991, after the restoration of Latvia's independent statehood, institutions related to democracy and the market economy were established. Along with this, there were massive transformations in society, although these were more difficult to spot. The construction of new identities is one aspect of social change, because identities are based on a sense of community with a specific group – something that makes it possible to ensure one's own sense of procedure and views about social reality, to understand which people are "ours" and which are "others," and to enjoy a sense of security in society. Identity is a source of meaning and experience for people.²⁹ Of particular importance during the stated period in time was ethnic identity, because 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.

²⁹ Castells, M. (2004). *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. II. Wiley-Blackwell, 2nd ed., p. 6.

The importance of ethnic identity in Latvia has been dictated by the presence of a second major sociolinguistic group – Slavs. In 1935, they made up just 12% of Latvia's population, but during the Soviet occupation, that percentage shot up to 42%.³⁰ Historical memory played an enormous role in the construction of the ethnic identity of Latvians, because it was only under the circumstances of democracy that they could be free of the interpretation of history which was forced upon them by the totalitarian Soviet regime. A particular role in the construction of collective memory, for its part, is performed by the fact that there are two parallel media spaces in Latvia which exist simultaneously. Here we find the Russian language and the Latvian language media space, and overlap between the two audiences is very negligible, indeed.

Analysis of the Latvian and Russian mass media of Latvia show that on the one hand, they are very active agents in the shaping of collective identity, while on the other hand, each of them interprets history in a different way – focusing attention on different phases of history, constructing a different collective memory, and thus helping the relevant target audience to construct its identity, too. For example, to construct Latvian identity was to activate links to the pre-war Republic of Latvia. 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.

In the early 1990s, the Latvian language press sought to create the impression that the Latvian state which existed between the two world wars was an ideal model for state and society – one to which Latvia would soon be returning. The population of interwar Latvia was presented as mono-ethnic, economic development was said to have been focused in particular on agricultural output, and Latvia itself was offered up as an organic member of the community of Western countries. 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.

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 identity in its place. At the same time people from another ethnic groups, especially Russian speaking, were often depicted in negative terms, publishing many scornful epithets. In that way, from one side, negative image of „others” was created, but from another side, positive image of Latvian identity was strengthened .

From another side, in the Russian language newspapers the Russian speaking population is depicted internationalist contrasting to the growing nationalism of Latvians. It is stressed, that Russian-speakers do not sort people according to their ethnic background. Russian newspapers mostly show their readers as simple and hard-working persons. Comparatively often veterans of war and work are mentioned, their feelings about actual processes are portrayed. In the Russian language newspapers,

³⁰ Zepa, B. and I. Šūpule (2006). “Etnicitātes konstruēšana: politiķi un masu mēdiji kā nozīmīgākie aģenti” (Construction of Ethnicity: Politicians and the Mass Media as the Most Important Agents), *LU Raksti*, Vol. 701, pp. 109-120.

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. The newspaper stressing the friendly and favourable relationships which existed among various elements in society before the processes of independence began.

The Russian language press, by comparison, constructed the identity of its audience on the basis of symbols of collective memory from the Soviet era – “labourer,” “internationalism, etc. These concepts and others appeared in the Russian language press of the early 1990s quite regularly. Audiences readily recognised them, and they presented a contrast to the historical memory that had been constructed among Latvians.

Analysis of newspapers that was conducted in the early 1990s showed that the interpretation of Latvia’s history was different in the Latvian and the Russian language print media.³¹ The study stressed the fact that Russian and Latvian historians themselves had different views, and this affected the differing political positions which were taken vis-à-vis important aspects of Latvian history. Given that the subject of history in Latvia is a timely one, historians have published articles in the mass media, thus becoming involved in the construction of collective memory. Mass-media analysis 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 strengthening of the democratic regime gave Latvians an opportunity to return to their “interrupted history.” References related to historical memory largely served as an argument in support of collective identity. Manuel Castells, a distinguished researcher into the field of collective identity, has offered a separation of two different kinds of identities, his thinking being based on the extent to which the construction of an identity is in line with the positions taken with institutions of power and governance or the way in which identities emerge as a form of protest or opposition. Castells wrote of a “legitimising identity” and a “resistance identity.” He defined the former as being “introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination vis-à-vis social actors.”³² Castells also noted that this explanation of legitimising identity fit in well with the theories about nationalism that were proposed by Anderson³³ and Gellner.³⁴ Thus Castells indicated that nationalism

³¹ Broks, J., Tabūns, A. and A. Tabūna. “History and the Images of the Past”. In Tabūns, A. (ed.) (2001). *National, State and Regime Identity in Latvia*. Baltic Study Centre, p. 84.

³² Castells, M. *The Power...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³³ Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined Communities*, revised ed. London: Verso Books.

is a key dimension of the identity. From this perspective, the legitimising identity describes the construction of the national identity of ethnic Latvians very well. On the one hand, the civil society is very actively and responsively constructing the national identity, but on the other hand, it is also, and simultaneously, rationalising and strengthening the power of the state.

The collective memory of ethnic Russians, as opposed to Latvians, is rooted organically in other memories. Three generations grew up during the 70 years of the Soviet Union. That is a sufficiently long period of time to ensure that habits are firmed up in the informal environment and that there is a desire to ensure the continuity of these memories. What is more, the discourse about historical memories in informal settings (i.e., in families) is in line with that which is expressed by communicators in the formal setting (the Russian mass media). This serves to construct the legitimising identity of citizens of Russia. Russians who live in Latvia, by contrast, shape their identity by confronting their collective memories with those of Latvians, who prefer to focus on “restored history” and the interwar period. What kind of identity is constructed on the basis of this confrontation between different historical memories? According to Castells, we could speak of the resistance identity here. Castells identified it as being one which is “generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building an identity of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society.”³⁵

Discourse about holidays in the press and in collective memory

The Latvian and the Russian language press depict the historical context of state holidays and the associated celebrations in different ways. The Latvian press usually pays little attention to those holidays which many people associate with the Soviet era – May 1, for instance. Basically the focus is on the anniversaries of Latvia’s independence and on holidays which are related to historical events. The Latvian language press makes use of historical symbols and myths to create links between historical events and the present day so as to construct the officially recognised and legitimising identity. The discourse about state holidays in the Latvian press and the audience for such content are ethnically limited. Latvians tell stories about the state, Latvians offer evidence about history, and the target audience for all of this is also made up of Latvians. As an agent for collective identities, the Latvian press performs an active role in constructing ethnic nationalism.

The Russian language press, by contrast, seeks out different ways of presenting state holidays. It writes about holidays and participants therein with emotion and joy only if the celebration has to do with Soviet-era traditions such as May 1 and “Victory Day” on May 9 – an extensive celebration in the USSR to commemorate victory over Nazi Germany in 1945. When it comes to state holidays of present-day Latvia, however, the depiction is often rather alienated or contrary in mood. Most often there is just a politically neutral listing of holiday events, other times the focus is on accidents, carelessness or shortcomings in the way in which the events are organised.

³⁴ Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism (New Perspectives on the Past)*. Cornell University Press.

³⁵ Castells, M. *The Power...*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Sometimes the press presents holiday events in an alienated way – as if they were taking place in some other country and had nothing to do with Russian speakers in Latvia. The Russian press, in other words, is constructing an identity which is different from the legitimising identity which is constructed by the Latvian press. It is group identity which is more in line with resistance identity in that it includes people “who do not celebrate because they see much in the way of injustice or disorder”, who “once (in Soviet times) did celebrate, and who are invited by the Russian language press to take part in holidays which the Latvian state does not celebrate.” It is evident here that the Russian language press is in no hurry to make use of state holidays as a resource for constructing a legitimising identity in the Russian speaking part of society.

George Schopflin, who is a researcher of Eastern European issues, emphasises the deep link between the celebration of holidays on the one hand and a group’s identity on the other: “When agreement is deep and unbridgeable, when two groups both believe that their way of life is valid, moral and driven by the imperative of reproduction, then conflict seems inevitable. It is very difficult for one community to look with nothing worse than indifference at the commemoration pursued by another.”³⁶

Collective memory and values

In a study about the ethnic identity of Latvians, Ilze Boldāne has found that the ideas which Latvians have about their history at the level of everyday interpretation is constructed as a dichotomy.³⁷ Negative meaning is attached to those phases in history which are described on the basis of occupying nations – the “German era,” the “Polish era,” the “Swedish era,” the “tsarist era,” and the “Russian era.” The period of Latvian independence, by contrast, is defined as “Latvia’s era” or “Ulmanis’ era,” after the Latvian dictator of the 1930s, Kārlis Ulmanis (p. 60). The concepts which are used to describe “Latvia’s era” or “Ulmanis’ era” are mostly based on economic development and the strengthening of ethnic identity, the emphasis being on national independence and the collective understanding of freedom. Freedom in this case is described as an individual, not a democratic value. The collective memory of ordinary people does not include words such as “democracy” or “authoritarianism.” In everyday interpretations of history, the entire interwar period of Latvian history is seen as a unified whole, with a particular emphasis on the period when Ulmanis was the country’s leader. He is depicted only in positive terms, as a man who enhanced the country’s wealth. Ulmanis had links to the countryside, and this creates a chain of associations about Latvia as a country in which agriculture was a powerful economic sector. This everyday interpretation of history does not involve a more detailed interpretation about interwar Latvia so as to differentiate between the period of democratic development (1918-1934) and the authoritarian regime (1934-1940).

³⁶ Schopflin, G. (2000). *Nations, Identity, Power*. London: Hurs & Co., p. 77.

³⁷ Boldāne, I. (2006). “Latviešu etniskā identitāte un tās loma sabiedrības integrācijas procesā Latvijā” (The Ethnic Identity of Latvians and its Role in the Process of Public Integration in Latvia). In Dribins, L. and A. Šņitņikovs (eds.). *Pretestība sabiedrības integrācijai: cēloņi un sekas* (Opposition to Public Integration: Causes and Consequences). Rīga: University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, p. 85.

When it comes to legal experts, the continuity of the Latvian state has been discussed to the point where there is a clear position vis-à-vis this issue: The Latvian state which was restored in 1991 represented a continuation of the statehood that was begun in 1918 and was interrupted in 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied the country.³⁸ If we look at the development of political processes between the two wars, however, we must note that there are at least two phases here, as noted above – the period of democratic parliamentarianism between 1918 and 1934, and the authoritarian period after Ulmanis staged a coup in May 1934. These are phases of history in which different values predominate. Between 1918 and 1922, the new Latvian state set up the various institutions of statehood – citizenship, the parliament, the military, a constitution. The economic, social and cultural life of the country was also established: “During the period of the democratic state, there was serious development of a civil society in the Western, liberal and democratic sense of the word – government-protected individual and minority rights, a capitalist society based on private property, a diversity of active associations, as well as free and critical political openness.”³⁹

The coup of May 15, 1934, interrupted the period of democracy, and the resulting authoritarian regime destroyed democratic institutions, including Parliament and the country’s political parties. The constitution was suspended. The authoritarian state very quickly dismantled almost everything that had been achieved during the democratic period in terms of establishing the prerequisites for a proper civil society – individual rights and freedoms were strictly limited, the operations of associations were subordinated to authoritarian control, free and critical openness was replaced with censorship and the dominant ideology of state. Ulmanis’ authoritarian regime emphasised national values, supported the concept of a “Latvian Latvia,” and proclaimed the unity of the nation.

Historians have strictly differentiated between the democratic and authoritarian periods, but despite this fact, there have been statements, signs, symbols and challenges in the public space which seek to define the first period of Latvia’s independence as a unified whole. The values and ideals of the authoritarian period are described as ones which apply to the entire interwar period. The slogan of a “Latvian Latvia,” which was popular after the 1934 coup, is often proclaimed by representatives of various organisations, not just ones which are radically nationalist. Those who seek to popularise history often refer to interwar Latvia as the “Ulmanis era.” Politicians, too, are often careless about the differentiation between the democratic and the authoritarian period of history. For instance, the country’s minister with special portfolio for public integration, Oskars Kastēns, quotes Ulmanis on his secretariat’s homepage: “Kārlis Ulmanis has said that we do not belong only to ourselves, we also belong to the state and to the nation.” Thus the integration minister accepts the image of Ulmanis that exists in collective memory, ignoring the discourse of historians and political scientists about Ulmanis’ policies vis-à-vis ethnic minorities after the coup. Another example of how politicians can manipulate with collective memory refers to the first post-occupation president of Latvia, Guntis Ulmanis.

³⁸ Ziemele, Ineta (2008) Latvijas-Krievijas valsts robežas jautājums un Latvijas nepārtrauktības doktrīna. Jurista Vārds. 22.07, nr. 27 (532) p. 1-15

³⁹ Ijabs, Ivars. (2007) Promocijas darbs. Pilsoniskās sabiedrības diskurss modernajā politikas teorijā un tā elementi Latvijas politisko ideju vēsturē. P. 124

Kārlis Ulmanis was the brother of Guntis Ulmanis' grandfather. The younger Ulmanis had no political experience or achievements, but his symbolic surname was sufficient for him to be elected by Parliament as the restored republic's first president. Collective memory operates as a kind of a filter which serves to emphasise some facts and forget about others. An example of this in Latvia is the fact that while the country had four presidents during the interwar period, only one has a state-financed museum and memorial home. That is Ulmanis. The other three presidents were Jānis Čakste (1922-1927), Gustavs Zemgals (1927-1930), and Alberts Kviesis (1930-1936), but none has received that type of attention from the state. In this case, the state is one of the agents in promoting historical memory in Latvia that is centred upon values such as an economically strong, independent and mono-ethnic country in which democratic values are not accented. It might be added here that Kārlis Ulmanis became president because his own Cabinet of Ministers appointed him to the office in 1936. Ulmanis, who was prime minister, announced that he would serve as president until reforms of the constitution, but he remained in the post until the Soviet occupation.⁴⁰ The last president to be elected by the democratic system of government, thus, was Alberts Kviesis.

There are no discussions in the public space which seek to differentiate between the democratic and the authoritarian period of Latvian politics, to emphasise what was achieved during the democratic period, or to evaluate the differences in values during the two periods. Collective memory constructs a correlation of Latvia's images in terms of economic growth, national values and unity among the people as achieved by the hand of the "strong leader." The period of democracy is ignored in this thinking, as is the fact that the Ulmanis regime destroyed the values of democracy.

The distinguished Latvian historian Edgars Andersons, in his two-volume examination of Latvian foreign policy, concluded that democracy and nationalism were two important dimensions of the Baltic States: "The Baltic States were created under the signs of nationalism and democracy. The Baltic peoples, however, soon learned that nationalism and democracy can not only be constructive forces, but also sources of destruction."⁴¹ The fact is that Latvia's political system after World War I had a great many different political parties, and this helped to denigrate the authority of democracy. The slogan of nationalism was used to pave the path toward authoritarianism. The balance between democracy and nationalism is still a very important issue in Latvian politics.

State holidays and collective memory

During state holidays, myths concerning the origins of the country and its most important phases of history are brought into the public arena, the aim being to ensure that local residents are proud of their country, that they feel a sense of belonging, and that all of this serves to enhance the legitimacy of the state.⁴² Focus group discussions organised to discuss state holidays with Latvians and Russian speakers showed that these are two groups in which the interpretation of history is

⁴⁰ Šilde, A. *Latvijas vēsture. 1914.-1940.* (History of Latvia 1914-1940). (1976) Daugava p. 600.

⁴¹ Andersons, E. *Latvijas vēsture 1920.-1940.* (History of Latvia, 1920-1940). (1982).

Daugava

⁴² Connerton, P. (1989). *How Societies Remember.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also Sharp, L.A. (2001). "Youth, Land and Liberty in Coastal Madagascar: A Children's Independence", *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 48(1-2), pp. 205-236.

very different, indeed. Russians focus on the idea that there are several different interpretations as to how Latvia's statehood was established. They emphasise the role of Lenin in the establishment of Latvia as an independent state, for instance.⁴³ Others argue that the events of 1918 were chaotic and accidental, pointing to various historical figures who may have had an effect on history and its various possible scenarios, including the emergence of Latvia as an independent state.⁴⁴

Other Russian speakers seek to simplify history by emphasising just one of the two decisive events in Latvia's history – the proclamation of independence of 1918, or the proclamation of restored independence on May 4, 1990. Some focus group participants differentiate between these two dates, arguing that “the state was established” on May 4, 1990, while “independence was proclaimed” on November 18, 1918. Others feel that the 1918 date is more important, because that was the date when “the state was proclaimed.” To them, any celebrations on May 4 are entirely unnecessary.

Russian speakers do not think much about whether the collective memory of their community includes archetypal ideas about Latvian history. This is showed in the fact that when it comes to education, Russian speaking focus group participants say that they are satisfied with a situation in which schools do not educate Russian

⁴³ The role of Lenin in the history of Latvia's statehood was varied. Lenin chaired the Russian Council of People's Commissars which, late in 1918, established the government of Pēteris Stučka in Latvia. It retained office until May 1919. In 1920, however, Latvia and Soviet Russia signed a peace treaty which, in political terms, remains of great importance to this very day, because it states: “Russia unequivocally recognises the independence, self-dependence and sovereignty of the Latvian state and willingly and for all time eternal waives any sovereign rights that Russia has had vis-à-vis the nation and land of Latvia.” This statement remains one of the cornerstones of Latvia's statehood in legal terms, and it is a key argument in favour of the idea that the post-Soviet Latvian state is a continuation of the state which existed between the two world wars.

⁴⁴ The Latvian People's Council, which was made up of eight political parties, proclaimed the Latvian state on November 18, 1918. The People's Council operated as a legislature. It defined the foundations of the Latvian constitution, and it established a temporary government headed by Kārlis Ulmanis (Šilde, Ā., *op. cit.*, pp. 257-287). On December 17, 1918, with the support of the Russian Council of People's Commissars, Pēteris Stučka, proclaimed an alternative, Soviet Latvian government, announcing that from that day forward, all power of state would be turned over to the Soviet government (Šilde, p. 289). The Soviet army entered Rīga on January 2, 1919. The provisional government and members of the Latvian People's Council withdrew to Liepāja, where they remained until May 22, 1919. On that date, Rīga was liberated by Latvian defence forces in co-operation with Estonian and German military units. On May 10, 1919, another would-be government was established, this one run by Andrievs Niedra and favoured in political terms by the Germans. The Niedra government usurped power and was backed up by German military forces headed by Graf Rüdiger von der Goltz. Just two months later, Niedra's government collapsed on June 27 after a series of battles near the Latvian town of Cēsis (Šilde, 308-312). On June 28, the provisional government of Kārlis Ulmanis returned to its work (Šilde, 317). All of this shows that there were three different “governments” in Latvia during the first half of 1919 – the Cabinet of Ministers of Kārlis Ulmanis, the Cabinet of Ministers of Andrievs Niedra, and the Soviet government of Pēteris Stučka. The military forces which supported Niedra chased the Soviet army out of Rīga on May 22, but a month later they lost at Cēsis, where they were routed by Estonian and Latvian forces. The Niedra government was forced into collapse. These battles allowed the institutions of state of the Republic of Latvia to become stronger. The provisional government and the People's Council could restart their activities in Rīga in preparation for the convening of a Constitutional Council.

speaking children about historical events related to Latvia's statehood. Participation in state holiday celebrations along with children is interpreted by Russian speakers as a form of entertainment, with no importance attached to the historical purpose of the holiday.

For Latvians, by contrast, the important date is November 18, 1918, when the state was proclaimed. Latvians treat this fact with civic piety, but without any in-depth understanding of the historical events which related to the complex process of the state's emergence. According to Schopflin, "myth creates an intellectual and cognitive monopoly in that it seeks to establish the sole way of making the world and defining world views. For the community to exist as a community, this monopoly is vital, and the individual members of that community must broadly accept that myth."⁴⁵

Asked about education for their children, Latvian focus group participants hope that schools will handle the task, arguing that history is complicated and that it is difficult to explain the historical meaning of different events to children. A good example is the veteran's commemoration on November 11 which is known in Latvia as Lāčplēša Day.⁴⁶ This is explained to a certain extent by the fact that the parents were born during the Soviet era, when history at schools was taught in accordance with the interpretations of the prevailing regime.

Inclusion and participation in the maintenance of collective memory, including the reproduction of myths on the event of holidays of state, is a way for the Latvian community to strengthen its legitimising identity. By protesting against this monopoly in the myths, Russian speakers construct their own identity, and it can more be seen as an identity of resistance.

Polarised memory and polarised collective identity

A survey which was conducted in Latvia in 1994 showed that Latvians and Russians have radically different views about the events of 1940 and the subsequent Soviet era in Latvia. Most Latvians argue that Latvia was occupied in 1940 and support the view that Latvia would have been better off if it had developed as an independent country similar to Finland. Most Russians, by contrast, support the view that it was "just due to the help of the republics of the USSR [that] Latvia had reached such a high level of development of the economy in Soviet times" and that "Soviet international policy promoted development of the nations and friendly relations among the republics." The American sociologist Barry Schwartz has identified as one of the phenomena of collective memory the idea of *consensus and conflict*, which describes "which beliefs about the past are shared; which beliefs [are] polarising."⁴⁷ Schwartz also notes that when two different groups construct different memories, this creates polarised memory, and it, in turn, creates a polarised collective identity. That

⁴⁵ Schopflin, G. *op. cit.*, p. 80. Schopflin adds that members of a community may be aware of the fact that the myth which they accept is not strictly accurate, but because myths are not history, that does not matter.

⁴⁶ November 11 commemorates an attack against Latvia in the autumn of 1919 which was launched by the military forces of Pavel Bermont-Avalov and Rüdiger von der Goltz. These forces were largely made up of prisoners of war from the Russian Empire who had been captured in Germany, and their aim was to destroy the Latvian state so as to ensure that it would not hinder the goals of Germany and Soviet Russia in the future.

⁴⁷ Schwartz, B. "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory", *Social Forces*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Dec. 1982), pp. 374-402.

is the situation in Latvia, particularly given that studies conducted since the turn of the millennium also show that the historical memory of Russians and Latvians remains very different, indeed.

The Latvian researchers Boldāne and Šņitņikovs have studied “cultural trauma” as a phenomenon in collective memory.⁴⁸ The authors have looked at the different interpretations which Latvians and Russians have vis-à-vis various historical events, arguing that cultural trauma creates different attitudes toward contemporary politics and government institutions, thus serving as a hindrance against the integration of society.

Conclusions

Different social actors are very influential in the construction of the collective memories of Latvians and Russian speakers. Of particular importance here are the Russian and Latvian language mass media. The result of this is that the memories that are constructed among Latvians and Russians shape a polarised memory, one which serves as a foundation for polarised identities, too. The identity of Latvians flows together with the legitimising identity, while that of Russians is more typically the resistant identity. Research conducted in the early 1990s and in more recent years show that the construction of differing collective memories continues to this very day. This is also seen in the way in which the celebration of national holidays is presented, as well as in differences in the historical message that is offered in the Russian and the Latvian mass media.

The construction of historical memory has to do with an emphasis on specific values and with the concealment of others. The historical memory of Latvians, for instance, typically emphasises the personality of Kārlis Ulmanis and the nationalism which he established. This means less attention to Latvia’s achievements in terms of implementing democratic values during the period of democracy in the country. This imbalance in values can be seen in public life in Latvia today, as well. There continues to be more reliance on “strong leaders” on the one hand, along with insufficient faith in the ability of democratic and civic forces to influence events on the other. The construction of historical memory offers potential that can facilitate the striking of a balance between democracy and nationalism in Latvia.

⁴⁸ Boldāne, I. and A. Šņitņikovs. “Is Cultural Trauma an Impediment to Society’s Integration?”, <http://www.politika.lv/index.php?id=15655>.