

**Ethnopolitical
tension in Latvia:
looking for the
conflict solution**



Baltic Institute of Social Sciences



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**ETHNOPOLITICAL TENSION IN LATVIA:
LOOKING FOR THE CONFLICT
SOLUTION**

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, various events in the area of ethnic policy have involved not just the concept of “public integration,” but also a series of guesses about the possibility that ethnic conflicts might emerge in Latvia.

The goal of the study “Ethno-political Tensions in Latvia: The Search for Solutions to Conflicts” is to make use of various research perspectives to gain a better understanding of the way in which people understand the ethnic situation in Latvia, the extent to which society is focused on public integration and ethnic peace, and the issue of whether people feel that a conflict will inevitably occur. Researchers were also interested in learning about the extent to which the thinking and actions of individuals might promote the deepening of a conflict. The research involves closely related macro and micro approaches which, on the one hand, allow for an overall view of moods and positions in society and, on the other hand, provide information about the way in which people from various groups in society understand things that are happening.

The study can, to a certain extent, be seen as a continuation of two studies that were conducted by the BISS in 2004: “Integration of Minority Youth in the Society of Latvia in the Context of the Education Reform” and “Ethnic Tolerance and Integration in the Latvian Society.” In both cases, there were many unanswered questions and seeming contradictions. One of these is centred on the overall thinking of people about the kind of society which Latvia should have in the future. The study about ethnic tolerance found that 84% of Latvians, 79% of Russians and 89% of other non-Latvians believe that *Latvia must be unified and that it must have a unified society in which people of various nationalities live together*. Only 6% of Latvians, 10% of Russians and 5% of other non-Latvians believe that *Latvia could also have a society of two communities, in which ethnic Latvians and Russian speakers live mostly apart and have little contact among themselves*. This indicates that most people in Latvia wish to see the emergence of a friendly and united society, not one in which people stay apart and engage in conflicts. At the same time, however, the study also showed a fairly distinct process of ethnic standing apart among ethnic Latvians (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004). The study of the integration of non-Latvian young people, by contrast, found that among Russian speakers, there is considerable dissatisfaction and even aggression both vis-à-vis the country’s ethnic policies and with regard to the Latvians who shape those policies (Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004).

The study “Ethnopolitical Tension in Latvia: Looking for the Conflict Solution” allows us to take a step-by-step look at the positions which various groups in society take and the way in which people from these groups might act. We find that it would be erroneous to say that the situation is stable and unchanging. It is a sensitive process in which specific factors facilitate balance and ethnic peace, while others provoke conflict. The study points to a series of factors which might mitigate or exacerbate the conflict. These are to be seen as risk factors in the development of conflict.

The study shows that the main line that has been drawn between Latvians and non-Latvians, the issue which foments the greatest debates, is the matter of attitudes toward issues of ethnic policy. This means that we can speak of a certain risk that ethno-political conflict might arise. Differences in views about the way in which specific issues are to be resolved may grow into an ethnic conflict, and dissatisfaction may cause one socio-linguistic group to attack another. The development of the

situation from now on will largely depend on the decisions and actions that are taken by the political elite.

Much attention in the study has been devoted to the role of politicians, making use of the views of various authors such as Brass (1985), who analysed ethnic relations and emphasised the role of politicians in specific in the manifestation and mobilisation of ethnicity. Brass feels that ethnic groups are artefacts of the political process. In his work, the author explains that competition among groups of the elite are the primary catalyst in the development of ethnic conflict, because the elite make use of ethnicity as a resource to mobilise large numbers of individuals. Indeed, ethnicity is one of the primary resources for political parties and the ethnic elite.

Changes in society create much confusion in all groups in society, and this creates collective ethnic fears (Rothschild, 1982). Politicians make cunning use of this to polarise society and to promote the spread of mistrust and suspicion. This becomes dangerous in a situation when the state can no longer ensure the protection of specific groups. In countries where democracy is new, government institutions tend to be weak, and there is a lack of skills in finding democratic means for resolving conflicts.

The emergence of an ethnic conflict can also occur when a group's status changes suddenly and when groups engage in competition among themselves (Horowitz, 1985). This has been evident in Latvia, because the process of change in the hierarchy of socio-linguistic groups has not yet been completed, and Latvians, despite being the indigenous and titular nation in Latvia, still feel themselves to be a threatened majority.

The mass media also serve to split up society. Participants in focus groups admit that in Latvia's case there is reason to talk not only about different information spaces for Latvian and non-Latvian residents which are based on the linguistic factor, but also about information spaces which differ in terms of content. Participants argued that the information that is provided by Latvian and Russian language press publications, the way in which they interpret events and express their views – these are very different. What's more, the press is often tendentiously negative about one or another socio-linguistic group.

“As I said, I don't usually think about having a sense of national belonging, but when I read articles like these, I get the sense that ‘my people are being attacked.’ Even though I am neutral, I do get that sense. I feel some kind of attack that is aimed in my direction.”
(Non-Latvian, young person)

In addition to those factors which must be seen as risk factors in the area of ethnic conflict, there are others which reduce the likelihood of a crisis.

First and foremost in this case is the fact that ethnic groups in Latvia are not concentrated in specific regions or areas of the economy. They are represented in lots of different activities, they pursue various economic functions, and they are scattered all around Latvia. This creates a structure of cross-patterned reticulation. According to Rothschild (1982), this is the best prerequisite for gradual and peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts.

Another factor which ensures balance in society is the fact that Latvians and Russian speakers are, in most cases, Christians, and the proportion of believers in each ethnic group is approximately the same. There are also everyday traditions such as holidays which Latvians and non-Latvians have in common. Everyone celebrates the New Year, Christmas, Easter and the Summer Solstice. Latvians, however, do not

celebrate such events as March 8, May 1 and Victory Day. Ethnic relations are also stabilised by similarities in lifestyles and income levels, and by the desire to maintain friendly relations.

The study looks at various conflict resolution strategies and seeks to find the most appropriate one for Latvia's situation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to use the theory of conflictology to evaluate processes of ethnic integration in Latvia's society and to evaluate possible ways of reducing ethno-political tensions. Particular attention in this project has been devoted to the effects which ethnic policies (in this case, reforms in minority schools) have on the issue of public integration.

The target audiences for the research were made up of Latvians and non-Latvians who live in Latvia, both citizens and non-citizens. Attention has also been focused on media analysis, particularly looking at the larger newspapers which are published in Latvian and in Russian.

These were the tasks which were associated with the research:

- 1) To obtain comparative information about political views and attitudes, senses of belonging and loyalty among Latvians and non-Latvians;
- 2) To study the views which are shaped by the mass media – the largest newspapers that are published in Latvian and Russian – vis-à-vis issues of ethnic policy;
- 3) To evaluate those factors which promote public integration in Latvia and those which hinder these processes and instead facilitate the emergence of conflict between Latvians and non-Latvians.

Methodology

The study was based on qualitative (focus groups, media analysis) and quantitative (survey) research methods, because the application of more than one method increases the validity and scope of research results.

Quantitative surveys

A survey was conducted among Latvians and Russian speakers in Latvia to look at the most important differences in the socio-demographic indicators, behaviours, political views and attitudes of the two groups. The cohort was made up of 1,000 respondents – 500 Latvians and 500 non-Latvians. The selection of respondents ensured representation of all Latvians and non-Latvians who are residents of Latvia. The survey was conducted in March and April 2004. Information from other studies was also used – the BISS study “Ethnic Tolerance and Integration in the Latvian Society” (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004) and “Language” (BISS, 1996-2004) among them.

Focus groups

Focus group discussions were organised as a part of the study, and the aim was to gain a more in-depth understanding of the views of Latvians and non-Latvians when it comes to Latvia's society today and in the future. Participants were asked to consider these issues from the perspective of inter-ethnic relations, the way in which these emerge, and the way in which they might develop in the future. One of the key aims was to learn about the strategies in reducing ethnic tensions that are used or

supported by representatives of Latvia's two major socio-linguistic groups, thus gaining a better understanding of possible conflict solutions at a broader scale.

There were four focus group discussions in all (age, gender and citizenship quotas were observed when selecting respondents in non-Latvian groups):

- 1) Latvians aged 18-30
- 2) Latvians aged 31-74
- 3) Non-Latvians whose native language is Russian, aged 18-30
- 4) Non-Latvians whose native language is Russian, aged 31-74.

The Latvian groups met on September 28 and 30, 2004, while the non-Latvian groups met on October 5 and 7. Each discussion took an average of 120 minutes.

The focus group discussions involved the use of several so-called projective methods, the aim being to obtain views from respondents which are as in-depth and varied as possible when it comes to the issues which are being studied. Methodologically, each discussion contained three sections, or three blocs of questions:

1) A collage of Latvia's society today and in 10 years' time. Participants were divided up into two sub-groups. One group was asked to produce a collage of images to describe Latvia's society today (what kind of society it is, what are the main problems, what kinds of people shape it, etc.). The second group produced a collage of images to describe Latvia's society 10 years from now (what kind of society it will be, what will be the main problems, what kinds of people will be shaping it, etc.). Respondents were given the same sets of magazines to find images for the collages – three magazines in Latvian and three in Russian. The primary aim was to learn about the agenda of local residents and to understand the role which inter-ethnic relations and ethno-political issues plays therein.

2) A set of 10 questions about inter-ethnic relations in Latvia. The questions were very concrete and brief ("What are my relations with Latvians / non-Latvians today?" "What might happen in the best / worst-case scenario?" "What could I / others do to ensure that the best / worst-case scenario does / doesn't occur?") The main goal of this method was to learn about existing and desired individual strategies for the reduction of inter-ethnic tension.

3) Analysis of excerpts of articles. Respondents were asked to study excerpts from two newspaper articles – one in Latvian, the other in Russian, both from leading Latvian daily newspapers. In terms of content, authors reflected radical views about major ethno-political issues such as the Latvian language, citizenship and education reforms. The aim for the participants was to comment upon the articles and to analyse them. The goal for the researchers was to gain a better understanding of the importance of the mass media in the emergence of ethno-political attitudes.

Media analysis

Six newspapers which are published in Latvia – three in Latvian and three in Russian – were studied by the researchers to find differences in the realities that are constructed by these newspapers, as well as differences of opinion which exist in the various newspapers when it comes to reforms in minority schools. The Latvian language dailies were *Diena*, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* and *Latvijas Avīze*, while the Russian language newspapers were *Chas*, *Telegraf* and *Vesti Segodnya*. The analysis covered the period of time during which there were active protests against minority school reforms in all of Latvia. The number of units to be analysed was limited, because the focus was on the entire month of February 2004, as well as the period

between August 15 and September 15, 2004. Researchers studied all of the issues of the aforementioned newspapers during these periods of time. Critical discourse analysis was the method that was put to use.

Making use of the critical discourse analysis processes that were defined by Van Dijk, the researchers compared the issues or propositions that were brought up in the Russian and Latvian press, as well as the way in which these issues were presented. The discourse analysis approach that was designed by Fairclough (2003) was used to find and analyse processes and participants in media texts.

CONCLUSIONS

The structure of ethnic stratification in Latvia

When we analyse the structure of ethnic stratification in Latvia, we can conclude that Latvia has a model of cross-patterned reticulation, with each ethnic group being represented in many sectors of the national economy and carrying out differing economic functions. The system is not, however, a symmetrical one. This is made clear by the fact that there are areas in which most employees are ethnic Latvians (government, education, agriculture), while there are others in which most employees are non-Latvians (transport, industry, construction). There are not, however, any significant differences in the income levels of ethnic Latvians and non-Latvians. According to Rothschild (1982), the **model of cross-patterned reticulation** is the best prerequisite for peaceful and gradual solutions of ethnic tensions. In Latvia, where each ethnic group finds jobs in specific sectors, but there are no significant income differences on the basis of ethnicity, the situation can be seen as one which diminishes the likelihood of any escalation of ethnic conflicts.

Relations between ethnic groups and the state

Government influences opportunities for political participation, economic opportunities, as well as the status of various groups, and this means that the relationship between specific ethnic groups and the government is very important in terms of the dynamics of conflict. The breaking point in Latvia when it comes to relations between the state and ethnic groups occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Latvia recovered its independence, and a great deal of attention was devoted to the status of Latvians and the Latvian language. The ethnic policies which were implemented as a result of this process led to a situation in which the status of ethnic Latvians and of Russians and Russian speakers in the country changed rapidly. This was first and foremost because of Latvia's language policy. Latvian was declared to be the only state language. The situation was also dictated by the country's citizenship policy, in accordance with which most Latvians received citizenship automatically, while many Russians and Russian speakers could become citizens only through the process of naturalisation. The theory of language conflict (Nelde, 1986, 1998) says that if a dominant group (a majority) uses language as the basis for integration of the remaining part of society (the minorities), then that is fertile ground for a political and linguistic conflict which can develop into an ethnic conflict. In Latvia's case, of importance is the fact that once the country regained its independence, there was a shift in the hierarchy of the two main socio-linguistic groups. Analysis of qualitative data indicates that this process is continuing, and in the case of both groups, it has much to do with the models which are developed in terms of shaping ethnic relations and reducing ethno-political tensions. According to Horowitz (1985), the rapid change in a group's **status** can lead to ethnic conflict. In Latvia's case, this must be seen as one of the main causes of ethnic tensions.

Latvia's ethnic policies are not aimed exclusively at protecting ethnic Latvians and the Latvian language. They also speak to the observance of the rights of national minorities. Still, the results of the research show that non-Latvians in Latvia are, generally speaking, more prepared than Latvians are to have a negative view of government. The greatest dissatisfaction among Russians and Russian speakers focuses specifically on the country's ethnic policies. For instance, a significant

majority of Latvians support education reforms in minority schools (77% do so), while a majority of Russians and non-Latvians oppose it (26% of Russians and 35% of people of other nationalities support the reforms). The distribution of views about the second state language illustrates a conflict of attitudes, too. Most Latvians do not support the idea that Russian should be made Latvia's second official language (support 19% of Latvians) but most non-Latvians support this idea (support for this is indicated by 87% of Russians and 75% of people of other nationalities). The results of focus group discussions tell us that Latvian language skills and problems with communicating in Latvian are one of the primary factors in promoting conflict among socio-linguistic groups. It must be added that this conclusion must be applied primarily to Latvians. Non-Latvians do not see problems in this regard. That is in part because of the self-sufficiency of the Russian language in Latvia and also because many people in Latvia are accustomed to speaking Russian in inter-ethnic communications. Language usage research shows that in recent years, the extent to which the Latvian language is spoken in inter-ethnic relations in the public and the private sphere (excluding only work) has diminished significantly ("Language", BISS, 1996-2004).

From this perspective it can be argued that one factor which leads to conflicts is the fact that 83% of those who are employees of the national government are ethnic Latvians. Power, therefore, is linked to Latvians as an ethnic group, which leads some people to feel alienation and opposition when it comes to government policy. This idea is supported by previous BISS research (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004; Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004), and by the qualitative data that were assembled in this study. The principles of discourse analysis indicate that when it comes to the dominant discourse of non-Latvians who are discussing relations with Latvians, people tend to say that the relationships are good, friendly and based on mutual understanding. At the same time, however, there are plenty of negative and critical attitudes in this group when it comes to the country's ethnic policies, because these policies are usually drafted by non-Latvians as an ethnic and linguistic group. Thus, at the level of discourse, a dislike of the governing political elite and the decisions which it takes is transformed into a dislike of the Latvian-speaking community as a whole. This facilitates the emergence of conflicts in society.

Because the relations which exist between ethnic groups and governments are considered to be very important in the dynamics of conflict (Esman, 1990, 1994; Horowitz, 1985), government institutions should seek **strategies that are more aimed at co-operation** so as to reduce ethnic tensions. These should be dominated by a constructive approach. Institutions should be created that are aimed at ensuring equality and at dealing with conflicts. The establishment of the secretariat of the minister with special portfolio for public integration was a good first step in the implementation of such a strategy, but the principles should also be implemented in the activities of other government institutions. It would also be desirable for government institutions to hire more non-Latvians so that they become more closely involved in the taking of decisions and, by extension, feel a greater sense of responsibility for the implementation of those decisions.

Competition among elite groups as a catalyst for ethnic conflicts

An earlier study called "Ethnic Policy in Latvia" (Apine, et al., 2001:58) stated that "political parties did not promote public integration in 2000 through the popularising of their views and through public activities in the field of ethnic policy."

Our research shows that there has been nothing much in the way of change in this area over the last several years. Political parties continue to engage in political confrontation when it comes to issues of ethnic policy, and they hinder public integration instead of promoting it, thus enhancing ethnic tensions in society. In Latvia, representatives of the political elite continue to exploit ethnicity to mobilise their supporters in elections. Thus they become a chief catalyst in promoting ethnic tensions.

The results of the study show that Latvian parties are still being divided up on the basis of the ethnic principle. Most Latvians support parties such as New Era, the People's Party, the Alliance of the Green Party and the Farmers Union, as well as For the Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK. Russians and other non-Latvians tend to plump for the party For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PCTVL), as well as for the People's Harmony Party. Analysis of qualitative data indicate that support for political forces in accordance with the ethnicity of politicians is a strategy in shaping ethnic relations. This is particularly true when it comes to middle aged and older Latvians. The goal of the strategy is to isolate Russian speakers from national governance, thus facilitating the taking of ethnic policy decisions which favour Latvians. This, in turn, must be seen as a factor which hinders the political participation of the Russian speaking community, and that subsequently facilitates the development of ethnic segregation and tensions. Survey results show that the support of Russians for PCTVL has increased somewhat as a result of the 2004 protests.¹ This indicates that PCTVL is perceived among Russian speakers as one which defends their interests. Other parties do not wish to address this particular segment of voters, because they are focused more on the defence of the rights of ethnic Latvians.

According to the theories and analyses of Brass (1985), many ethnic conflicts can be blamed on the political elite in terms of manifesting and mobilising ethnicity. Competition among groups of the elite is one of the risk factors in the area of ethnic conflict. In Latvia's case, too, representatives of the political elite are distinctly responsible for increasing ethnic tensions, and their behaviour will have much to do with whether the tensions are to be resolved or exacerbated in the future. In the context of Brass' theory, it has to be said that the study of visions about the present and the future society as presented during group discussions allows us to conclude that issues of ethnic policy and attitude conflicts which emanate from these issues are a forced agenda between Latvians and non-Latvians. In other words, conflicts of ethnic policy at this point are largely political and social constructs, and the main shapers of these constructs, according to analysis of group discussion data, are the political elite and the mass media. The agenda of respondents is based on issues such as the socio-economic stratification of society, Latvia's accession to the European Union and its consequences, as well as environmental problems.

Collective ethnic fears and their role in the dynamics of conflict

According to students of ethnic relations, ethnic conflicts very often become exacerbated as the result of rapid or radical socio-political changes in society, because such changes cause much confusion among all groups in society, leading to the emergence of collective ethnic fears (Rothschild, 1982). Previous BISS studies (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004) indicate that collective ethnic fears or the sense of being

¹ "Jaunais Baltijas Barometrs" (New Baltic Barometer), Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, November, December 2004, unpublished data.

threatened in Latvia can be found both among Latvians and non-Latvians, although the sense of being threatened is more distinct among Latvians, who tend to respond by avoiding contacts with other ethnic groups. The results of focus group discussions tell us that avoiding a different ethnic or linguistic group is one of the most typical strategies for reducing ethnic tensions, and this is particularly characteristic among Latvians. It is one of the strategies that is applied so as to prevent the threat of direct conflicts.

Collective fears or senses of peril among Latvians and non-Latvians are exactly the concepts which are exploited by politicians in their work, and this facilitates polarisation of society. This trend can become dangerous at some point in the future, because it results in the dissemination of mistrust and suspicions among people. When politicians seek to gain political benefits by exploiting the fears or concerns of an ethnic groups, they must remember that this may prove to be a catalyst in the emergence of ethnic conflicts.

Ethno-political tensions in Latvia: An evaluation of the situation

This study is based on the principle that an **ethnic conflict** is a situation in which two or more ethnic groups do not agree on a political, economic, social, cultural or territorial issues that is of importance in society (Brown, 1993). On the basis of this definition, it can be said that there are signs of an ethnic conflict in Latvia, and the cornerstone for this conflict is a lack of agreement on issues of ethnic policy, as well as the dissatisfaction among non-Latvians with the ethnic policies that are being implemented by the state. In terms of analysing the dynamics of conflict in line with the typology of Aklajev (1999), Latvia is on the “stage of competition” at this time. This is typified by the increasing competitiveness in relations. The behaviour of the political elite in terms of how extensively it will be exploiting ethnic issues will have everything to do with the question of whether the conflict might escalate toward “the stage of direct conflict” – the point where relations that are aimed at co-operation are destroyed and conflicting attitudes and behaviours are institutionalised on both sides.

It has to be added that under specific circumstances, the conflict in Latvia could become more intense, and an interactional ethno-political crisis could emerge. That would happen, for instance, if one or the other ethnic group felt significantly more threatened. There are, however, factors which indicate that this is unlikely in Latvia. Ethnic tensions are manifested more in the form of linguistic conflicts, and this does not exacerbate conflicts or violence, because cultural differences are not particularly distinct, and ethnic stratification does not involve any distinct vertical hierarchy. Still, there are also factors which suggest that the scenario might be possible after all, and polarisation of the political elite is a key factor here. Polarisation of the views of Latvians and non-Latvians when it comes to the ethnic policies of the state must be seen as a factor which promotes the development of a crisis in ethnic relations. This focuses on the way in which the two linguistic groups perceive and shape aspects of power.

Let us now turn to a summary of things which the two Latvian linguistic groups hold in common when it comes to characterisations and attitudes and to the vision of the future, as well as things which differ between the two groups.

Differences and commonalities in the descriptions and attitudes of the two linguistic groups in Latvia

When we analyse the socio-linguistic specifics of Latvians and non-Latvians, we first see that the Russian language is dominant among non-Latvians. A total of 58% of people who do not call themselves Russian say that Russian is their native language, and 82% mostly speak Russian at home. This means that the dominance of the Russian language among non-Russian non-Latvians is a basis for the socio-linguistic separation of Latvians and Russian speakers.

Language usage habits and Latvian language skills, in turn, are a key factor in promoting conflict among socio-linguistic groups. More than 10 years after the restoration of Latvia's independence, there is still a situation in Latvia in which communications between Latvians and non-Latvians usually take place in Russian. Among Russians and non-Latvians, Latvian language skills are significantly worse than the Russian language skills which prevail among Latvians. Only 47% of non-Latvians have a more or less free command of the Latvian language, while 73% of Latvians have a more or less free command of the Russian language.²

Differences in the socio-demographic parameters of Latvians and non-Latvians have to do with places of residence and the structure of employment. Russians and representatives of other non-Latvian ethnic groups are concentrated primarily in Latvia's largest cities – Rīga, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Jelgava, Jūrmala, Liepāja and Ventspils. Latvians, in turn, represent the majority of rural residents. This helps to explain differences in the structure of employment, as well. Latvians are more likely than non-Latvians to be employed in agriculture, while non-Latvians are more likely to work in the fields of transport, industry and construction. The fact that Latvians dominate the structures of national governance and education can be attributed to the influence of policies regarding the state language and citizenship. Analysing the income of Latvians and non-Latvians in Latvia, we find no statistic differences between the two. We can conclude that the model of cross-patterned reticulation exists in Latvia, which means that each ethnic group is represented in many different areas of activity. From the perspective of conflict theory (Rothschild, 1982), this model serves to reduce the likelihood of escalated ethnic conflicts.

When we look at the religion and related behaviour of Latvians and non-Latvians, we must find that there are differences in the belonging of Latvians, Russians and other non-Latvians. Most Latvians are Lutheran or Roman Catholic, while Russians tend to be members of the Russian Orthodox church. People of other nationalities are either Russian Orthodox or Roman Catholic. It must be added, of course, that these are all Christian denominations, and they do not conflict with one another in Latvia. The religious behaviour of people (the proportion of the faithful, the frequency with which people attend worship services, etc.) does not differ much at all among the various groups.

There are also more commonalities than differences in terms of other issues which have to do with the everyday lives of Latvians and non-Latvians. Majorities of Latvians (61%), Russians (74%) and people of other nationalities (67%) think that there are no great differences in the lifestyles of Latvians and others in Latvia. Both Latvians and non-Latvians celebrate the New Year, Christmas, Easter and also the Summer Solstice. Latvians, unlike non-Latvians, hardly ever celebrate Women's Day on March 8, May 1 or Victory Day in relation to the end of World War II, but this

² "Valoda" (Language), Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 1996-2004.

indicates that there are differences in the way in which history is interpreted, not that there are differences in lifestyles.

The greatest differences between Latvians and non-Latvians can be observed when it comes to issues which relate to the state's ethnic policies. Latvians support education reforms in minority schools, while most non-Latvians oppose those reforms. Non-Latvians also support the introduction of a second state language in Latvia, while most Latvians object to this idea.

Among non-Latvians, the dominant position is that national law, particularly with regard to ethnic policy (language, education, citizenship) was shaped so as to favour ethnic Latvians, which means that they have greater opportunities in life than non-Latvians do. Latvians hold a diametrically opposite view – criticism among Russian speakers vis-à-vis the country's ethnic policies are unjustified, because the law says that all of Latvia's residents have opportunities to learn the Latvian language, to obtain citizenship and to pursue an education.

Latvians and non-Latvians also have differing views when it comes to ethnic relationships. The results of qualitative data analysis show that non-Latvians have a more positive view than Latvians when it comes to inter-ethnic relations in society. Latvians often hold negative attitudes which are aimed specifically against members of the Russian speaking community, while negative attitudes among non-Latvians are most often focused on decisions in the area of ethnic policy. The two groups have differing views when it comes to the causes for the ethnic gap, but the country's ethnic policies are the main factor here. In this case, too, each group focuses on different aspects of the issue. Latvians say that problems include the use and status of the Latvian language, as well as the interpretation of historical truths. Non-Latvians speak of what they consider to be unfair citizenship and education policies.

Latvians and non-Latvians also hold conflicting views when it comes to Latvia's accession to the European Union and NATO. Most Latvians are in favour of this (support for membership is indicated by 65% and 71% respectively), while Russians and people of other nationalities are mostly opposed (32% of Russians and 37% of other non-Latvians support entry into the EU, and the same is true of 22% and 35% respectively when it comes to accession to NATO).

There are also significant differences in the consumption of the mass media and in support for political parties. The audience of the mass media in Latvia can, generally speaking, be divided up among those who read, watch and listen in Latvian and those who read, watch and listen in Russian. Political parties are also divided up on the basis of the same principle – those which are supported by Latvians and those which are supported by non-Latvians.

Focus group results tell us that there is reason to talk about different Latvian and Russian information spaces in terms of their content. Press publications in Latvian and Russian offer different information, different interpretations of events and different views. What is more, they are often tendentiously negative vis-à-vis one or the other socio-linguistic group. This research made use of a qualitative methodology, as well as an intertextual approach to discourse analysis (comparison of the discourse of different agents – the mass media and respondents as members of society), and there is reason to believe that we can speak of different dominating ethno-political discourses in the Latvian and the Russian speaking communities, ones which largely correspond to the discourse of the relevant mass media. This, in turn, suggests that the mass media serve as organisers and disseminators of ethno-political discourse in society.

If we look at the important differences which exist in ethno-political attitudes and in attitudes vis-à-vis Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO, however, there is also a positive factor – the fact that among non-Latvians in Latvia, there are few who wish autonomy, who want Latvia to become a part of Russia, or who wish to depart from Latvia. Future visions among Latvians and non-Latvians are similar. Fully 84% of Latvians, 79% of Russians and 89% of people of other nationalities are convinced that *Latvija must be unified, a society with one community in which people of various nationalities live together*. This indicates that the majority of people in Latvia seek a friendly and unified society, not any aspect of separatism.

This is also confirmed by analysis of the identity of Latvians and non-Latvians. Among Latvians, 82% expressed a sense of belonging in Latvia, while the same was true in 74% of cases when it came to Russians and people of other nationalities. This indicates that most of the non-Latvians who live in Latvia feel at home here. Comparatively speaking, very few Russians and people of other nationalities in Latvia said that they feel links with Russia (25% and 18% respectively).

Comparative analysis of the Latvian and the Russian press

Our comparison of the Russian language and Latvian language press allowed us to make note of distinctly different information spaces for the audience that reads in Russian and the audience that reads in Latvian. This is seen first and foremost in the agenda of the press. Education reforms are at the centre of attention for the Russian mass media, but the subject is treated far less often in the Latvian media, usually only if something important happens (the Education law is amended, there are protests against the reforms, etc.).

When we analyse the subjects that are treated and the way in which they are presented, we often find completely different images in Latvian and Russian newspapers. Education reform in the Latvian press is mostly presented from the viewpoint of government policy, emphasising how important it is to learn Latvian and how justified the education reforms are. The Latvian press also tends to denounce protests among Russian speakers.

The Russian press, by contrast, emphasises the protests against the education reforms. The protest movement is glorified and compared to the independence movement which prevailed toward the end of the Soviet era. The Russian press depicts these protests as a battle for human rights, as a way of opposing injustice. The protests are extensively reflected in the Russian press with active language, lots of slogans and colourful photographs. It has to be emphasised that the Russian newspapers in Latvia not only *inform* their audience, but also, as in the case of *Chas*, seek to *organise* the audience – something that is not typical of mass media functions in the present day. Slogans and calls to action are used to mobilise the Russian speaking community in the protests against education reforms.

The media establish a gap between the two ethno-linguistic groups, preserving the sense of being threatened among their readers. In the Latvian press, the division between “us” and “them” is mostly felt between the lines and as a result of the orientation of these press outlets toward Latvian readers. In the Russian newspapers, by contrast, there are fairly clear and distinct statements to say that there are two different groups in society and that the readers of the newspapers are all Russian speakers.

Strategies to reduce ethno-political tensions and to shape ethnic relations

Analysis of the results of the focus group discussions reveals several strategies for reducing tensions. These focus is on the way in which respondents shape and are ready to continue to shape their relations with non-Latvians or Latvians. In evaluating the possible scenarios for the development of ethnic relations, we must conclude that there are three dominant scenarios which reflect the full spectrum of possible models – an open ethnic conflict, unchanging relations (neutrality) and integration. Analysis of qualitative data tells us that Latvians want society to be united, but they are sceptical about the process of integration as such. This can, to a certain extent, be attributed to their own weak motivations in terms of becoming more integrated themselves.

Representatives of the two socio-linguistic groups point to different strategies for reducing ethno-political tensions. Making use of the typology which Bolger (2003) developed in terms of conflict resolution strategies and supplementing it with other strategies, the researchers determined those strategies which are typical of Latvians:

1) **Enforce.** Among Latvians, the view prevails that the country's ethnic policies and the relevant demands are adequate for the situation in Latvia, and the duty of the state is to ensure the stricter implementation of these policies, thus resolving ethno-political problems which may prevail.

2) **Postpone.** This is a strategy which respondents see as inevitable, not so much as a result of conscious action. Respondents say that this is because there must be a change in generations before ethno-political problems can be resolved.

3) **Stand aside.** This is the most typical strategy to reduce ethno-political tensions and to prevent ethnic conflicts. The strategy is pursued in several different ways – promoting the ability of Russian speakers to leave Latvia, purposefully avoiding any contact with non-Latvians, limiting the ability to non-Latvians to engage in political activity with active support for the political parties of one's own socio-linguistic (ethnic) group, shaping closed internal groups, and establishing a system of cultural codes that will be understandable only to members of those groups.

4) **Functional integration.** One dimension of integration is functional integration (Karklins, 2000), which speaks to people's ability to form contacts with other members of society. Of central importance here is language, language skills and the space in which the language is spoken. Latvians assume that one strategy for shaping ethnic relations is readiness to change the dominant model of communications which exists at this time – refusing to speak Russian when contacting with Russian speakers, instead speaking Latvian so as to enhance the integration of Russian speakers.

As far as non-Latvians are concerned, it has to be said that they find it hard to describe any strategies for reducing ethno-political tensions or shaping ethnic relations. This is because non-Latvians are more likely than Latvians to have a positive view of ethnic relations and a negative view of ethno-policy. Thus it is that the strategy which emerges from their views is a compromise, promoting the development of ethnic policies which correspond to their interests and abilities.

In-depth research shows that the following strategies can be identified on the part of non-Latvians:

1) Structural integration. This dimension of integration applies to an individual's inter-ethnic social network and political participation in society (Karklins, 2000). Previous BISS studies (Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004) show that

structural integration insofar as it is related to non-Latvians is primarily manifested through protests. The political participation of Russian speakers over the last year has involved participation in various socio-political movements and events where the goal is to protest against the state's ethnic policies, particularly education reforms in minority schools. If we look at the issue from the perspective of theories about social networks, then we find that structural integration is poorly developed. Even though inter-ethnic social networks are open and heterogeneous, the dominant everyday model of contacts points to weak interaction with the people from the other socio-linguistic group (inter-ethnic contacts occur seldom and do not last long).

2) Compromise. This is a strategy which seeks to change the state's ethnic policies with respect to non-Latvians (minorities). Non-Latvians expect the Latvians (the political elite) to adapt laws to their interests and abilities, explaining that at this time, the state's ethnic policies discriminate against ethnic and linguistic groups other than Latvians.

If we compare the strategies which representatives of Latvia's two leading socio-linguistic groups present when it comes to reducing ethnic tensions and forming ethnic relations, we must conclude that the two groups have different strategies, that they have different ethnic expectations vis-à-vis each other. Latvians more often speak about passive strategies in shaping ethnic relations and reducing tensions, while non-Latvians tend to be prepared for action – the establishment of heterogeneous inter-ethnic networks, for instance.

All in all it can be said that there are things in Latvia which indicate that an ethnic conflict already is in place. These include attitudes vis-à-vis issues of ethnic policy, the support of various political parties and the sense of being threatened. It has to be said, however, that there are also indications that the conflict is not about to turn into violence or any ethno-political crisis. Thus, for instance, the structure of ethnic groups is based on the model of cross-patterned reticulation. There are comparisons in terms of the lifestyles and income levels of the two groups, and the fact is that most people wish to maintain friendly relations. It has to be concluded that the way in which these relations will develop in the future will very much depend on what the political elite do next – will it seek to preserve “competitive” or “constructive” relations?

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

According to representatives of the social sciences,³ one of the fundamental issues in the development of democratic governance in many countries of the world is the need to preserve ethnic peace. Escalation of ethnic conflicts can threaten the level of democracy and of economic development in newly established countries, and so a key issue is the way in which ethnic conflicts can be resolved so as to prevent violence and to promote constructive co-operation among ethnic groups that is based on the principles of democracy.

This approach is predicated on the belief that democracy is a regime which offers people a way to settle conflicts in a peaceful way and that when the principles of democracy are observed, that ensures that ethnic tensions are resolved, not exacerbated. This has been explained through the fact that the normative background or “political culture” of democratic regimes includes tolerance and the search for compromise (Verba, 1965, Almond and Verba, 1963, 1980, Hosftede, 1989). Second, the activities of institutions under circumstances of democracy are aimed at seeking a balance and at organising public discussions. This, too, is more likely to lead to the resolution, not the exacerbation of tensions.

Under conditions of democracy, however, there are also various strategies for resolving conflicts and organising the distribution of power. Deutsch (1987) speaks to two theoretical approaches – the **competitive** and the **co-operative** strategy. When strategies are focused on co-operation, they usually involve creative and constructive approaches in transforming and then resolving conflicts (institutions are created for the express purpose of ensuring equality and resolving conflicts). The strategy of competition, for its part, stops at the preservation of the status quo and at attempts to hinder the further development of the conflict.

Ethnic conflicts and their reasons

The term “ethnic conflict” here is based on the definition of Brown (1993). An **ethnic conflict** is a situation in which two or more ethnic groups disagree on an important political, economic, social, cultural or territorial issue. This is a definition which can be used in Latvia because it does not present ethnicity as such as the cornerstone for conflict. As has been pointed out in several studies,⁴ ethnic conflicts in Latvia are centred on language policy and interpretations of history.

In explaining conflicts in the social sciences, Aklaev (1999) differentiates between two basic approaches – the perspective of origin and the perspective of instrumentalists. Representatives of the former of these approaches speak about the properties and characteristics that are inherited by specific groups – ethnicity, language, tradition and changes therein (Geertz, 1963). Those who defend the **perspective of instrumentalists**, for their part, view ethnicity as a socio-political resource for individuals, one that is used by individuals to achieve their goals. Instrumentalists believe that ethnicity is a social construct, one that is made up of various elements of culture and is both contextual and malleable. When links in

³ Aklaev, A.R. (1999). *Democratization and Ethnic Peace. Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in Post-Soviet Settings*. England: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.

⁴ Zepa, B., Šūpule, I., Krastiņa, L., Peņķe, I. and J. Krišāne (2004). *Ethnic tolerance and integration of the Latvian society*. Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. See also Zepa, B., Kļave, E., Jeruma, L. and J. Krišāne (2004). *Integration of minority youth in the society of Latvia in the context of the education reform*. Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences.

social groups are weak, ethnicity serves as something which structures society (Anderson, 1983; Brass, 1985).

Brass (1985), in analysing ethnic relations, emphasises the role of politicians in the manifestation and mobilisation of ethnicity, arguing that ethnic groups are artefacts of the political process. Brass posits that **competition among elite groups is the prime catalyst for the development of ethnic conflicts, because elites make use of ethnicity as a way of mobilizing large numbers of individuals**. Ethnicity, in other words, is one of the primary resources for political parties and the ethnic elites.

Over the last several years, theories on ethnic conflicts have covered dimensions of both of the aforementioned approaches – origin-based and instrumentalist. That is because ethnicity has historically been rooted in the collective consciousness, but also because specific groups of elites purposefully exploit ethnicity so as to mobilize support in elections.

Horowitz (1985) represents the psycho-cultural approach in this area, arguing that a major role in ethnic conflicts is performed by group psychology and by competition among various groups. When **the status of a group changes** quickly, that can become a reason for ethnic conflict.

The structure and manifestation of ethno-political conflict

In “Democratization and Ethnic Peace. Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in Post-Soviet Settings”, Aklaev (1999) covers three aspects of ethnic conflicts:

- 1) The configuration of an ethnic group vis-à-vis the rest of society (i.e., the structure of ethnic stratification);
- 2) The relationship between the ethnic group and the state;
- 3) The dynamics of the ethnic conflict.

Further along in this introduction, let us take a brief look at all three of these parameters, also focusing on the thinking of several other authors when it comes to the analysis of conflicts.

The structure of ethnic stratification

According to Rothschild (1982), there are several types of ethnic stratification: vertical hierarchy, parallel segmentation, or cross-patterned reticulation. In the case of **vertical hierarchy**, all dimensions of social life (politics, the economy, culture) are subject to ethnic superiority or subordination (the apartheid system of South Africa was a textbook example of this). In the case of **parallel segmentation**, each ethnic group is stratified on the basis of socio-economic parameters, and it is represented by the political elite which represents its interests. When it comes to **cross-patterned reticulation**, each ethnic group is represented in many different areas of activity and pursues varied economic functions. Each social class or sector of society organically brings representatives of various ethnic groups into itself, but the system is not symmetrical. According to Rothschild, this last model is the best one if there is to be a gradual and peaceful resolution to ethnic conflicts.

Horowitz (1985), meanwhile, analyses the link between ethnicity and social class in society, positing that in those cases in which one social class coincides with an ethnic group, the potential for conflict is considerably more dangerous.

Representation of ethnic groups in the corridors of power

In “Ethnic Politics”, Esman (1994) argues that the power of the state dictates opportunities for political participation, as well as the status and economic opportunities of various groups. This means that in the context of ethnic relationships, the relations between an ethnic group and the power of the state are a very important aspect of the dynamics of conflict. Horowitz (1985) also points out that major ethnic differences in the distribution of power and income are one of the primary causative factors for ethno-political conflicts. Power relationships are used to determine citizenship issues, election systems, the state language, and the advantages that are made available to certain ethnic or religious groups.

The dynamics of ethnic conflicts

Most authors who study conflict agree that conflicts involve certain dynamics – increased passions and reductions in tensions. Aklaev (1999) has identified the following phases in a conflict:

- 1) The “pre-competition stage”, when all of the involved parties have neutral relationships, are focused on co-operation, or have no relations at all;
- 2) The “competition stage”, where there is sharper competition in relations, which can be caused by the inner dynamics of the conflict itself or by surrounding events;
- 3) The “conflict proper stage”, during which conflicting parties attack one another. As the number of conflicting interactions and the importance of these interactions increases, the conflict escalates – action leads to counter-action, and relations that are aimed at co-operation are destroyed. Conflicting attitudes and behaviours become institutionalised on both sides.

One key element in exacerbating ethnic conflicts is any radical or rapid socio-political change in a given society. This is determined by changes in perception, in institutions and in security strategies. Changes in society cause great confusion in all groups, leading to **collective ethnic fears** (Rothschild, 1996). Leaders of ethnic groups and politicians make use of this fear to polarise society. Mistrust and suspicion are the result, and this becomes dangerous if the state proves unable to provide necessary protections for certain groups. The point here is that **government institutions tend to be weak** during transitional procedures, because traditional procedures and norms are no longer appropriate, but no new ones have yet been developed. Accordingly, the structures that have been used to resolve conflicts in the past are no longer operational. Governing elites and military groups often take advantage of such situations in order to gain greater support for themselves. Nationalist myths and claims of external threats are created. Security becomes the chief concern for local residents (**the “security dilemma”**), and this leads to the emergence and mobilisation of specific groups which prepare to defend themselves. Posen (1993), a specialist in ethnic relations, feels that this scenario was played out in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union during the late 1980s.

A typological approach to ethno-political crises

In analysing societies in which changes occur rapidly, Aklaev (1999) defines two different types of ethno-political crisis – systemic ones and interactional ones. When major political changes occur in multi-ethnic societies and societies undergo

democratisation, **systemic ethno-political crises** appear in the form of institutional problems in governance – **the inability of the government to ensure the foundations for a multi-ethnic and functioning democracy**. The main problems usually include identity (the emergence of a unified nation), legitimatisation and participation, because different ethnic groups usually do not hold identical views on these matters, or they are not all given equal opportunities.

Interactional ethno-political crises, for their part, occur when there are significant changes in relations among ethno-political agents – the state, the dominant ethnic group and other ethnic groups. In countries where fundamental changes are occurring, these crises most often emerge as a result of these circumstances:

- 1) Changes in the social status of a group within a political system, the spread of collective fear or a sense of threat;
- 2) Ethnic concerns, a sense of threat, key increases in these emotions, and a focus on a specific issue such as a border dispute, discriminatory laws, etc.

Ethno-political crisis management and conflict resolution

The aim of crisis management is to resolve a dangerous confrontation without bloodshed, but also in a way which ensures that the interests of both sides are satisfied. In a crisis situation, the basic problem is a **political dilemma** – how to defend the interests of both sides, and how to avoid doing anything that might deepen the conflict even further. According to Winn (1996), one of the most important issues in crisis management is agenda-setting. There must be careful thought given to the agenda of the public discourse. Constructive crisis management includes techniques such as negotiations to find a solution, or the involvement of third-party mediation in the process.

Bolger (2003) has defined five strategies for conflict resolution, arguing that each of these can be used in a specific situation after its context is involved:

1) **Postpone**. This strategy is appropriate when it is impossible to engage in rational discussions because emotions have taken the upper hand. This strategy, of course, does not resolve the conflict as such, it simply means that the issue is put off for the future. Sooner or later, a strategy for resolving the conflict will have to be identified. Postponement is an appropriate strategy in those cases when all of the necessary information is not to hand, or in cases when there are hopes that the conflict might resolve itself. When used incorrectly, this strategy can lead to an escalation in the conflict.

2) **Enforce**. This is appropriate when there is no time for debate, and there is a need for a very fast but not decisive decision. This is not a democratic strategy, and it is dangerous, because it, too, can lead to an escalation in the conflict.

3) **Accommodate**. This strategy is advantageous in those cases when the need to preserve or establish good relations is more important than the pursuit of one's own interests in the specific situation. Sometimes this strategy is used because it helps in establishing good relations with the other side so that other issues can be resolved. The strategy is also put to use in those situations when there is no chance for influencing the decisions that are being taken.

4) **Compromise**. Both sides yield on certain issues, and the interests of neither side are satisfied in full. Compromise is also sometimes used as a temporary solution in a complex matter.

5) **Explore**. In this case, both sides work together so as to come up with new ideas and solutions. This creates greater understanding and unity, because both sides

see that their needs are being taken into account. This is an appropriate strategy in those cases when all of the parties must be fully involved and make an equal investment in the process. The problem here is that this strategy requires a lot of time, effort and openness to communication. It is also made more complex by the number of people who must necessarily be involved.

THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES

A Socio-economic characterisation of Latvians and Non-Latvians

The ethnic distribution and place of residence of Latvia's residents

According to the Latvian Statistical Board, Russians and representatives of other non-Latvian nationalities in Latvia are concentrated primarily in the country's larger cities and towns – Rīga, Daugavpils, Rēzekne, Jelgava, Jūrmala, Liepāja and Ventspils. Of Latvia's 26 administrative districts, we find the greatest numbers of Russians and other non-Latvians in the Rēzekne, Daugavpils, Ludza, Preiļi and Krāslava districts of eastern Latvia, as well as in the Rīga District which surrounds the capital city.

Table 1. The distribution of residents among larger cities and districts, beginning of 2004

	Latvians	Russians	Other
LATVIA	58,6	28,8	12,6
<i>Rīga</i>	42	42,9	15,1
<i>Daugavpils</i>	17	54,5	28,5
<i>Jelgava</i>	54,2	30,4	15,4
<i>Jūrmala</i>	49,9	36,4	13,7
<i>Liepāja</i>	50,9	33,7	15,4
<i>Rēzekne</i>	43,7	49,4	6,9
<i>Ventspils</i>	53,3	30,7	16
Aizkraukle district	76,5	14,3	9,2
Alūksne district	82,2	13,7	4,1
Balvi district	77,5	18,7	3,8
Bauska district	73,7	11,2	15,1
Cēsis district	85,6	9,3	5,1
Daugavpils district	39,7	37,9	22,4
Dobele district	73,4	12	14,6
Gulbene district	85	11,2	3,8
Jelgava district	66	18,8	15,2
Jēkabpils district	67,5	22,6	9,9
Krāslava district	48,6	24,8	26,6
Kuldīga district	91,5	3,1	5,4
Liepāja district	87,8	3,4	8,8
Limbaži district	88,6	6	5,4
Ludza district	56,6	35,8	7,6
Madona district	87,6	8,6	3,8
Ogre district	76,8	15,5	7,7
Preiļi district	67,6	26,9	5,5
Rēzeknes district	56,6	39,3	4,1
Rīga district	64,8	24,3	10,9
Saldus district	83,7	5,3	11
Talsi district	92,1	3,4	4,5
Tukums district	84,8	8,2	7
Valka district	81	12,5	6,5
Valmiera district	83,3	10,7	6
Ventspils district	89,9	5	5,1

Data source: Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

<http://data.csb.lv/pxweb2004/Database/Gadagramata/04.%20Iedz%EEvot%E2ji/04.%20Iedz%EEvot%E2ji.asp>

Income and employment

Labour studies that have been conducted by the Central Statistical Board show that there are certain areas of work in which most employees are Latvians, as well as those in which non-Latvians hold more jobs. Among all employed persons in Latvia, 62% are Latvians. Areas in which they dominate include national government (83%), education (73%) and farming (77%). Non-Latvians are more likely to be employed in transport (51%), industry (48%) and the construction industry (46%).

All of this can be explained through the influence of policies concerning the state language and the issue of citizenship. Latvians dominate in national government because of citizenship requirements and the need to speak Latvian. They dominate education because of language policies in the educational system. Also of importance are historical traditions and the specifics of the way in which industries were developed in Latvia. Historically, Latvians have been an agricultural nation, while industry during the Soviet era was developed largely with the participation of workers from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Table 2. Employees aged 15-74, by sector of work

	Latvians %	Other nationa- lities %	Total, thsds. of people
Employees – Total	62	38	1006,9
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing (A+B)	77	23	138,5
Industry (C+D+E)	52	48	197,7
Construction (F)	54	46	74,4
Wholesale, retail trade, repair of personal and household goods (G)	57	43	152,6
Hotels and restaurants (H)	57	43	24,7
Transport, storage and telecommunication (I)	49	51	94,5
Financial intermediation (J)	68	32	15,7
Real estate, renting and business activities (K)	58	42	41,9
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security (L)	83	17	67,4
Education (M)	73	27	78,6
Health and social work (N)	69	31	59,0
Other community, social and personal service (O-P)	60	40	61,8

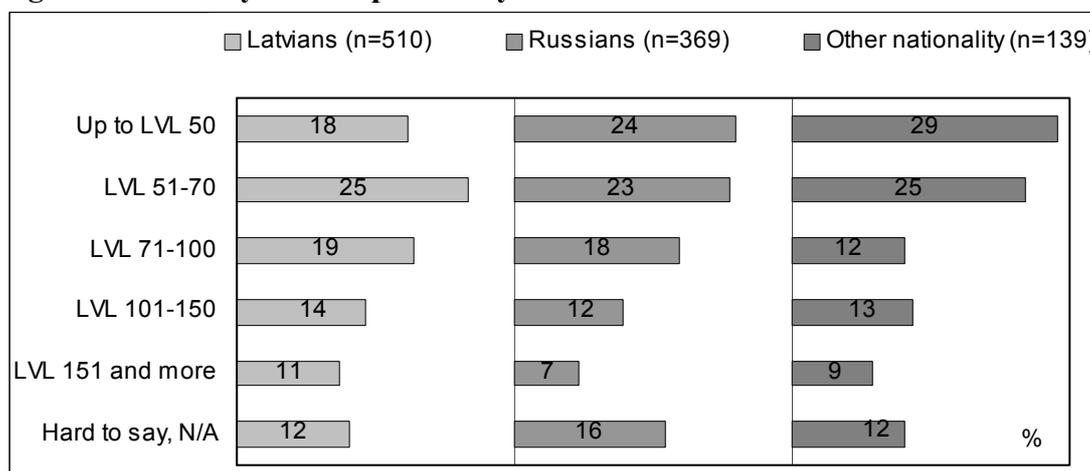
Data source: CSB Labour Force Survey, 2003.

If we analyse the income of Latvians and non-Latvians in Latvia, then we see that there are no statistical differences among the income of Latvians, Russians and other non-Latvians. Respondents in all three groups made fairly similar statements about their income. Small differences are not statistically significant and can be explained through the context of the interviewed cohort.⁵

⁵ Among non-Latvians who were selected, there were comparatively more older people, which might help in explaining why a greater percentage of non-Latvians said that their income is less than LVL 50 per month.

The structure of employment and income among the various ethnic groups suggests that Latvia does have the model of cross-patterned reticulation, which says that each ethnic group is represented in many different areas of activity and carries out various economic functions while the entire system remains less than symmetrical. According to Rothschild (1982), this is the best model for gradual and peaceful resolutions of ethnic tensions.

Figure 1. Monthly income per family member



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004, N=1018.

Satisfaction with work

People were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their job on a scale of 1 to 10, and the rating among Latvians was 6.6 (the arithmetic average), while among non-Latvians it was 6.4. It has to be noted that non-Latvians who are citizens were slightly more likely to be satisfied with their job – the rating in that group was 6.8, while the rating among non-Latvians who are also non-citizens was just 6.0.

Satisfaction with life

On the same 10-point scale, Latvians rated satisfaction with their lives at a level of 5.6 (the arithmetic average), while representatives of other nationalities came up with an average rating of 5.5. Here, too, non-Latvian citizens were more positive than non-citizens – a rating of 5.9 and 5.2 respectively.

Latvia's society today – important issues and problems

The results of focus group discussions indicate that representatives of both socio-linguistic groups talk about Latvia's society in a way which focuses on major problems. They all mention one and the same central issues – social stratification, the level of socio-economic welfare, income levels, the European Union, problems with the environment, problems with food quality.

“Society has been divided up between the poor and the rich, not between Latvians and Russians. This is the division which is the cornerstone of everything in our society.”
(Non-Latvian, medium or older generation)

“The most important thing for us right now is that we are being fed with European funds, and we are being told such beautiful stories that many people just gape and think that the money is being given to us just for the hell of it, that Europe will work hard for us, and we will not have to give anything in return. Big open mouths, these are people who cannot think for themselves!” (Non-Latvian, young person)

“We feel that a fairly high level of unemployment is a major problem, and many people cannot live on the basis of the standard of living which the state has proposed. Aid payments are low, particularly subsidies for children. Pensions – people who have spent their entire lives hard at work, people who have paid their taxes, they now receive the pension of a beggar. Over the course of the years, the pension is increased by one lats, by two lats. That is the attitude of the state.” (Latvian, young person)

In accordance with the approach of critical discourse analysis, the way in which people come up with subjects for discussion has much to say about the most important discourse information of the relevant group or individual (Van Dijk, 2000). If we look at the primary and secondary subjects which were brought up, we can find out which aspects of the problems that are discussed are considered by the respondents and which are ignored. This allows us to arrange the issues in accordance with their importance. The topics which were brought up by participants in the study when discussing Latvia's contemporary society are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Processes and problems which typify Latvia's contemporary society: Correlation of qualitative data

Group	Major concepts, phenomena, problems	Less often mentioned concepts, phenomena, problems
Group 1 – Young Latvians	Money (work, unemployment, several jobs, inflation, the euro), loans, health, nutrition, the European Union, politics, negations.	God, love, a society with two communities, sports as a way of bringing people together, traffic safety, the rapidity of life, new technologies, environmental problems.
Group 2 – Middle aged and older Latvians	Money, stratification in society (the poor and the rich), the European Union, the euro, politics, inflation (higher prices), negativism.	New technologies, families, time (movement toward social, economic and political progress is too slow), children (attitudes of the state vis-a-vis families with children – low support payments, etc.).
Group 3 – Young non-Latvians	The European Union, structural funds, the euro, Americanisation, poverty, capitalism (money), nutrition, unemployment, a low level of welfare, stratification in society.	Gambling, alcoholism, problems with ecology or the environment, a low birth-rate.
Group 4 – Middle aged and older non-Latvians	Family, advertising, loans, stratification in society, money, negations in society, lack of trust in the government or the state.	Food quality, young people (who think that they can do anything), politics.

When asked to describe the profile of society, respondents focused more on socio-economic issues than on political matters. One of the central political subjects was Latvia's accession to the European Union, but here, too, respondents tended to review the matter from the socio-economic perspective.

Among young Latvians and young Russians, sports were mentioned as a factor which facilitates integration. Young people stressed that people from areas that are not related to politics make a greater investment in public integration – athletes, musicians, artists, etc. This is a view which indirectly indicates alienation between the individual and the state:

“This athlete makes it clear that athletes, not politicians, move things forward in our country. Not just athletes, but also musicians and artists. Certainly not politicians. I’m talking about simple people!” (Non-Latvian young person)

“I would mention hockey players, because everyone in Latvia is happy about the accomplishments of the team. When they win, that brings people together.” (Latvian young person)

None of the respondents in the groups of young people talked about problems with ethnic policy when talking about society today. This means that such issues are not on the agenda of young people.

The only focus group in which issues concerning ethnic policy and ethnic relations were discussed as a component of the modern-day Latvian society was the one in which middle-aged and older ethnic Latvians took part. The main focus was on politicians in Latvia, and they were described from two different aspects. First, there were critical attitudes vis-à-vis the political elite. Second, there were also negative attitudes toward opposition politicians and their political views and goals. As people spoke about these matters, researchers noticed critical attitudes toward the Russian speaking community in Latvia. In this group, too, however, issues of ethnic policy were mostly forced items on the agenda.

All in all, analysis of the qualitative data indicates that ethnic relations and issues which concern the state's ethnic policies are not seen as major problems in Latvia today. Non-Latvians who are asked to describe the present-day Latvian society do not mention such subjects at all. Latvian respondents point to issues such as a society with two communities, as well as a political elite which is ideologically split.

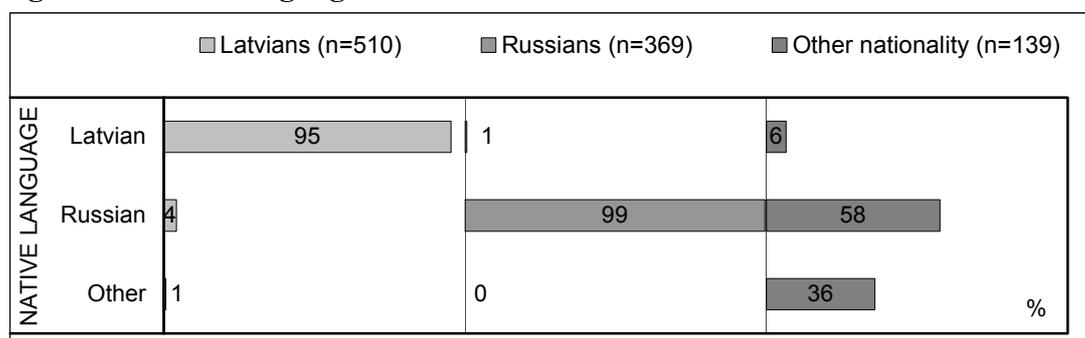
Native language, ethnic identity

Latvia's society is split up linguistically between Latvians and Russian speakers, and that is because both Latvian and Russian are commonly spoken languages in the country. Among Latvians, most list Latvian as their native language, and most of them speak Latvian in everyday situations. The group of Russian speakers, by contrast, is made up of a number of different minority groups, and these are people who mostly speak Russian on an everyday basis.

Among surveyed Latvians, 95% said that their native tongue is Latvian, while 4% cited Russian and 1% mentioned some other language. Among surveyed Russians, nearly 100% reported Russian as their native language, while among people

of other nationalities, 6% reported Latvian as their native tongue, **58%** said that it was Russian, and 36% cited some other language.

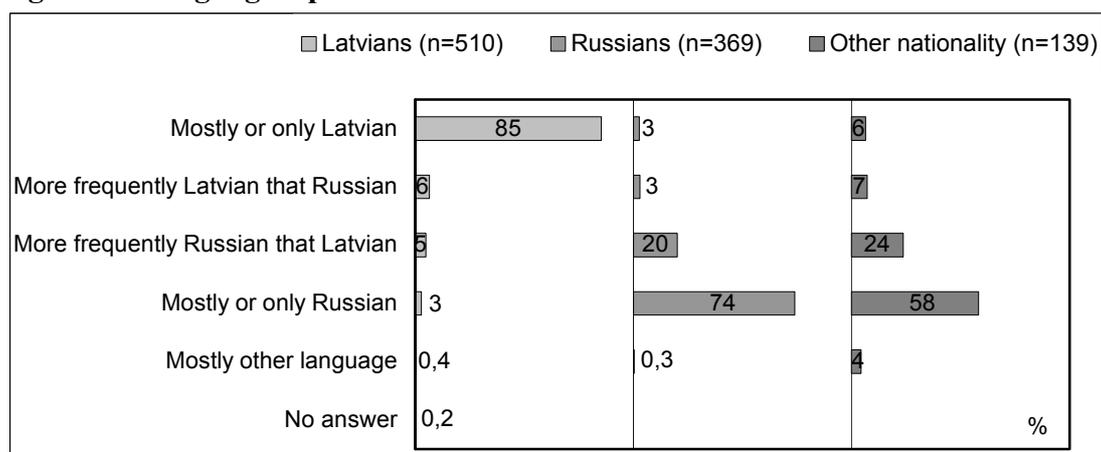
Figure 2. Native language



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004, N=1018.

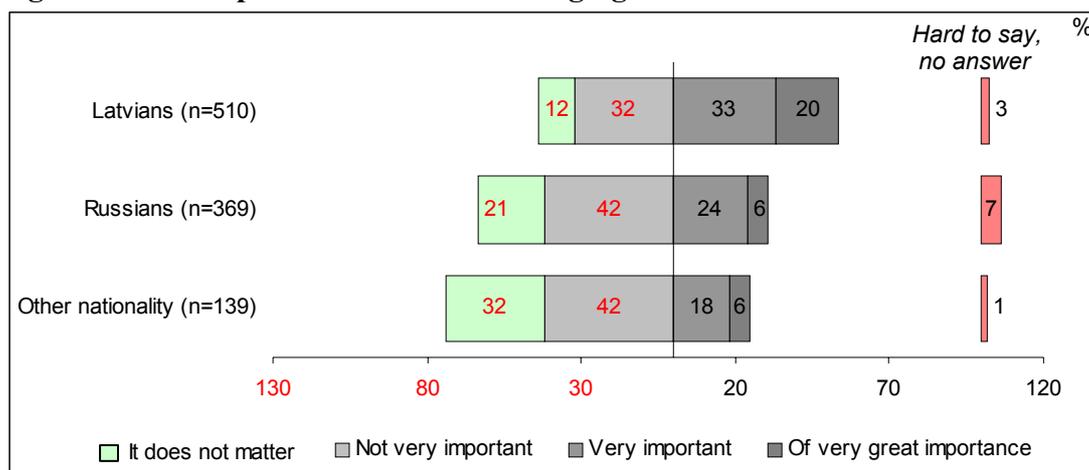
There is a similar situation when it comes to the language that is spoken at home and among friends – 91% of Latvians mostly speak Latvian at home, while 8% usually speak Russian. Among ethnic Russians, 94% mostly speak Russian, and 6% speak Latvian. Among people of other nationalities, fully **82%** speak Russian in most cases at home, 13% speak mostly Latvian, and only 4% speak some other language.

Figure 3. Languages spoken at home



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004, N=1018.

Researchers hoped to determine how important ethnic identity is to respondents, and so this question was posed: “How important a role in your life does the fact that you are a [*nationality*] play?” There were significant differences between Latvians, Russians and people of other nationalities here. All told, **53% of Latvians felt that their ethnos is of great importance in life**. Among Russians, the same was true among **30%** of respondents, while among people of other nationalities it was just **24%**.

Figure 4. The importance of ethnic belonging

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004, N=1018.

Language skills

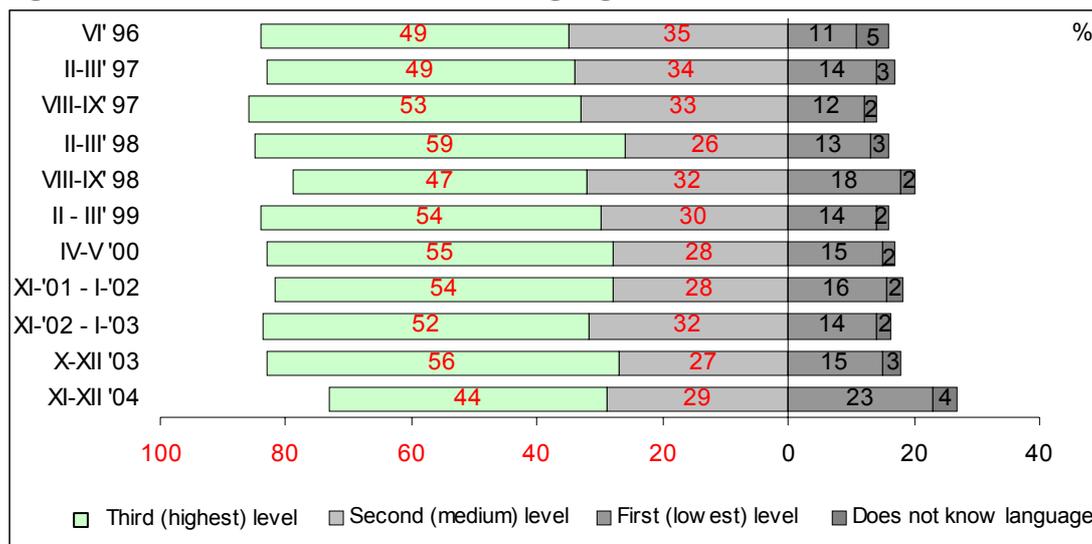
More than 10 years after the restoration of Latvia's independence, the situation is still one in which communications between ethnic Latvians and local residents of other nationalities usually take place in Russian, because Latvian language skills tend to be much worse among Russians and people of other non-titular nationalities than are Russian language skills among ethnic Latvians.

When people who are not Latvians are asked to assess their own Latvian language skills, 10% admit that they do not know the language at all, and another 43% say that their knowledge is very poor (the lowest level of language skills). A total of 47% of these respondents have a more or less free command of the Latvian language. Better Latvian language skills are found in the age group between 15 and 34. Most of those who do not know the language at all are in the 50-74 age group.

Russian language skills among ethnic Latvians are still quite good – 73% of Latvians have a more or less free command of the language, 23% have poor skills, and 4% do not know Russian at all.

Figure 5. Self-evaluation of Latvian language skills, overall and by age group

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. LVAVP. "Language". November – December 2004. % of those whose native language is not Latvian, N=848

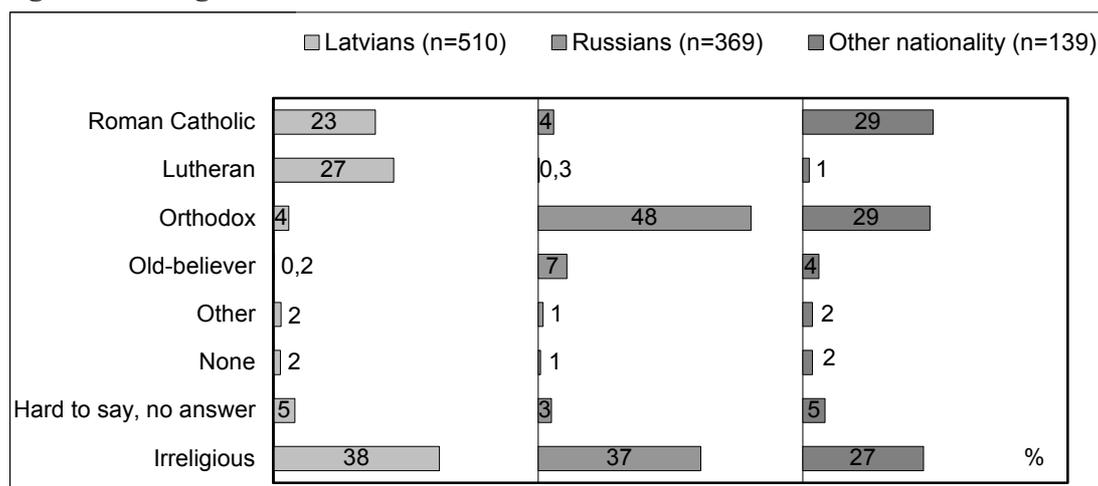
Figure 6. Self-evaluation of Russian language skills

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. LVAVP. "Language". November – December 2004. % of those whose native language is Latvian, N=1155

Religion

Among surveyed Latvians, 58% described themselves as believing in God. The same was true among 60% of Russians and 70% of people of other nationalities.⁶

There are, however, significant differences in terms of denominations to which people belong. Among Latvians, 23% are Roman Catholic, 27% are Lutheran, and 38% say that they are not believers at all. Among Russians, 48% are Orthodox, 7% are Old Believers, and 37% are not believers. Among other nationalities, there are significant numbers of Roman Catholics (29%) and Orthodox (29%).

Figure 7. Religion

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

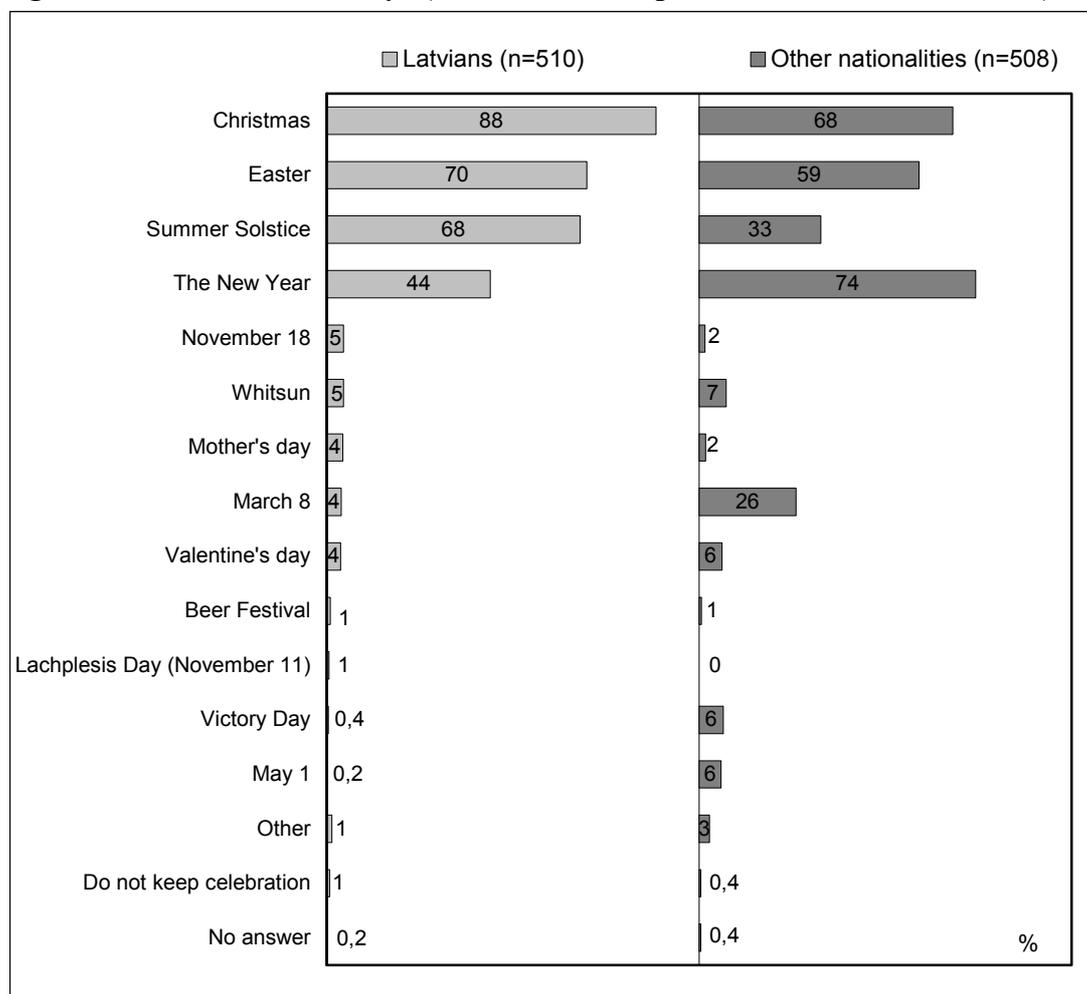
⁶ In the cohort of people who are neither Latvians nor Russians, there was a comparatively larger number of older people, and that may help in explaining why there is a larger proportion of believers in this particular group.

Asked how often they attend church services, people in all ethnic groups offered more or less the same responses – 26% or 27% of believers attend worship services regularly (at least once per month).

Celebrated holidays

With the aim of finding out differences in everyday traditions between Latvians and non-Latvians, respondents were asked this question: “Which holidays do you and your family usually celebrate both at home and by attending various events (not counting birthdays and name’s days)?”⁷ There are holidays which both groups celebrate – the New Year, Christmas, Easter and the Summer Solstice. Latvians, unlike non-Latvians, hardly ever observe such holidays as March 8, May 1 and Victory Day.

Figure 8. Celebrated holidays (several answers possible, totals exceed 100%)



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

⁷ The concept of name’s days may be unknown to some readers. On the Latvian calendar, names are attached to each date, and when one’s own name comes up, that is something like a second birthday. Certain comparisons can be drawn to the Roman Catholic calendar of saints.

Ethnic belonging and media spaces

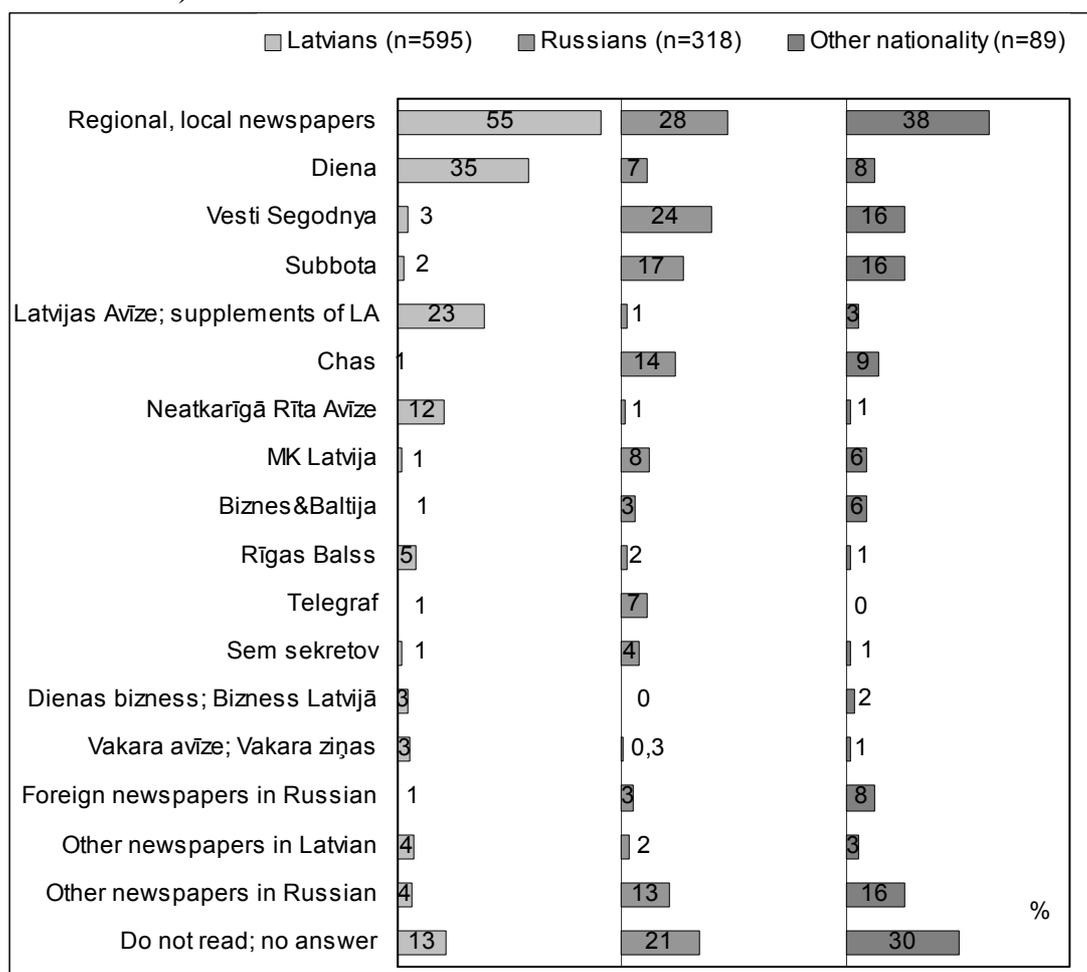
The audience of the mass media in Latvia is divided up between those who read, watch and listen in Latvian and those who read, watch and listen in Russian. The fact that there are separate linguistic information spaces was made clear during the focus group discussions, because participants were asked to describe their habits in terms of mass media consumption. Survey data show that the situation is most intense when it comes to television, because most Russian speakers in Latvia watch and listen to the mass media from Russia, and television, of course, is the one mass medium which reaches the largest number of people. Thus the attitudes of many Russian speakers in Latvia are closer to the attitudes that are expressed in the Russian media, as opposed to the official views of the country in which these people live.

Newspapers

The only newspaper which is published in Latvian and is read by non-Latvians, too, is *Diena*. 35% of Latvian respondents, 7% of Russian respondents, and 8% of respondents of other nationalities read the paper regularly.

Among the Latvian audience, other popular newspapers include *Latvijas Avīze* (23%) and *Neatkarīgā* (12%). Russians and other non-Latvians favour *Vesti Segodnya* (24%/16%), *Subbota* (17%/16%), *Chas* (14%/9%) and *Telegraf* (7% of Russians).

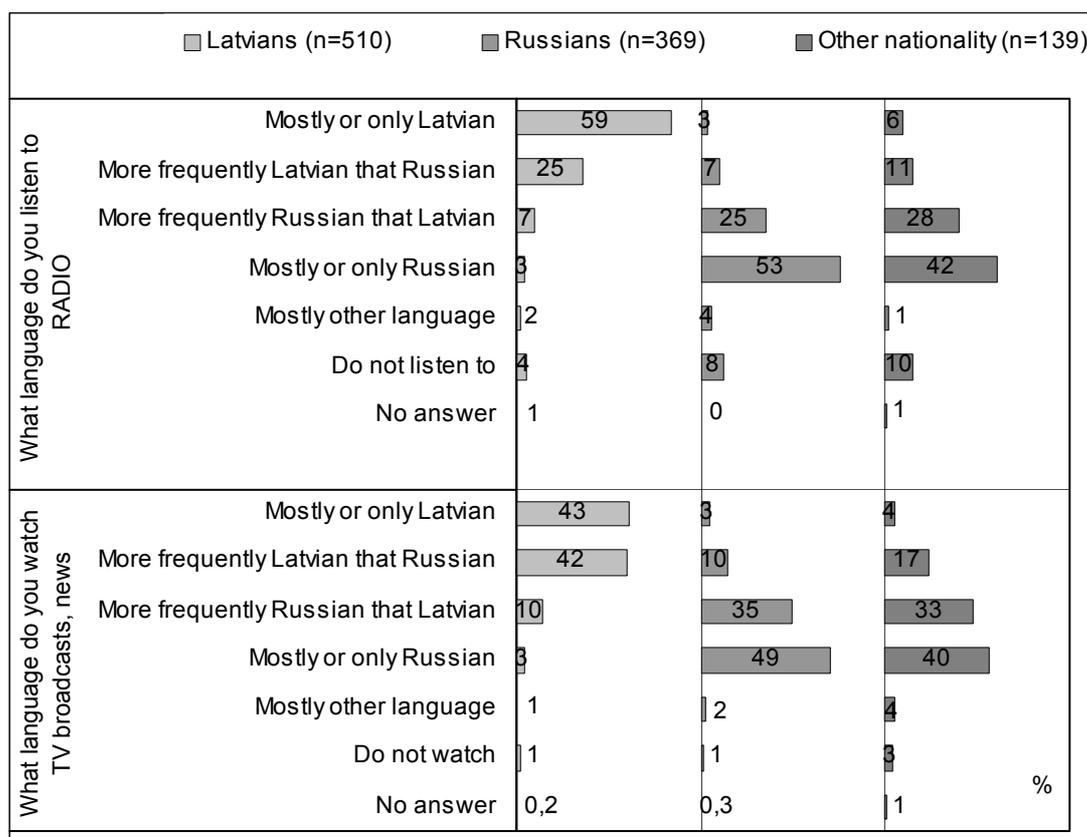
Latvians are more likely than Russians and others to read local, regional or city publications – 55% of Latvians, 28% of Russians and 38% of people of other nationalities said that they do.

Figure 9. Newspapers which are read regularly (several answers possible, totals exceed 100%)

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. October 2004. N=1002

Radio and television

As is the case with newspapers, Latvians mostly watch and listen to television and radio programmes in Latvian, while Russians and people of other nationalities mostly watch and listen to programmes in Russian. Among Latvians, 84% mostly listen to the radio in **Latvian** and 85% watch television mostly in **Latvian**. Among Russians, 78% mostly listen to the radio in **Russian**, and 84% mostly watch television in **Russian**. Among people of other nationalities, 70% listen to the radio primarily in **Russian** (70%), while 73% tend to watch television in **Russian**.

Figure 10. The language in which the radio and television are listened to/watched

Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

The role of the mass media in shaping and upholding the ethnic gap

Participants in all of the focus groups said that in Latvia there is reason to speak not only of different information fields for Latvians and others because of linguistic reasons, but also of differences in the content of the two information spaces. Participants say that they think that the information, interpretations and viewpoints that are presented by the Latvian and the Russian media are very different. Many participants argued that the publications are often tendentious and negative vis-à-vis the other socio-linguistic group.

“Sometimes I think – thank God that many Russians don’t know Latvian, because sometimes the content makes my hair stand on end. It’s also good that Latvians don’t read Russian newspapers.” (Non-Latvian, medium or older generation)

“At one point I was accidentally receiving [a Russian language newspaper].(.) Yes, it was an interesting newspaper, I think that it continually prints absolute lies. The paper said, for instance, that Latvia was never occupied.” (Latvian, young person)

“As I said before, I thought that I did not have a sense of national belonging, but when I read such articles I get the sense, that “my people” are being attacked. I still feel those things, despite my neutrality, I feel that I am being attacked in some way.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

Participants in the focus group discussions said that they do not trust the mass media, whether Latvian or non-Latvian and particularly when it comes to commentaries. That is not, however, a reason for people to reject the press altogether. Respondents believe that information in the press is simply twisted so as to satisfy the political interests of those who finance the media outlets.

“Politicians have the press which they need. They finance it. They order the press to write something, and they pay cash for it.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“I try to read information about the same event in various newspapers. Articles about Russian schools for instance. I have my own view, but at the same time I become panicky over the fact that one newspaper says one thing, the other says something else. It looks like all of the journalists have been ordered to write something specific.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

When researchers studied the issue of different information spaces during the focus group discussions, they used one of the so-called projective methods (see “Description of research”). Participants were given two articles which focus on ethnic issues (language, education and citizenship) – one from a Latvian newspaper, the other from a Russian newspaper. The two articles reflected radical viewpoints in terms of two different ethno-political discourses.

Participants in all of the groups, when asked to comment on the excerpts from the Russian and Latvian language newspapers, said that the way in which authors present their views is unacceptable. There was criticism over the form of expression and the resources which, according to respondents, were “*exaggerated*”, “*provocative*” or “*demagogic*”. It has to be added, however, that participants in the discussion agreed with the overall content of the excerpts – non-Latvians agreed with the views that were presented in the Russian language newspaper, while Latvians agreed with those that were presented in the Latvian language paper. This means that there is reason to talk about different ethno-political discourses among Latvians and non-Latvians, ones which in large part are in line with the discourses that are promoted by the mass media. This, in turn, shows that the mass media help in shaping an disseminating ethno-political discourse in society.

“If the Russian speakers think and act in this way, then the newspapers will partly defend them, and the Latvian newspapers will write the opposite. Does this influence anything? It only serves to fire up mutual national hatred.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

“It is advantageous for the government to create an artificial enemy. Now, I have also read the Latvian press, which says that they (the Russians) are planning to make use of extremist resources.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

“Russian speakers read the Russian press, and that shapes their thinking. If they could also read the Latvian press, it would be easier for them to find their way around. (..) They read the kind of press that you gave us. It is pure demagoguery, and they begin to think yes, I am oppressed, democracy is limited. Some of them truly believe that this is so.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

The things which respondents had to say about commentaries which contain different content allow us to come up with several important conclusions. First of all,

the ethno-political gap applies both to society and to the mass media. Second, one of the main factors in promoting the existence of this gap, according to focus group participants, is that there are various political forces and parties which make use of the media on behalf of their own interests.

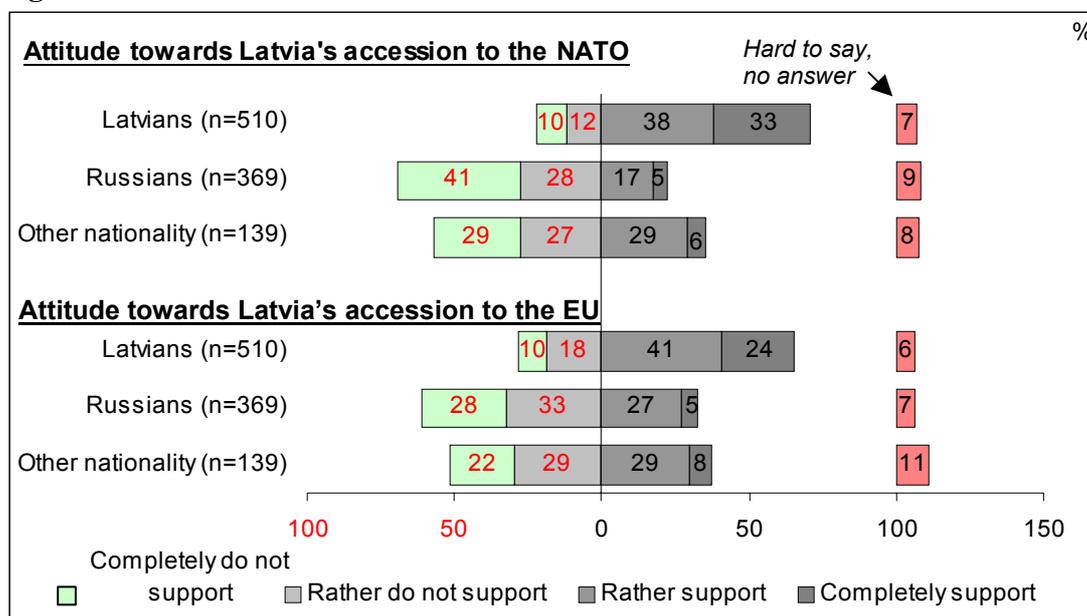
“There are more leftist and more rightist newspapers. Newspapers and society at large are divided up among the parties.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“Politicians manipulate. The press, the Russian speaking press manipulates a lot, it lies, it does not report, it does not inform, its aim is to provide the wrong information, to fire up people’s emotions. (...) People are being fired up via the mass media.” (Latvian, young person)

Views on Latvia’s accession to NATO and the EU

Another area in which the views of Latvians and non-Latvians differ is the question of Latvia’s accession to the EU and NATO. Differences in these opinions, too, have much to do with the different information spaces which prevail. Most Latvians support Latvia’s accession to the EU and NATO (65% and 71% respectively), most Russians and people of other nationalities do not (32% of Russians and 37% of other non-Latvians in the case of the EU, and 22% of Russians and 35% of others in the case of NATO).

Figure 11. Attitudes toward Latvia’s accession to the EU and NATO



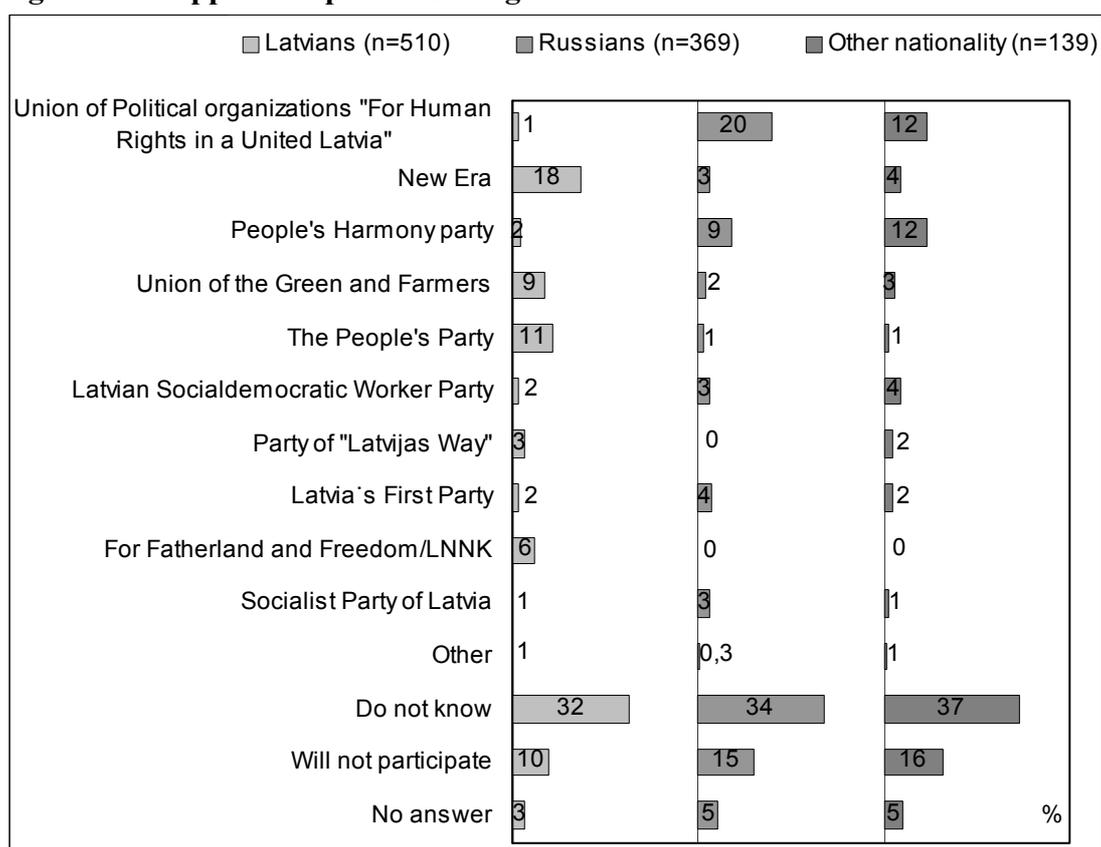
Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Supporting political parties during elections

As has been pointed out on numerous occasions by specialists in the area of ethnic relations and by political scientists, political parties in Latvia can be divided up in accordance with ethnicity. Latvians mostly vote for parties such as New Era, the

People's Party, the Alliance of the Green Party and the Farmers Union, and For the Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK. Russians and people of other nationalities plump for parties which used to be in the For Human Rights in a United Latvia alliance, including the People's Harmony Party (Figure 12). As a result of this, ethnic issues are at the centre of public political debates. Each of the groups of ethnic leaders seeks to mobilise voters on the basis of ethnicity. This serves to exacerbate many ethnic issues.

Figure 12. Support for parties during elections



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Analysis of the qualitative data, too, indicates that political forces receive support for ethnic reasons, and this is one of the strategies which participants in focus group discussions pointed out when talking about ways in which the majority can enhance its status in society while isolating major linguistic minorities from the political arena. Latvians from the middle or older generation were most likely to speak of this strategy. The idea that minorities must be isolated so that ethnic tensions can be reduced indicates, to a certain extent, that Latvians perceive themselves as a threatened majority.

"We Latvians should take a page from the book of the Russian speakers, we must be equally active. In elections, it is no longer as important whether one votes for the People's Party, New Era or For the Fatherland, we just need to go to vote so that the percentage of Latvians who vote is higher and so that the leftists are fewer and fewer in number in the legislative institutions. (...) We must vote, we must get all of our friends and relatives to vote. People in the countryside say, Oh, what point is there? I will not vote." (Latvian, middle or older generation)

“It [tense ethnic relations] may have emerged in part because to a certain extent we feel that there is some kind of threat – from Russia, but also, to a certain extent, from those people who live in Latvia but speak Russian.” (Latvian, young person)

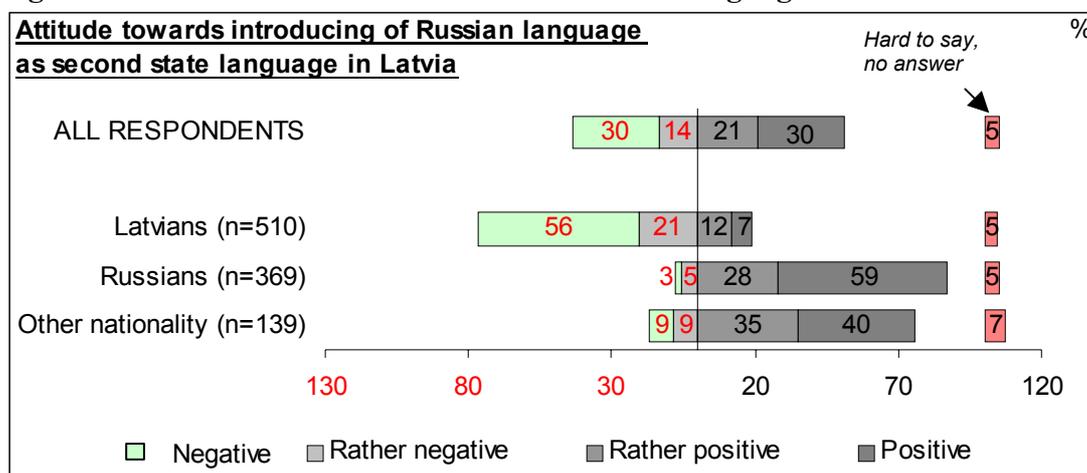
Horowitz (1985) has written about ethnic conflict, arguing that one of the signs of such a conflict is the division of political parties on the basis of ethnic principles. If this thinking is applied to the party structure in Latvia, then we cannot conclude otherwise than that there are signs of an ethnic conflict here. That is particularly true because ethno-political issues in particular are the ones which are polarizing society on the basis of ethnic and linguistic belonging.

According to Brass (1985), competition among elite groups is also a risk factor in terms of ethnic conflicts. If local residents support political parties on the basis of the ethnic principle, that is one indicator of this phenomenon, and it suggests that elite groups tend to make use of ethnicity so as to gain political victories.

Views about the state language

One issue in which there are the greatest differences in the views of Latvians and non-Latvians is the matter of the state language, and here we see a conflict of attitudes between Latvians and others. Most non-Latvians support the idea that Russian should be made Latvia’s second official language (support for this is indicated by 87% of Russians and 75% of people of other nationalities, as opposed to just 19% of Latvians).

Figure 13. Views about Russian as a second state language in Latvia



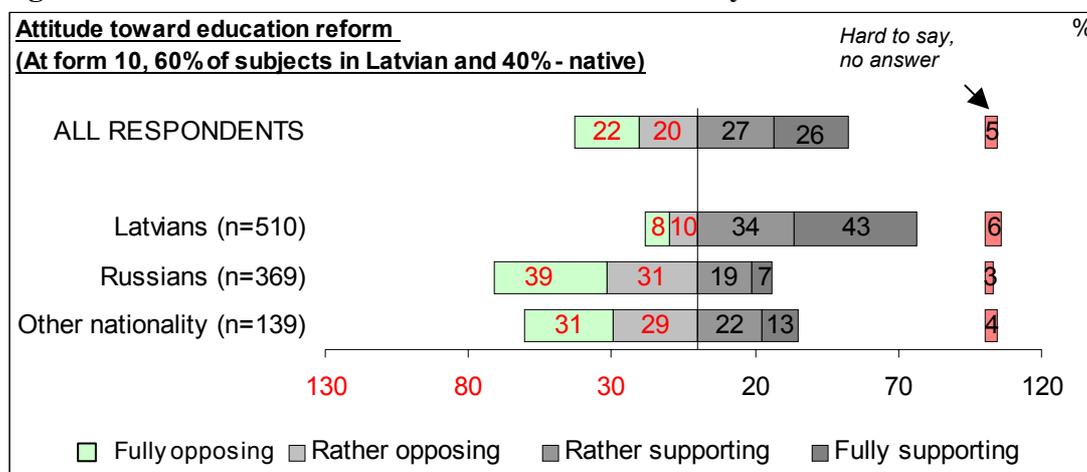
Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Views about education reforms

Similar answers are heard with respect to the issue of education reforms in minority schools – Latvians support them, Russians and other nationalities do not. Attitudes toward the state language and the language of instruction in schools are fundamental issues in creating conflicts of attitudes between Latvians and non-

Latvians. Previous BISS research⁸ shows that the main cause for this is that both groups feel a sense of being threatened.

Figure 14. Views about education reforms in minority schools



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Evaluations of ethnic relations and differences in lifestyles

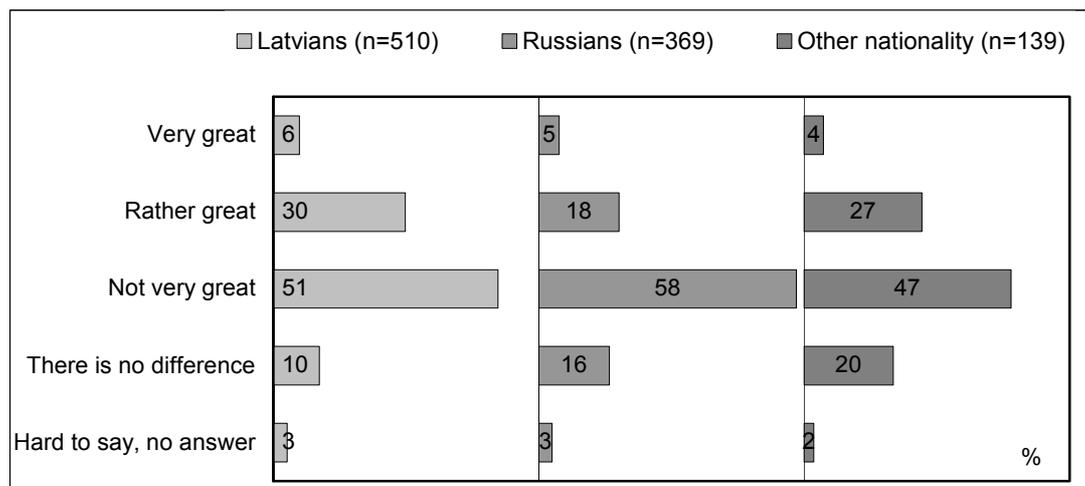
The results of the quantitative survey show that ethnic relations in Latvia are seen as being positive or satisfactory by most people. On a 10-point scale, Latvians said, on average, that their relations with Russians can be rated at a level of 7.81 (arithmetic average). Russians rated their relations with Latvians at a level of 8.35, while other non-Latvians rated their relations with Latvians at a level of 8.70.

When respondents themselves were asked to evaluate differences in the lifestyles of people of various nationalities in Latvia, it turned out that majorities of Latvians (61%), Russians (74%) and other non-Latvians (67%) feel that there are no particular differences in the lifestyles of Latvians and others in Latvia. It has to be added, however, that 36% of Latvians, 23% of Russians and 31% of others feel that there are significant or fairly significant differences in this area.

⁸ Zepa, B., Šūpule, I., Krastiņa, L., Peņķe, I., Krišāne, J. "Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society", Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2004.

Figure 15. Differences in lifestyles

How great is the difference in the lifestyles of Latvians and people of other nationalities in Latvia?



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Analysis of the qualitative data tells us that the views of Latvians and non-Latvians mostly coincide when it comes to Latvia's society. Both groups agree on the problems which are important in society today, and ethnic relations here are not particularly important. When the leader of the discussion brought up the issue of ethnic relations, however, respondents said that there is a gap between Latvians and non-Latvians in society, and focus group participants tried to evaluate these relations.

Relations between Latvians and non-Latvians can, generally speaking, be described with the phrase **weak functional integration**, and that is particularly true in urbanized environments. This was indicated by focus group participants who spoke of weak social interaction with non-Latvians, as well as by previous research. The study "Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society" (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004) shows that people in Rīga, both Latvians and non-Latvians, are more likely to agree with the idea that Latvians and Russian speakers live in separate worlds. The proportion of people who think so is greater among Latvians.

Analysis of qualitative data reveals the fact that Latvians respondents say things which demonstrate a greater social distance vis-à-vis non-Latvians than is the case when non-Latvians speak about Latvians. Those who hold more radical views think that there is an **ethnic conflict** in the relations between "Latvians and Russians". This view was particularly common among middle-aged and older Latvians. They were the ones who hold the most critical views about interethnic relations in society.

"Russians and Latvians will never be friendly. [Pause] Perhaps people pretend that there is no conflict, but in fact there is a conflict, and there will continue to be the conflict. The only issue is how this is manifested." (Latvian, middle or older generation)

"Poor relations, very poor relations at this time. For the most part you might think that the unwillingness to establish relations comes from the Russian side. We already heard the viewpoint here about the Russian mentality – the eternal victor. We Latvians are Latvians. We seek to crawl back into our hut, we do not spend much time outside of it. For the Russians, the whole world is their fatherland if you look at how they behave here, in America, in Germany. The same situation exists there, the only difference being that in those other countries the Russians really are a minority." (Latvian, middle or older generation)

Young Latvians are not as categorical in their approach. Young people generally speaking believe that there is reason to say that relations between Latvians and non-Latvians are tense to a certain degree right now. Respondents used such words as “*tense, a bit exacerbated*” and “*fired up.*”

“I can’t say that the relations are neutral or invisible. If they were neutral, if we did not see them as them, then there wouldn’t be a problem at all. That’s why I think that there is some tension right now.” (Latvian, young person)

Non-Latvians have different views when it comes to ethnic relations. Some think that relations have improved over the last few years because of increasing Latvian language skills among non-Latvian residents (the annual quantitative study “Language” (BISS, 1996-2004) also shows that Latvian language skills among non-Latvians are continuing to improve). There are other respondents, however, who disagree and feel that they are under threat. Some people said that the sense of insecurity is based on an inability to predict political decisions.

“10 years ago I felt much worse. I think that society back then was much more hostile. On trolley buses, no one said anything, people were afraid to speak to one another. There were tensions. That is no longer true. Because we Russians are living here and learning the Latvian language to a better degree, this removes many of the problems which used to exist.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“I used to be more convinced, I’m less convinced now, I don’t know what to expect tomorrow. (..) In part that depends on legislation. It affects us – a new law is adopted, a limitation which will not affect some people but will affect others.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

At the same time, however, the ethnic conflict which is discussed by Latvians and by some non-Latvians has not been revealed. Studies that have been conducted by the BISS in the past (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004; Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004), we can speak of a **conflict of ethnic policy**, one that is manifested most often as a conflict between attitudes vis-à-vis ethnic policy. The results of this study supplement and confirm this idea. First of all, issues of ethnic policy are no longer on the agenda of focus group respondents when they are asked to describe contemporary society. Second, Latvians and non-Latvians do not have very different views when it comes to the profile of society today, and both sides distance themselves from the issues of ethnic policy. Latvians and Russians have one and the same social and economic problems.

“We all live in the same country, we basically encounter the same things every day. There are probably issues where we have different opinions – language is one of them. I think that some people have diametrically opposite views, but generally speaking, I think that most people have the same views about a majority of issues – bitter views.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

This suggests that issues of ethnic policy and the conflict of attitudes between Latvians and non-Latvians which emanate from those issues are a forced agenda. Ethnic policy conflicts must be seen as a political **construct**, one in which the political elite and the mass media are the two main sources, according to analysis of

group discussion data. In line with Rothschild's concept of ethnic policy (1982), this situation must be defined as a conflict of policy, not as an ethnic conflict. At the same time, however, it does include the threat of ethnic conflict. The future development of the situation will largely depend on the decisions and actions of the political elite.

"The idea of a conflict between the Latvians and the Russians is very often simply exaggerated." (Latvian, young person)

"Tensions in inter-ethnic relations are being developed very purposefully and consciously. The issue of who is a Latvian, who is a Russian, who is someone else – it has existed for a long time now, but it has never become abnormal in terms of its extent. (...) This is a problem which is being established artificially in relation to issues of citizenship, the state language, the ability of people to find work. It is a great source of income for the government." (Non-Latvian, young people)

"This phrase – 'relations between Latvians and Russians.' We have no relations. I carefully watch the situation in electric trains, (...) I have never witnessed any attempt to settle relations – oh, you Russian pig, oh you person of this kind. I have seen nothing of the sort, this has all been established by the politicians. (...) It is an issue which the politicians just dreamed up. I don't even want to talk about this, because personally I have a very nice attitude toward Latvians." (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

According to things which Latvians and non-Latvians say when asked to describe ethnic relations, people separate out two different issues – **ethnic relations in society as a whole** and **individual ethnic relations**. The dominant discourse is one in which relations in society at large are evaluated in negative categories (poor, conflicting, exacerbated, etc.), while individual (my) relations are seen as neutral, neutrally positive or positive. This dominant discourse is typical both among Latvians and among non-Latvians:

"When it comes to Russians, my personal situation is that I have normal and good relations with Russians. I work together with many Russians, many of my friends are Russians. If I speak of Latvians and Russians as a whole, however, then the relations really are poor, there simply is no mutual understanding there." (Latvian, middle or older generation)

"In everyday life, there is no particularly extensive isolation between Latvians and Russians. I have many colleagues who are Latvians, and somehow I don't even notice the fact that they are Latvians. If we have the same interests, then we understand each other very well. (...) In society, however, I think that the problem does exist." (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

There are, however, also alternative models for relations, and these lead to problems at the individual level, with communications being encumbered:

"Personally I don't agree. At work I have to deal with Russians quite a lot, I have to talk to them. The thing is that I know ... I have met lots of Russian speakers, and among all of them, only two are people whom I could describe as normal."

"I also think that it is difficult. I know very few Russians, but at work we supposedly are discussing one and the same thing, but it seems that they don't understand. Perhaps

because of the language, perhaps that's why it seems to be the case." (Latvian, young person)

Analysis of qualitative data shows that non-Latvians have a more positive view of ethnic relations than Latvians do. Discourse among non-Latvians typically involves statements such as "There are good relations between Latvians and Russians at the everyday level, there are no problems." Criticism is waged not against Latvians, but against decisions that are taken in the realm of ethnic policy. At the discourse level, we see that non-Latvians are dominated by the view that those who establish the state's ethnic policy are all members of the Latvian community. Thus any opposition to the political elite and its decisions often is manifested as dislike of Latvians. Here we see further evidence of something that was a major conclusion in the study "Integration of Minority Youth in the Society of Latvia in the Context of the Education Reform" (Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004) – the idea that decisions in terms of ethnic policy (in this case, education reforms) have exacerbated ethnic relations in Latvia. This explains the dominant view of ethnic relations among non-Latvians – at the everyday level they see no problems, but society at large, according to respondents, does face this problem.

"I am constantly amazed at the way in which these problems emerge. I have relatives who are Latvians, I have friends who are Latvians. I always work with Russians and Latvians. I have never had any problems. Well, there were a few problems, but they were very insignificant. People talk about these problems more than they really exist in our society. As far as I have contacted with Latvians, I have found that no one objects to the fact that others live here. What difference does it make? No one cares. Many mixed marriages involve people who live peacefully and even very happily." (Non-Latvian, young person)

Among Latvians, negative attitudes focus specifically on members of the Russian speaking community and less on politicians who, in terms of ethnic or linguistic belonging, are a part of the Russian language group and defend the ethnopolitical interests of that group. Latvians do not criticise the country's ethnic policies. On the contrary, Latvians tend to think that the state should implement even stricter controls when it comes to the implementation of the policy, particularly insofar as education reforms in minority schools are concerned. The importance and influence of ethno-political decisions in the establishment and upholding of interethnic relationships repeatedly point to the role of the political elite in seeking out solutions to ethnic tensions.

Causes of an ethnic gap

When analysing the causes of any ethnic gap that exists, we have to look separately at the views of Latvians and of non-Latvians when it comes to these causes. The relevant statements largely reflect the views of both linguistic groups when it comes to the ethno-political situation in Latvia. Non-Latvians have mentioned fewer reasons for any ethnic gap, perhaps because they tend to have more positive views about inter-ethnic relations as such than Latvians do. What's more, the reasons which are cited by non-Latvians have mostly to do with ethnic policy, while Latvians are more likely to speak of other issues – speaking Latvian, a sense of being threatened by the Russian speaking community, differences in culture and mentality, etc.

Latvian thinking about the causes of an ethnic gap

The Latvian language

According to Latvian respondents, Latvian language skills and the ability to communicate in Latvian are one of the main factors in promoting conflict among socio-linguistic groups:

“I often have contacts with Russian people. We seem to understand one another, but sometimes I’m angry that someone has lived here for so long, and in a larger audience some people have to speak Russian. Internally I am angry about this, even though I can also communicate in Russian.” (Latvian, middle and older generation)

“I am terribly upset about the fact that no one in those schools tells the kids that they have to learn, they are telling them not to learn! We will arrange it so that you can all learn in Russian, they say. No one says that the kids need the education!” (Latvian, middle and older generation)

“I often feel pain in the society in which I live, because everything happens in Russian, and I see an open lack of desire to live in any other way.” (Latvian, middle and older generation)

According to qualitative data, Latvians deal with this conflict primarily by isolating themselves and stepping aside. Specifically this means avoiding any contacts with non-Latvians, and the self-sufficiency of the Latvian language environment is used for this purpose. Data from the ongoing research “Language” (BISS, 1996-2004) tell us that for 54% of Latvians, their native language is self-sufficient for communications in the public space. When it comes to what non-Latvians think about the Latvian language and its use, however, there are negative attitudes, and quite frequently Latvian is spoken for functional reasons, not because of the motivations and free choice of the individual. We are also seeing an increase in the number of those non-Latvians who do not like to speak Latvian (BISS, 1996-2004). These two factors – the self-isolation of Latvians and the increasingly negative attitudes which are occurring among non-Latvians (something which also encourages isolation in this particular group) – must be seen as factors which deepen the ethnic gap.

Differences in culture

Cultural differences (in sociology, the concept of culture largely refers to individual lifestyles) are another issue which Latvians bring up when discussing ethnic gaps in society.

“Latvians mostly (..) well, let me say this about all of the Latvians whom I know, whom I consider to be my friends, they are mostly (..) people of culture. They have close relations with culture. Most Russian speakers ... well, I have seldom met anyone who is interested in literature or anything of that sort.” (Latvian, young person)

“No matter what kind of relations there are, whether they are normal or different, the fact is that they have something different inside of themselves. No matter who friendly you feel, there is something different there.” (Latvian, middle and older generation)

“It is very difficult [to make contacts] with others [Russian speakers]. Of course, that is because of their mentality. (...) I don’t know. It’s hard to make contacts with them, we don’t have the same interests, we don’t really have anything to discuss.” (Latvian, young person)

Non-Latvians also speak of this factor, but they don’t think that it is a cause for tensions in ethnic relations in society.

“It’s a problem of perception. There are key differences between Latvians and Russians, but given the existing level of culture and cultural resources, both demands are satisfied. I don’t see any fertile soil for conflict here. (...) There are differences, but that is not a reason for conflict. I see absolutely nothing that could be described as conflicting. It’s an issue with which people can speculate, of course, and people do that.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

Different thinking among Latvians and non-Latvians when it comes to the meaning of cultural differences in the establishment of the ethnic gap may be explained by virtue of the fact that Latvians in focus group discussion speak more about relations with non-Latvians as such, focusing critical attitudes on Russian speaking members of the community and thus stressing the things which are different between the two socio-linguistic groups. Non-Latvians, for their part, are more likely to focus negative thinking on the country’s ethnic policies and the political elite which is made up largely of ethnic Latvians, not on Latvians as such. That is why non-Latvians do not think that it is particularly important to see possible causes of an ethnic gap in the culture and lifestyle of the dominant linguistic group.

More in-depth analysis of statements that were made tell us that differences in culture (lifestyle, world view, mentality, etc.) must be seen more as guesses on the part of respondents when it comes to the issue of an ethnic gap, not really as a justified reason for the gap.

Non-Latvian thinking about the causes of an ethnic gap

The state’s ethnic policies

In discussions with non-Latvians, the view was frequently stated that non-Latvians, as opposed to Latvians, face discrimination. Respondents say that the law, particularly in relation to ethnic policies (language, education, citizenship), is favourable for Latvians and that Latvians, as a result, have greater opportunities in life than non-Latvians do. Negative attitudes among non-Latvians on ethnic issues, therefore, are focused not on Latvians as such, but rather on politicians who are blamed for the fact that there are “*bad ethnic relations*” in society.

“If you take an objective look at things, then you see that Latvians are in a much more privileged situation than Russians are. That’s not even because they speak the Latvian language, they are the titular nation. It is because of laws which favour the titular nation. You will agree with me when I say that the rights of Russian speakers are affected in many different ways.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“I don’t believe our government which says that it is thinking about the ability of our children to find work in the future, but is forcing them to study all subjects in Latvian. I don’t

believe that. The attempt to get us to believe in this idea is pointless. This is foolishness. (...) These are supposedly reforms, but they more resemble revenge." (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

The thinking of Latvians is diametrically opposite. Latvians believe that the critical attitudes of Russian speakers vis-à-vis the ethnic policies of the state have no good reason, because the law says that all of the residents of Latvia have opportunities to learn the Latvian language, to obtain citizenship and to complete an education. What's more, Latvians in focus group discussions express disgust over the situation that has emerged in the context of ethnic policy – one in which Latvians "*have to feel guilty*" about the demands that are made in regard to issues of language, citizenship and education. This indicates that process of change in the hierarchy of socio-linguistic groups has not yet been completed, and Latvians, as the titular nation of the country, still feel themselves to be an endangered majority.

"Why do we constantly have to make excuses about the fact that Latvian in the state language, that we are trying to bring that person into the sun and asking him to pass a language exam, and now there are these education reforms in those Russian schools? In the end it turns out that we have to make excuses – why are we doing this, why are we forcing the Latvian language onto people?" (Latvian, young person)

"They choose the words that are as noisy as possible, and they argue that our state language policy is aimed at harming everyone else. It's normal, after all, that a country has a state language, a primary language." (Latvian, young person)

"Any Russian speaking person can learn the language and become a citizen. Once he becomes a citizen, he has all the same rights as everyone else." (Latvian, middle or older generation)

"All of them have the opportunity to prove themselves, to study, to pass exams, to get citizenship and no longer to be a non-citizen. They will be citizens. If any of them were not allowed to learn the state language and obtain citizenship because of eye colour or the size of curls in their hair, well then we could speak about political or other national repressions. That is not the case, however!" (Latvian, middle and older generation)

If we analyse these statements from the perspective of discourse analysis, then we must conclude that the discussion about issues of ethnic policy in particular lead to binary opposition in the statements of respondents. In linguistic terms, there is a visible gap between the two socio-linguistic groups. Respondents use the terms "*us – they*" in their statements, and they strictly observe the positive self-image and the negative image of others as a discursive strategy in describing the relationships of power – something that is the most general sign of a conflict between groups (Van Dijk, 2000).

Polarisation of the views of Latvians and non-Latvians when it comes to the state's ethnic policies must be seen as a factor which promotes the emergence of a crisis in ethnic relations. This has to do with the way in which the two language groups perceive and shape relationships of power. It also points once again to the role of the political elite in seeking out solutions to conflicts over ethnic policy.

Thinking of both groups about the causes of an ethnic gap

There are some factors of an ethnic gap which are discussed by one or the other socio-linguistic groups in terms of their discourse, but analysis of qualitative data reveals that there are also factors which are of importance to both groups.

Endangered linguistic identity

One of the problems for society in the future will be fear over the preservation of linguistic identity, and this is something that is true in both groups. Both Latvians and non-Latvians understand the influence which the English language and the culture of Western Europe are having on the Latvian and Russian languages and, by extension, on their national identities. On the other hand, non-Latvians in particular will also stress the influence of the other dominant linguistic group on their own group.

“Our society will be made up of Latvians who speak with an English accent. That has always happened in Latvia. When the Germans were here, there was a powerful German accent, when the Russians were here, there was a Russian accent. The English language is very much entering our society now, in all of the advertising and so on. Just look at the names of things.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“There are people in my circle of acquaintances who are already very shy about the fact that they are Russians. There are three of us who speak Latvian to one another even though we know that we are Russians. I am bemused by people who are shy about their native language. I see this girl doing everything that she can to send her children to Latvian schools. This means that she completely wishes to reject her roots. I don't think that's proper. If we reject our roots, then we will not be able to contribute anything to society.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“I want my children to understand that they are Latvians, that they live in Latvia, that they speak Latvian.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

“I wish Latvian schools and children's homes were to devote much more attention to the Latvian environment, to ethnography. The Latvians themselves are not upholding Latvian traditions, they are not teaching them to the children. These are things which should be taught to the children.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

There are several circumstances in terms of foreign and domestic policy alike which have brought up fears about preserving one's own native language and, by extension, one's linguistic identity.

Latvia's accession to the European Union is the first of these. Both Latvians and non-Latvians are convinced that there will be increasing competition in terms of language, and this will have an effect on inter-ethnic relations in Latvia and on the development of multiculturalism. This, in turn, will inevitably have an effect on local cultural identities, as well.⁹

⁹ Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. “Latvijas iedzīvotāju motivācija un ekspektācijas attiecībā pret Latvijas iestāšanos Eiropas Savienībā” (Motivation and Expectations of Latvian Society in the Framework of Latvia's Integration into European Union), research, 2003.

Second, things that happened in 2004 in the context of minority education reforms indicate that the linguistic identity of Russians is becoming more and more important. One of the conclusions of the study “Integration of Minority Youth in the Society of Latvia in the Context of the Education Reform” (Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004) is that protests against educational reforms essentially represent an effort of the Russian linguistic community to preserve the area, prestige and status of the socio-linguistic functions of the Russian language in society. These processes have affected the views of Latvians when it comes to their language and the preservation and strengthening of its status. This means that issues concerning the preservation of Latvian identity are also on the table. This was seen in the qualitative data of this study. Analysis shows that strategies which Latvians suggest in terms of dealing with tensions related to ethnic policy involve self-isolation and forced changes.

Interpretations of history

The literature tells us that one factor which leads to national thinking is a collective memory of political history. If everyone in a country has a collective memory of political history, then that is a fundamental element in national identity (Smith, 1997, 2002), as well as a factor of integration in society. In Latvia, most Russian speakers have a different memory of history than most Latvians do. When non-Latvians think about history, they do not think about the pre-Soviet history of Latvia – something that is of key importance in nurturing the national sense of belonging of ethnic Latvians.

That the understanding and interpretation of history can lead to an ethnic gap is shown in direct statements by respondents to say that people of one or the other group hold “wrong” views about history – something which results in negative attitudes vis-à-vis the other ethnic or linguistic group. There are also discussions in which participants demonstrated their own understanding of Latvian history, particularly with regard to the country’s occupation and to the period of time which Latvia spent as a part of the Soviet Union. These observations have been made not just in this study, but also in other BISS research (Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004).

“I think that the biases are more based on history. Right now I could not tell you about any way in which Russia or those Russians have harmed me, I can’t see any reason why I should hate them. I think that this is more true among our older generation, they had different experiences, it was more painful for them.” (Latvian, young person)

“When the Soviet Union accepted Latvia as a member, it began to build up industry, it built factories. People who worked there were sent in from all over the country, from the Urals, the Caucasus. These are people who built things, they invested in industry, they developed industry. Now they are all told that they are immigrants. They all worked on behalf of this country. We lived under the rule of the Germans for 700 years. Why didn’t the Germans build a Ford factory here? I cannot tell you anything that remained in Latvia after those 700 years, I will talk about Daugavpils, the ‘Lokomotīve’ factory, the chemical fibre factory, the issue of metal processing. The occupants, as [the Latvians] call them, left something behind. They did not remove anything from this country.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

“If I compare Latvian and Russian school textbooks, I get confused. I read text to say that Latvia was occupied. As far as I know in my life, Latvia was a part of the Soviet Union, part of a big country. Now I read in books that it was occupied. From my own experience, I

know that this is not true, but future generations will read the same things and believe them. History is meant to ensure that people learn from their mistakes. Let's do that, let's not rewrite history on behalf of our own goals." ("Integration of Minority Youth in the Society of Latvia in the Context of the Education Reform", BISS, 2004, discussion among non-Latvian students)

Analysis of the reasons which the two groups propose with respect to the emergence of an ethnic gap shows that the state's ethnic policies are one of the most important factors (the same conclusion was made in previous BISS research – Zepa, Kļave, et al., 2004; Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004). Analysis of the qualitative data in this study shows that each linguistic group has a different view about the main causes for an ethnic gap. The dominant view among Latvians focuses on the Latvian language and on the "incorrect" understanding of historical truth when it comes to the Soviet Union's policies in Latvia. Among non-Latvians, by contrast, thinking is dominated by the "unjust" nature of citizenship and education policies. Essentially these different understandings of the causes of a socio-linguistic split confirm that there is an ethnic gap in place.

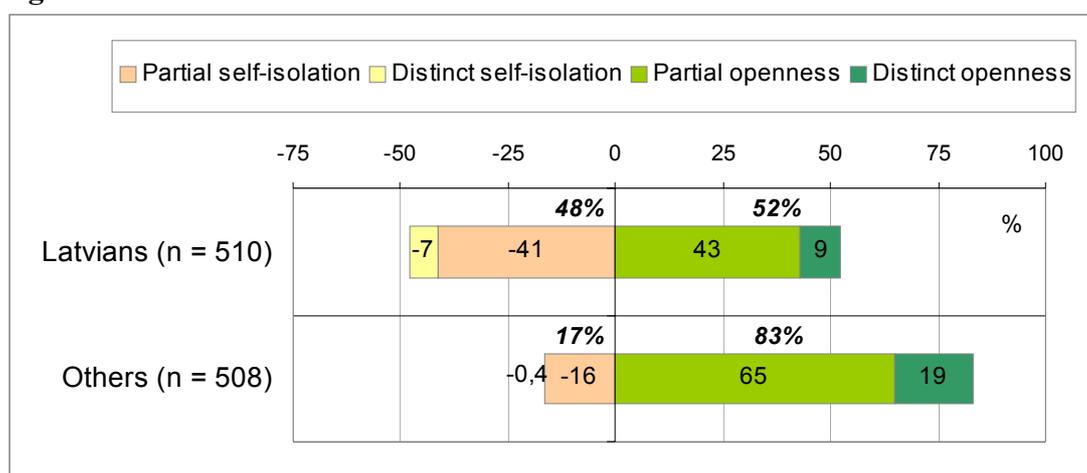
Tendencies of self-isolation

The study “Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society” (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004) shows that among Latvians, people more often tend to be cautious and to isolate themselves from other ethnic groups than is the case among non-Latvians. Among surveyed Latvians, 48% stated that they are more or less people who isolate themselves in terms of ethnicity; among non-Latvians, the figure was just 17%.

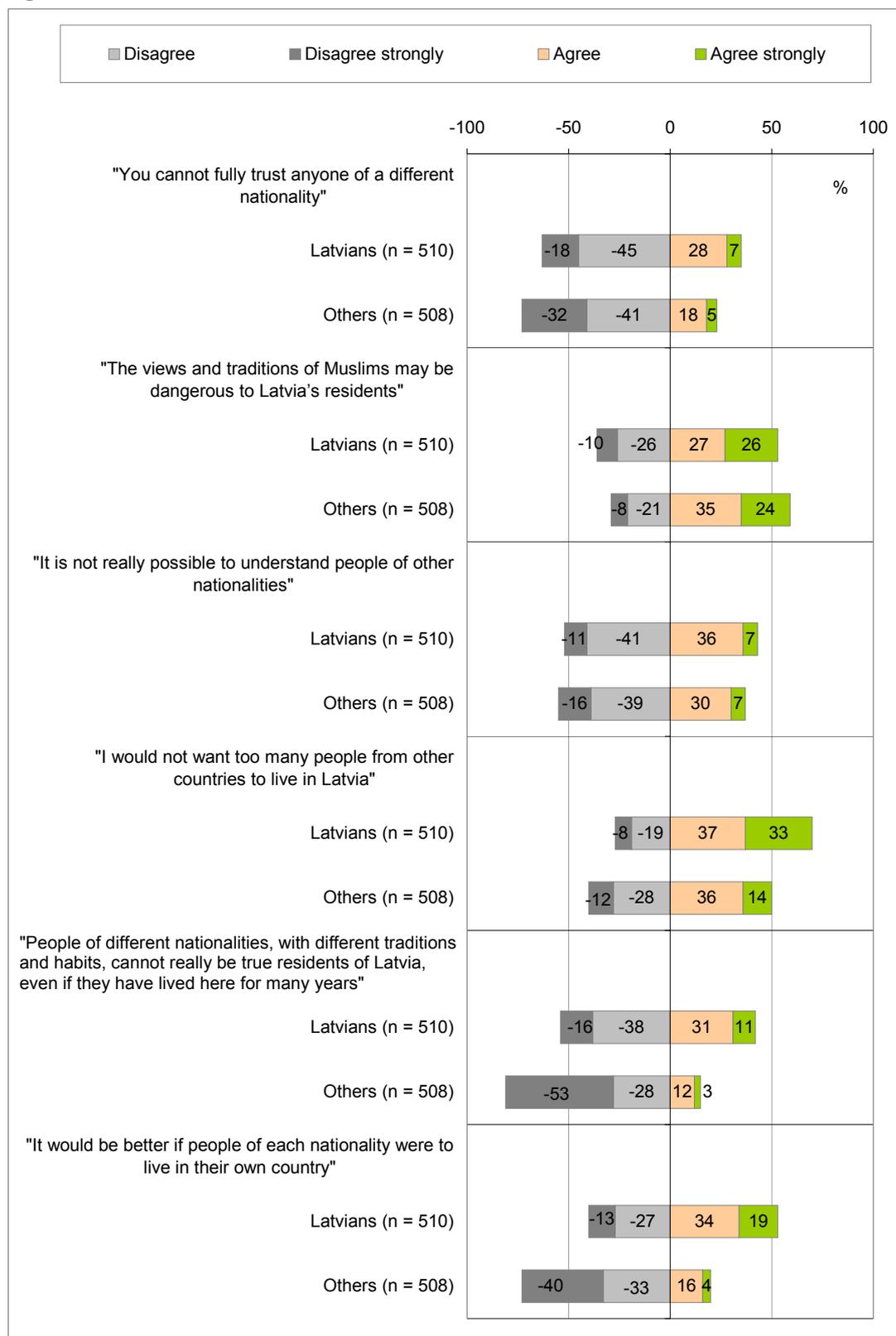
The greatest differences in the views of non-Latvians and Latvians were identified in response to three specific statements which respondents were asked to rate:

“I would not want lots of people from different countries to live in Latvia”, “People of other nationalities who have different traditions and habits cannot be true residents of Latvia, even if they live here for many years”, and “It would be better if people of each nationality were to live in their own country” (see Figure 17).

Figure 16. The ethnic self-isolation index



Source: Avots: Zepa, B., Šūpule, I., Krastiņa, L., Peņķe, I., Krišāne, J. (2004) Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society. Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. Page 53.

Figure 17. Statements which indicate ethnic self-isolation

Source: Avots: Zepa, B., Šūpule, I., Krastiņa, L., Peņķe, I., Krišāne, J. (2004) Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society. Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. Page 55.

The authors of the study used various theories to explain the self-isolation among Latvians. According to the conflict theory of Esses, potentially competitive external groups which might increase competition among groups are viewed very cautiously or are rejected altogether. In other words, self-isolation is seen as a desire to avoid conflict. Second, tendencies of self-isolation among Latvians are explained through the hypothesis of contacts of Allport: Latvians less often than non-Latvians have made contacts with people of other nationalities, and so they are more cautious. Third, the tendency of Latvians toward self-isolation can be explained by the fact that some Latvians feel threatened. This is common, because Latvians do not yet feel themselves to be a majority in their own country, they feel threatened when it comes to their “natural” rights (Blumer, 1958). Among Latvians, the sense of endangerment is also enhanced by psychological insecurities, a lack of self-esteem, and a shortage of self-confidence. These are factors which have remained in place since Soviet times.

The results of focus group discussions tell us that at the level of the individual, self-isolation or distancing from the other ethnic or linguistic groups is one of the most typical strategies in terms of reducing ethnic tensions. It is a strategy which is used to prevent the threat of direct conflict, and it is particularly typical among Latvians. To supplement the conclusions that were drawn from the study “Ethnic Tolerance and Integration of the Latvian Society” (Zepa, Šūpule, et al., 2004), we must say that another factor which explains the self-isolation of Latvians, particularly vis-à-vis Russians, is the historical strategy of preserving national identity – shaping a more or less closed internal group with a system of cultural codes that can be understood by all members of that group.

The sense of endangerment is less common among young Latvians. If people in this age group isolate themselves from others, that is more because of “ideological comfort” that is promoted by the state’s ethnic policies, which are favourable for Latvians. This means that Latvians may see no need to seek out any other strategy in dealing with conflicts over ethno-political attitudes – compromise or integration, for instance. This means that the process of mutual integration is poorly developed in Latvian society, and one of the causes for this may be that Latvians have little motivation when it comes to integration.

When it comes to talking about “pressure from Russia”, respondents “tell stories” (according to the principles of critical discourse analysis, the “telling of stories” is a scheme for argumentation which is an antonym to the concept of “an argued approach”, i.e., one that is based on objective facts (Kalmus, 2003)) about the way in which Russian speaking residents of Latvia are, with the support of Russia, asked not to obey the law and to fight for their rights as a minority nationality. Latvian respondents see a certain amount of danger on the part of Russia. Participants in the discussions think that Moscow is endangering Latvia with the help of opposition politicians.

“As long as a third power [Russia] dictates terms – and that is no secret to anyone – the third power will provide financing for people who fire up emotions here, it is in their interests to ensure that life here is not peaceful. Russia is the highest power, not them [points to a photo collage of the then prime minister, Indulis Emsis, and the president of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga]. The Russians rule this country.” (Latvian, young person)

“In Russia there’s an Internet site about Latvia. There are all sorts of statements there in which Russians in Latvia are called up to act in one way or another. (...) ‘Russian schools – our Stalingrad’ is their main slogan. (...) The site suggests that Russians refuse to

buy tickets on public transport, it encourages them to cause unrest.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

These statements illustrate the sense of endangerment which Latvians feel. Collective ethnic fears and the so-called “security dilemma” which is facilitated by purposefully created nationalist myths and threats of external danger – these help certain groups to emerge and to mobilise, and they are, therefore, one of the most important means for exacerbating ethnic conflicts (Rothschild, 1982).

It has to be said, however, that respondents from the middle and older generations of ethnic Latvians were radically negative vis-à-vis the Russian speaking community, and stories about the way in which Russians and Russia are endangering Latvians in Latvia may be seen as a way of legitimising the radically negative positions of the story tellers themselves. In accordance with the principles of critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1995, 1998, 2000), respondents are using the discursive strategy of justification so as to preserve their positive self-image while talking about ethnic relations.

In this context, the strategy which Latvians use in reducing ethnic tensions involves isolation of non-Latvians (which is a way of implementing passive self-isolation). This is seen in the convictions that were stated by the group on more than one occasion – that Russian speakers should leave Latvia and return to their ethnic homeland or move to some other country.

“First of all, there should be a law which helps those people to depart for their ethnic homeland, that is one thing. (...) Let them go to study or work in Russia. The labour market is free there. Let them go to Germany to work.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

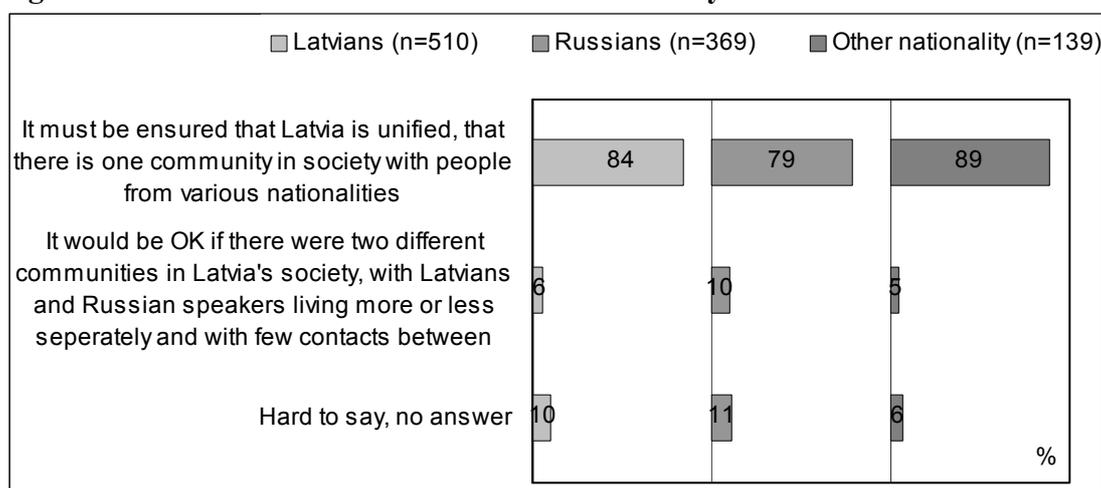
“This is an issue which the government should have resolved, the state should have helped the people who want to leave. If someone wants to go and live in his homeland, that can only be supported.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

Views about the model of Latvia's society in the future

Quantitative survey data show that Latvians, Russians and people of other nationalities tend to have similar visions of their future from many different aspects. Some 84% of Latvians, 79% of Russians and 89% of people of other nationalities believe that *Latvia must be unified, with one community in society in which people of various nationalities live together*. Only 6% of Latvians, 10% of Russians and 5% of people of other nationalities agree that *Latvia can also have a society of two communities in which Latvians and Russian speakers live more apart and have few contacts between themselves*. This indicates that most people in Latvia hope to see the emergence of a friendly and unified society, they do not want separatism. It has to be said, however, that understandings about how this kind of society can be created differ between the various nationalities.

Figure 18. Views about the model of Latvia's society in the future



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

If we take a close-up look at the views which are held by respondents when it comes to the future of Latvia's society, we simply have to say that the way in which people think about the important issues of the future allows us to gain a more in-depth understanding of the important agenda of the present day. This is made clear by the thinking of respondents vis-à-vis ways in which the problems of the present day can be resolved or, on the contrary, made more complex.

Among participants in the focus groups, the dominant view about Latvia's society in the future (10 years from now) is that society will not change much. The processes and problems which typify society today will continue to develop (Table 3).

It is key to note here that Latvians and non-Latvians have one and the same views about the future of Latvia. In all groups, respondents cited the same primary subjects – increasing socio-economic stratification in society, a crisis in national (ethnic identity), a variety of cultures (multiculturalism), the importance of levels of income, environmental issues and the quality of food. Other subjects were mentioned less frequently: The European Union, Americanisation as an example of the hegemony of American culture (this is part of the debate over the threats and crisis

which are faced in terms of ethnic identity), crises in terms of the family as a social institution, new technologies, as well as shifts in the values of young people.

“The same problems will persist. There will always be strata in which people lack something.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

“We will not face a situation in which money is no longer important. Money is the cornerstone of the fact that we have families, we have homes, we have a certain sense of security. Money always ensures this. When we say that money is not everything – well, money is one of the most important things, you can’t do anything about that.” (Latvian, young person)

“I am also interested to know whether Latvia will preserve it’s identity in the national sense – learning the language and so forth. Perhaps we will all be known as Americans, not as Russians, Latvians or Belarusians. Will that be true 10 years from now?” (Non-Latvian, young person)

“In the future there will be one big country, and it will be called America! (..) Perhaps not after 10 years, but there will be one country, I am certain of that. Differences will disappear, they’re already disappearing. (..) If you observe the universally accepted rules, then everything is fine, there are no differences. (..) Everyone will lose nationality.” (Non-Latvian, young person)

Analysis of the data from the discussions shows that the public agenda of the future will not contain issues which have to do with ethnic policy or ethnic relations, and that indirectly indicates that these are relatively unimportant issues at this time. This confirms the previously stated idea about the fact that crises in ethnic relations and conflicts in terms of attitudes over ethnic policy are a forced item on the agenda. The emphasis is on social and economic welfare which, according to respondents, influences all other processes in society, including the extent to which an individual is satisfied with his or her life.

“Welfare in society will increase and people will have money, or else society will be naked in the poison ivy. In a healthy and wealthy society, all other problems disappear somewhere. Well, they remain in place, but they are not the most important ones.” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

The desire to depart from Latvia

Most people in Latvia have never given any thought to the possibility that they might leave. The largest share of those who question the possibility that they might depart is found among Russians (22%) – 11% say that they see no possibility of leaving Latvia, 10% have not yet decided, and 1% have decided that they will certainly leave. Among people of other nationalities, 15% agree – 10% see no chance, 4% have not decided, 1% will leave. Among Latvians they are 13% (6%, 4% and 3%).

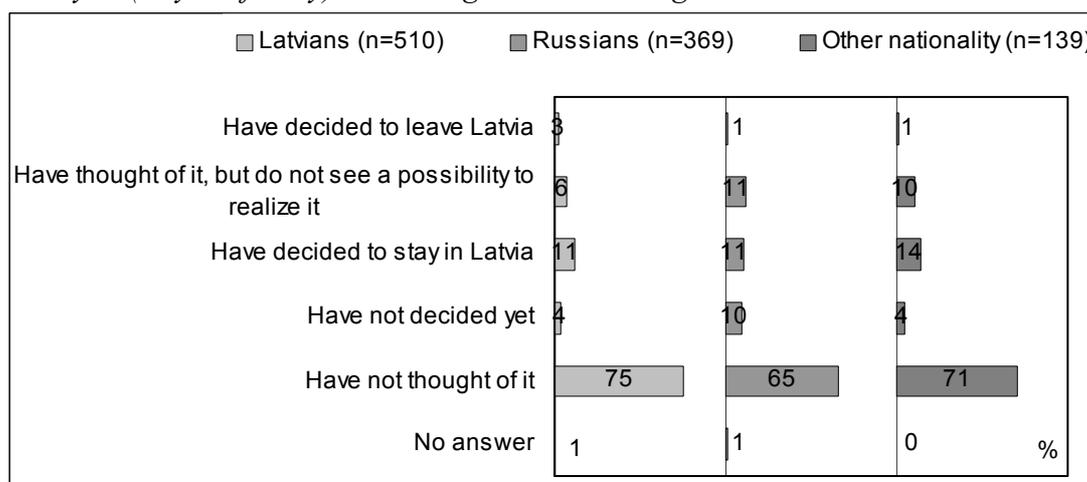
Respondents who were interviewed in Russian were asked to compare the opportunities which they face in Latvia to those which they would face in Russia. Survey results show that nearly one-half of Russians and people of other nationalities (47% and 55% respectively) think that their standard of living is better in Latvia than

it could be in Russia. 50% and 61% respectively think that they and their families will do much better in Latvia than in Russia. Russians and people of other nationalities, however, are more sceptical about this statement: “*It is easier for a person like me to find work in Latvia than in Russia.*” Only 36% of Russians and 41% of people of other nationalities agreed. Nearly one-third of the respondents (26%-36%) could not answer the questions at all.

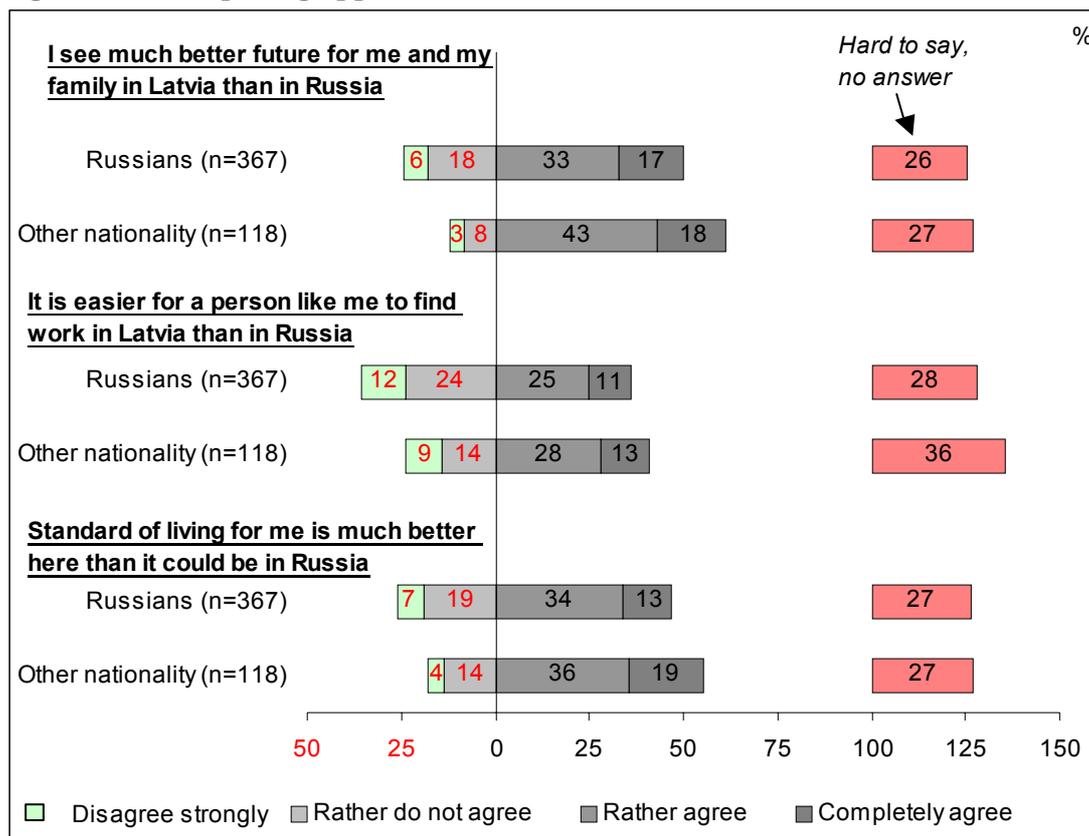
All told, this indicates that nearly one-half of Russians and other non-Latvians have motivations in terms of remaining in Latvia – they think that the standard of living is better here than in Russia.

Figure 19. The desire to depart from Latvia

Have you (or your family) ever thought about leaving Latvia?



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Figure 20. Comparing opportunities in Latvia and Russia

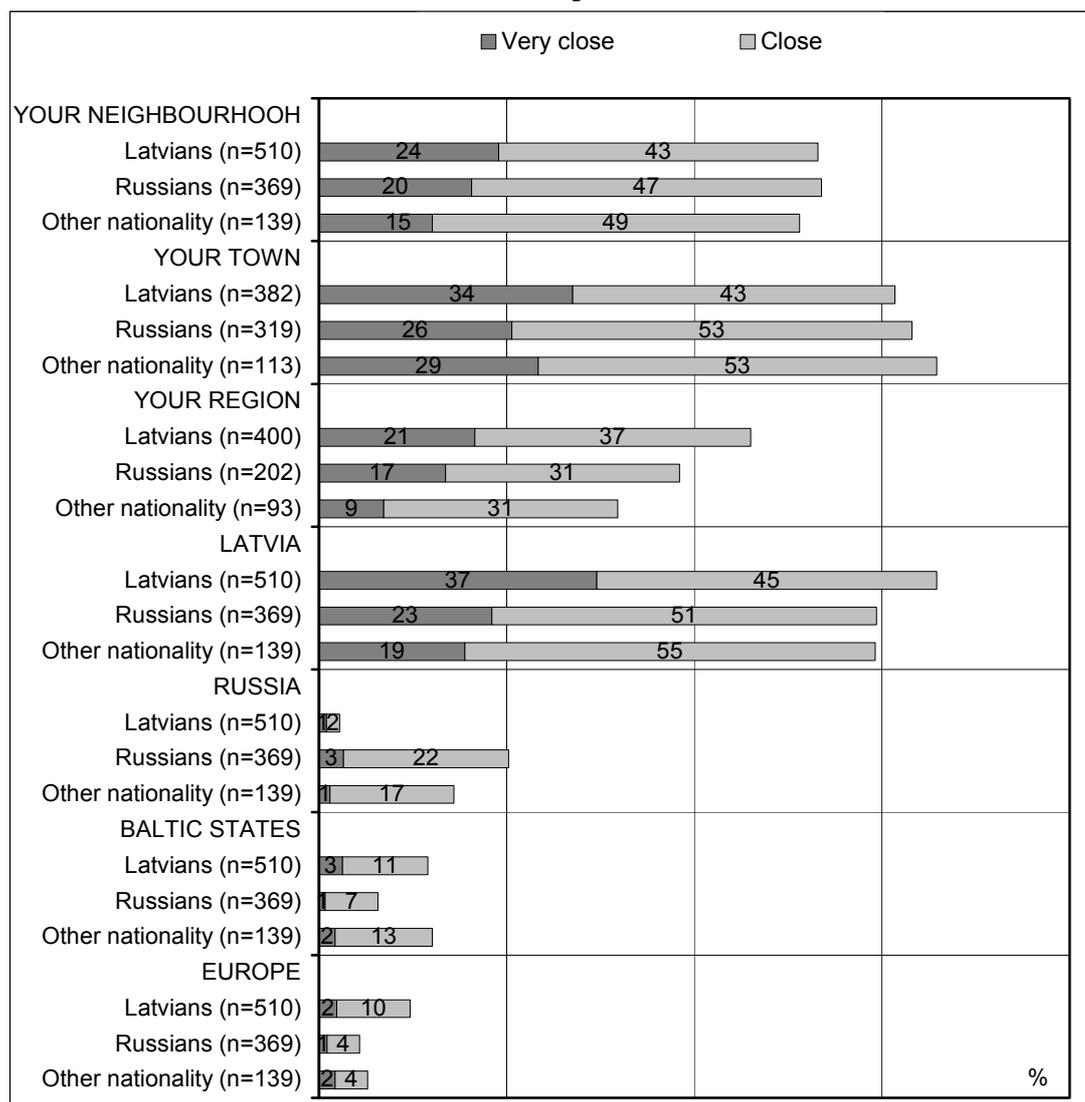
Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. % of those who were interviewed in Russian, N=504

The sense of belonging and civic identity

People were asked to respond to the question of “*How close are your links with ...*”, and the answers that were given indicate that Latvians, Russians and people of other nationalities have the closest links with their city and with Latvia. Among Latvians, 82% said that they feel a sense of belonging in Latvia, while among Russians and people of other nationalities, the same is true among 74% of respondents. Asked whether they feel a sense of belonging in their home town, 77% of Latvians, 79% of Russians and 82% of people of other nationalities answered in the affirmative. **All told, this indicates that most Russians and other non-Latvians who are resident in Latvia feel a sense of belonging here.**

If we analyse the extent to which Russians and people of other nationalities feel a sense of linkage to Russia, we see that few Russians and other non-Latvians in Latvia feel such a sense of contact – 25% and 18% respectively.

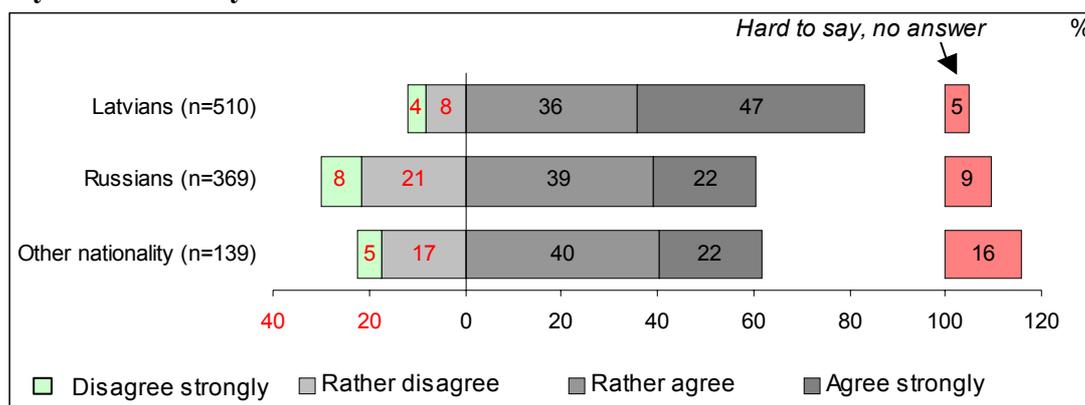
Figure 21. A sense of belonging in one's neighbourhood, one's city or region, Latvia, Russia, the Baltic States and Europe



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

It has to be noted here that the sense of belonging in Latvia is more distinct among ethnic Latvians. Asked to respond to the statement that “*I would rather live in Latvia than in any other country*”, 83% of Latvians, but only 61% of Russians and 62% of other non-Latvians agreed. A total of 47% of Latvians are completely convinced of the truth of that statement (i.e., they are the ones who answered “completely agree”, as opposed to “partly agree”). The same was true only of 22% of Russians and other non-Latvians.

Figure 22. Attitudes toward the statement “I would rather live in Latvia than in any other country”



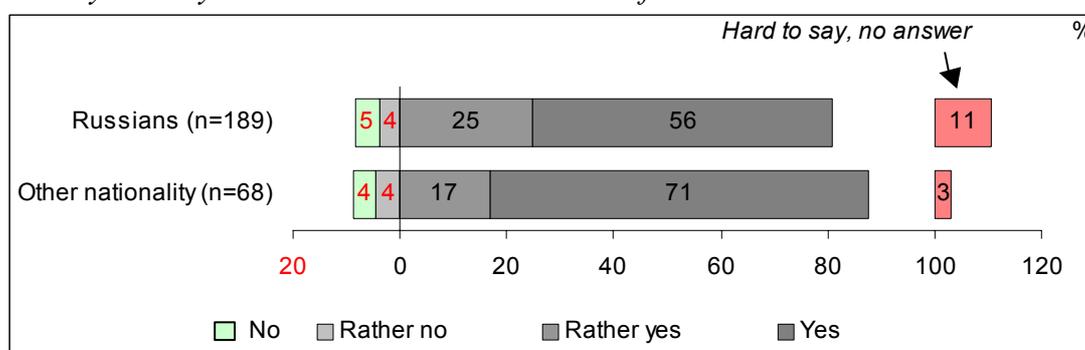
Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. N=1018

Among surveyed Latvians, all respondents were citizens, while among Russians and other non-Latvians, 49% of Russians and 51% of others were citizens of Latvia.

Among those Russians and people of other nationalities who are not citizens of Latvia, only 9% and 8% respectively said that they would not want their children to become citizens of Latvia. Fully 81% of Russians and 88% of people of other nationalities want their children to obtain citizenship. Asked whether they themselves are planning to seek naturalization, 34% of Russian non-citizens and 37% of non-citizens from other non-Latvian nationalities said that they plan to do so.

Figure 23. Attitudes toward children becoming citizens of Latvia

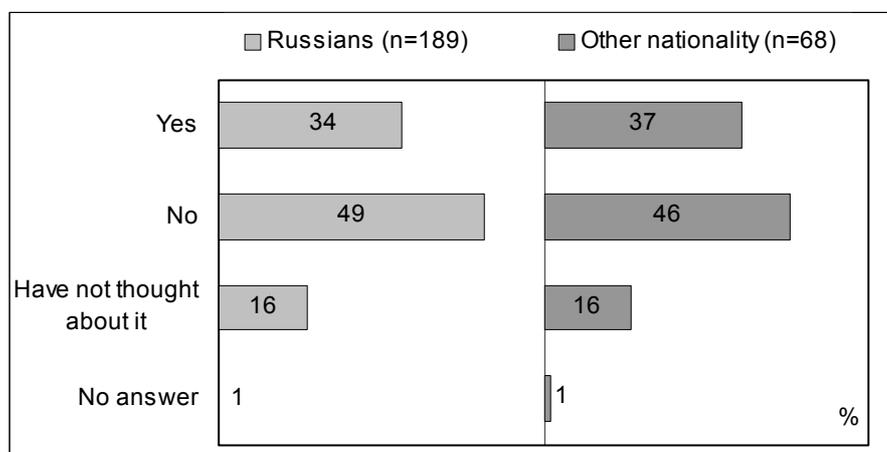
Would you like your children to become citizens of Latvia?



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. % of non-citizens, N=257

Figure 24. Attitudes toward one's own becoming a citizen of Latvia through naturalisation

Are you yourself planning to become a citizen of Latvia through the process of naturalisation?



Source: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences. April 2004. % of non-citizens, N=257

The development of ethnic relations in the future

Participants in the focus group discussions found it quite difficult to discuss the way in which ethnic relations might develop in Latvia in the future. The views that were stated can, in general terms, be divided up into three groups – ones which conform to three different scenarios in terms of the development of ethnic relations:

(1) One of the most radical scenarios is open ethnic conflict. This view is typically held by middle aged and older people, Latvians in particular. Non-Latvians tended to speak more in the form of assumptions, not declarations of fact, when it came to the possibility of such developments in ethnic relations.

“It is a time bomb, and the fuse has already been lit. There will be a very major conflict at some point. Everything is calm in society right now, there are demonstrations and picket lines, but something will explode, it certainly will! And then radical steps will be taken in response, I am sure of that.” (Latvian, middle or older generation).

“If people are allowed to do anything that they want, as is the case now (.), if that continues then it [a conflict] will occur. Not immediately, but developing gradually, gradually ... those kinds of groups will emerge.” (Latvian middle or older generation)

“If a time bomb is set up in society, then it starts to explode after 10 years or so. The 10 years have passed and discussions about conflict are beginning. The bomb is slowly starting to explode. Who needs that?” (Non-Latvian, middle or older generation)

2) Ethnic relations will not change. This is a view that is typical of young people, both Latvians and non-Latvians. Respondents think that at the very worst, we can expect forms of organised protests – meetings, picket lines, demonstrations. Non-Latvians doubt that there will be open ethnic conflict, arguing that Latvians are a socially inactive group and will isolate themselves instead of engaging in open conflict. Young Latvians, by contrast, believe that at worst, we can expect public

denunciations from other countries, particularly Russia, when it comes to the ethnic policies which Latvia implements vis-à-vis non-Latvians and minorities.

(3) The most positive possible scenario, according to respondents, is integration. The two socio-linguistic groups, however, have different views about this model. Latvians expect non-Latvians to integrate (this is again a passive form of building up relations), while non-Latvians perceive integration mostly as a way of yielding on issues of ethnic policy (rules for obtaining citizenship, education reforms, the availability of Latvian language lessons). In other words, non-Latvians expect Latvians, too, to be active in the process of integration.

“It all depends on the individual – how much the individual, the Russian individual, wants to become integrated into the environment in which he lives. His brain may fully accept this country as the place of his residence or, as my colleagues said, he may continue to behave like a victor – I own, I deserve, etc. It is the inner world of a peculiar person.”

“That’s the thing – they don’t want to become integrated!” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

“There really are two options here – society can break up into two parts once again. There will be those who want to integrate, at best their children will learn the Latvian language, work in Latvia, perhaps find a second fatherland here. There will also be those who cannot integrate – they will leave.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

It has to be added here that Latvian respondents, to a certain extent, doubt that integration will be a scenario in the development of inter-ethnic relations in the future, and so they instead propose another model – self-isolation which is implemented with the strategy of staying away from Russian speakers (who are expected to leave Latvia).

“The best situation would be one in which those who do not like it here just leave and go where they are satisfied.” (Latvian, young person)

“I know that their origins date back to cattle breeders and travellers from ancient times, they are not the same as Latvians who sit in their own farm for generations. If they feel that the situation is better somewhere else and that the roads are open, then perhaps they will leave.” (Latvian, middle or older generation)

In all, it has to be said that the scenarios which respondents describe in terms of the development of ethnic relations in the future lead us to two fundamentally important conclusions. First of all, when respondents think about the development of inter-ethnic relations in the future, they focus on ethno-political issues more than on mutual relationships. This indicates that issues of ethnic policy are important in ethnic relations. Second, there are different strategies for the establishment of ethnic relations and the reduction of tensions. Latvians tend to present passive strategies (they expect non-Latvians to engage in protests, to integrate and to leave), while Russian speaking young people are more likely to speak of active forms of dealing with ethno-political problems. They expect both sides to act, and this indicates that there are different expectations in many areas, not least in terms of ethnic considerations.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LATVIAN AND THE RUSSIAN PRESS

Introduction

These were our goals in conducting a comparative analysis of the Latvian language and Russian language press in Latvia:

- To study the differences between major Latvian language and Russian language newspapers when it comes to ideas about ethnic policy;
- To find out how true it is that there are two separate media spaces in Latvia – one dominated by the Russian language, the other dominated by the Latvian language.

In order to achieve this, researchers did the following things:

- They selected articles about education reform in the Latvian and Russian newspapers;
- Using the method of critical discourse analysis, they analysed the way in which issues concerning education reforms were reflected in the Latvian and the Russian press;
- They compared the discourses that were found in the Latvian and the Russian newspapers.

Articles that were published during two periods were selected for analysis – those that were published in February 2004, and those that were published between August 15 and September 15, 2004. In both instances, there were major protests against education reforms in minority schools, and these protests attracted a great deal of attention. Articles were selected from three Latvian and three Russian dailies – *Diena*, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* and *Latvijas Avīze* in Latvian, and *Chas*, *Vesti Segodnya* and *Telegraf* in Russian.

In order to ensure a more precise comparison of the positions that were presented in the papers, researchers chose articles which focused on specific aspects of education reforms – ones that were reflected in the Latvian and the Russian press to a sufficient degree. Within these subjects, researchers selected those articles which best reflected the position taken by the newspaper itself – articles which contained more than just a few paragraphs and which were written by the relevant newspaper's reporters. Letters to the editor were not considered.

The socio-political context

The time periods that were selected for media analysis – the entire month of February, 2004, as well as the period between August 15 and September 15 of that year – were periods when there were active protests against education reforms in minority schools all over Latvia. In order to present the background to these events, we provide here a brief summary of the 2004 protests and other events in relation to the education reforms that were to be implemented at the minority schools:

- On January 22, a protest was held at the building of the Latvian parliament under the slogan “Hands off of Russian schools!”. Parliament on that day was planning to approve amendments to the Education law which had been proposed by the government in May 2003 so as to declare that 60% of classes at the high school level must be taught in Latvian, while the other 40% can be taught in the minority

language. On second reading, however, the law was adopted in a different version, declaring that all classes at the high school level must be taught in Latvian, save only for those which have to do with ethnic identity and culture.

- On January 23, there was a protest in Rīga against the new version of the law, with protesters gathering outside the building of the Ministry of Education and Science. MPs from the governing coalition in Parliament declared that on third reading, the law would be returned to its previous version – 60% of classes taught in Latvian, 40% in the native language. Moreover, schools would be able to select those classes that would be taught in the two languages.

- On January 29, minority students protested in the town of Ventspils.

- On February 5, the Education law amendments were approved on third reading. There were protests outside of Parliament and the offices of the Latvian president.

- On February 11, another protest was held outside the offices of the president. The president had until February 12 to decide whether to sign the law or to send it back to Parliament for further consideration.

- On February 13, the president proclaimed the approved amendments to the Education law. The Russian Schools Defence Headquarters (a non-governmental protest group) declared that this decision by the president meant that she is not the president of all of Latvia's residents.

- The amendments to the law on education took effect on February 27. A protest action called "Wall" was held in Rīga to defend a video that had been produced by opponents of the law – "Black Kārlis" made reference to the Latvian education minister and was a parody of the Pink Floyd song "Another Brick in the Wall".

- On March 6, there was a congress of the defenders of Russian schools in Latvia. Delegates made three major demands – reinstate education in Russian, award Latvian citizenship to all non-citizens, and grant official status to the Russian language.

- On April 15, another protest was held against education reforms in Rīga. The aim was to present a letter to the prime minister and to the education minister. The letter was titled "We don't need these kinds of reforms!"

- On April 16, an open lesson in the Russian language was taught outside of Rīga's Hall of Congresses.

- On May 1, there was an unauthorised protest in the town of Liepāja against the shift of high schools toward more classes being taught in Latvian. People distributed invitations in schools, calling on students to attend a protest "against the destruction of education in Russian".

- Also on May 1, there was a protest called "For Russian schools in a unified Europe" in Rīga.

- On June 10, the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters organised a meeting between defenders of Russian schools and the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner, Alvaro Hill-Robles, and with several members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Throughout the summer, the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters prepared for protests on September 1 – the start of the new school year. Debates over the protests and education reforms as such intensified in the latter half of August. In mid-August, protesters sent a letter to Latvia's government to warn that mass protests

against education reforms “cause serious concerns about the possibility that on September 1, protesters may become involved in open conflicts with the police”.

- From August 23 until September 3, opponents to the education reforms held protests in the Esplanade park of Rīga. The protests continued around the clock for 12 days.

- Between August 22 and September 5, six protesters engaged in a hunger strike.

- On September 1, protest brochures were distributed to students as they stood in line on the first day of school. In the evening, eight protesters chained themselves to the doors of the Cabinet of Ministers.

- Also on September 1, the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters organised a rally in Victory Park in Rīga, but the Ministry of Education and the Rīga City Council stole their thunder by organising a concert in honour of “Knowledge Day”, with performances by Latvian and Russian musicians, including the popular band *Mumij Trolj*.

- On September 2, the vast majority of minority students in Latvia ignored calls from the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters to boycott classes and went to school as planned.

- On September 11, some 270 representatives of Russian organisations gathered for the establishment of a new NGO – the Unified Congress of the Russian Community in Latvia. Delegates declared that they would fight over issues of language, citizenship and power in government.

Results of the analysis

In this paper, we are using the terms “Latvian newspapers” and “Russian newspapers”, because the processes of education reforms were discussed in different ways in the Latvian language press and the Russian language press. Within those two groups, however, there were also significant differences. The newspaper *Latvijas Avīze*, for instance, took a more nationalist position than did the other Latvian language newspapers. In general terms, however, each newspaper supported a certain viewpoint to a greater or lesser degree, and that is the prism through which journalists wrote about the processes of the education reforms.

Before looking at the way in which specific events and social actors were reflected in the Latvian and the Russian press, let us describe the general positions of the various newspapers when it comes to issues of education reforms and ethnic relations as such.

Latvian language newspapers contained much less in the way of information about the minority education reforms than did the Russian language newspapers, and only the most major events in relation to the reforms found their way into the pages of the Latvian newspapers. This means that Latvian language newspapers were focused on Latvian readers, assuming that they were not much interested in minority education reforms. This is also evidenced by the fact that when there were articles about major events in relation to the reforms, authors often presented a general review of the situation in this process at the beginning of their stories, also writing about changes that have occurred in the field of minority education since the restoration of Latvia’s independence.

The most typical propositions¹⁰ or, in other words, the most important subjects in the Latvian language press were the following:

The Latvian language must be learned to a very high degree at minority schools so that all young people have equal opportunities to enter state universities and to be competitive in the job market. Education reforms are one way of ensuring that students in minority schools achieve good Latvian language skills.

The law says that in pursuit of this goal, the Latvian language must be the language of instruction in schools. The protests of Russian speakers are confusing, because the state has yielded and rejected the demand that all students study only in the Latvian language, instead setting out the proportion of 60:40. The protests can be ignored, because only a small segment of the Russian speaking public took part. The only thing that is upsetting is the open dissatisfaction and militant mood of the Russian speakers, the opposition of these people to the emergence of a Latvian Latvia.

In the newspapers that were published in Russian, events surrounding the education reforms were discussed to a far greater degree than was the case in the Latvian language press. The fact that education reforms were an important subject for the Russian language newspapers is indicated that in virtually every interview that was conducted by these papers during the aforementioned periods of time, no matter what the central subject, questions were posed about the interviewee's attitude vis-à-vis the education reforms.

These are the propositions of the Russian speakers:

Rights and opportunities must be equal in terms of a child's right to pursue an education in his or her native language – if Latvians have that opportunity, then Russian children must have it, as well.

In Russian language newspapers comparisons are drawn to Soviet times, arguing that education reforms represent Latvian revenge in relation to the sufferings of the Soviet period, but at the same time, Latvians were not banned from studying in their native language at that time, so the current policies of the state are crueller and less tolerant than were the rules that existed in the Soviet times.

Russian speakers believe that everyone must learn and speak the Latvian language, but when it comes to the way in which the language is to be taught at school, most Russian speakers think that Latvian language lessons would be enough (that is the way in which Latvians learned very good Russian), other classes should not be taught in Latvian. If subjects are taught in Latvian, the level of knowledge of students deteriorates (this latter argument was usually not mentioned in the Latvian language press).

Because the newspapers largely represented one or another position vis-à-vis education reforms, other views were published seldom or in a specific light. In the Russian language newspapers, opposite views were published if they were expressed by the government officials who were responsible for education policies and supported it. It has to be said that the Russian newspapers, unlike the Latvian newspapers, did occasionally present opposing views from their own midst – Russian speakers who support education reforms, for instance. Minority representatives

¹⁰ The term “propositions” here is used in the sense of critical discourse analysis. Of great importance in discourse is the way in which subjects are represented, the way in which information is selected and emphasised within discourse. It was Van Dijk who used the term “proposition” to refer to these subjects.

appeared less often in the Latvian language press than Latvians appeared in the minority press during the period of time that was studied.

When newspapers considered education reforms in the context of ethnic relations, several major types of discourse appeared:

The discourse "We do not want hatred" was used in the Latvian and the Russian newspapers alike, but from opposite sides of the issue. Latvian language newspapers created the impression that protesters were aggressive, while Russian language newspapers insisted that the protests were very peaceful – the hunger strike, for instance, was presented as a form of non-violent protest. This served to legitimate the relevant position, to discredit the other side and to strengthen the contradiction between the two ethno-linguistic groups (us against them).

"When the column of people yelling 'Hands off of Russian schools!' marched past a Latvian school, windows were opened, and our children waved at their peers in a friendly way. Politicians should shut up about the idea that national hatred is being fomented. Russian children do not link protests aimed at defending their Russian schools to any kind of national quarrel!" (Vesti Segodnya, February 6)

The discourse of Fascism appeared quite often in the Russian language newspapers, with Latvians being compared in various contexts to Fascists and the state's education policies – to genocide. Latvian and Russian language newspapers have always presented different views about what happened at the conclusion of World War II. Latvian language newspapers present those events as an occupation, while Russian language newspapers describe them as a liberation from Fascism. The discourse of Fascism is also connected to the discussion about involvement of Latvians in war crimes. This is a discourse which provides a clear sense of moral superiority to those who engage in it, and that helps to legitimate their views about education reforms.

"We must rid Latvia of neo-Nazism." (a protester quoted in *Latvijas Avīze*, 3 September)

"The reforms are spiritual genocide! The reforms are a Fascist experiment!" (*Vesti Segodnya*, 2 September)

"MP Genādijs Kotovs displayed the symbol of the political party which initiated the reforms 'For the Fatherland and Freedom.' The party's symbol is a swastika." (*Vesti Segodnya*, 2 September)

The Latvian language newspapers frequently used the discourse of "the state has done so much for you" as an argument against claims to suggest that schools were not prepared for the education reforms. Latvian language newspapers wrote about the investments which government institutions had made in preparing for the reforms – financing, bilingual education courses for teachers, etc. Readers were encouraged to think that after such vast investments, all schools should have been quite ready to teach most classes in Latvia.

The reflection of events

According to the discourse analysis approach of Fairclough (2003), there are three basic elements in expressions – processes, participants and conditions. We will now take a look at how the Latvian language and Russian language press wrote about specific events in relation to education reforms, then analysing the way in which the most important social actors in these processes were described.

A demonstration outside of the Latvian president's office on February 5

Latvian language newspapers tried to minimise the size and importance of the protests, making use of various discourse strategies:

- Create the impression that there were few participants and passive supporters;
 - Discredit participants, providing a detailed description of negative elements about them (no culture, lazy, disloyal, hate Latvians, poorly organised, etc.);
 - Point to the participation of Russian politicians in organising the protests;
 - Stress those times when protests are unauthorised and link this fact to criminal violations and the police (*"Those in power seek to shift the activities of the students from an expression of a socio-political position in relation to the specific issues at hand to something like a semi-criminal zone."* – *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 17 February).
 - Stressing that the protests were a threat against security (*"Even supplementary police forces were called in, and they sought to prevent any provocations which the young people may have been planning."* – *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 6 February).

The aim of these strategies was to lead Latvian readers to think that everything was just fine, that the protests could be ignored, that no true reaction to the protests was necessary and that there was no need to focus on the causes and solutions of the problem.

The Latvian language newspapers contained extensive descriptions of the bad behaviour and hooliganism of individual participants in the demonstrations:

"Soiled the president's residence", "Trampled the flowers", "A shameless man who pissed outside of the castle while drunk", "The police found a swastika and vulgar statements addressed to President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga on the walls of the castle", "Vandals" (Latvijas Avīze, 6 February); "The protesters threw things purposefully at the windows of the castle" (Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze, 6 February).

The Russian language press contained very brief statements of these violations, choosing to accent other things instead:

- The demonstrations were massive (the Latvian language and Russian language newspapers cited very different numbers of participants);
- The demonstrations involved the entire Russian speaking community: *"Among the defenders of Russian education were all kinds of people – the children of workers, and the children of big businessmen who arrived at the demonstration with their personal chauffeurs and security guards" (Vesti Segodnya, 6 February).*

Generally speaking, the Russian language newspapers provided much longer articles about the events, complete with big photographs (later the same photographs would be used to illustrate other articles related to education reforms). The demonstrations were presented as a revolution, as a decisive historical event in the lives of all of Latvia's Russian speakers. The articles contained much in the way of drama and pathos, and this can be seen in the headlines that were printed – *"A school revolution" (Vesti Segodnya, 6 February), "A day of disobedience" (Telegraf, 6 February), "Passions over reforms-2004: Spring in the castle square" (Chas, 6 February), and "The future of the entire Russian national minority is being decided today" (Vesti Segodnya, 6 February).*

On more than one occasion, Russian language newspapers sought to draw parallels with the fight for Latvia's independence during the period that is known as the national renaissance, thus summoning up images of people's suffering during the battle for rights and freedoms against repressive governments:

"This warm and spring-like day in February will probably be recorded in the history of Latvia's Russians. Because this was the beginning of the Russian spring. A velvet revolution. A renaissance?" (Chas, 6 February).

Increasing conflicts between Russian and Latvian students

Latvian newspapers presented much greater concern than Russian newspapers about the possibility that violence might increase in Latvia as a result of conflicts between young Latvians and Russians (*"Violence is escalating in society", "The amount of violence can only increase"* – *Latvijas Avīze*, 14 February). Newspapers said that the anti-reform protests were the main causes for these concerns. Such conflicts that did occur were presented with great drama so that people would conclude that the situation is very serious and that there is an urgent need for counteractions so as to ensure that Russians do not significantly harm Latvian schoolchildren. In the same story, the newspaper quoted an official from the Rīga city government who listed all of the things that had been done to reduce the threat of conflict.

In Russian language newspapers, by contrast, there was a fairly ironic attitude toward the idea that Latvians should fear Russian children, over the dramatisation of what were supposedly everyday conflicts among teenagers.

Interestingly, no newspaper reported a single instance in which Latvians harmed Russian schoolchildren, but formulations tended to be neutral – "conflicts between Latvians and Russians".

The president announces that she will proclaim the amendments to the Education law

Both the Russian language and the Latvian language newspapers stressed that the president studied the amendments to the Education law very carefully and that she spent a lot of time in talking to the defenders of various views – MPs from the leftist party For Human Rights in a United Latvia, Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Russian Language of Instruction, the organisation "Strasbourg", the Ministry of Education and Science, the secretariat of the minister with special portfolio for public integration, etc. The president's announcement was presented as a very important thing both in the Latvian and in the Russian newspapers.

In the Russian language newspapers, there was much disappointment and bitterness over the president's decision:

"We are very sorry, Madam President, that you are so slow-witted. Until the final moment we trusted in your national wisdom, but apparently we made a mistake. That is sad."

"The president of the Republic of Latvia opposes Russian schools!" (*Vesti Segodnya*, 11 February)

Emsis meets with school principals

When Prime Minister Indulis Emsis met with the principals of minority schools, the Latvian language press presented this as a very positive event,

emphasising the nice atmosphere and the mutual understanding that prevailed: *“The conversation took place (..) in a constructive atmosphere of mutual sympathies. The prime minister thanked the principals, and the principals openly expressed their favour toward minister Radzēvičs”, “The principal (..) made the prime minister happy”, “Minister Radzēvičs once again presented hope”, “The minister was pleased that ...”* (Latvijas Avīze, 20 August).

In writing about the meeting, Latvian language newspapers really stressed (with a significant sense of relief and triumph) that minority schools were prepared to teach most classes at the 10th grade level mostly in Latvian as of September 1, because the principals who took part in the meeting said so (*“Schools confirm readiness for reforms”* – Diena, 20 August). In other words, if principals who were involved in the reform process said that they were ready, this could be seen as a guarantee of the truth. The idea was created that everyone at the meeting agreed with one another, thus suggesting that the article was representing the views of virtually every person in Latvia.

The Russian language newspapers were far more sceptical about the prime minister’s meeting, questioning Emsis’ conclusion that the minority schools were prepared for reforms. Chas, for instance, stressed that Emsis drew his conclusions after just one hour of meeting with 19 school principals. Latvian newspapers, by contrast, felt that the conclusions were entirely justified (*“The meeting was aimed at understanding the true situation in Russian schools.”* – Latvijas Avīze, 21 August). Even Latvijas Avīze, however, conceded that the prime minister met *“those principals who began to prepare for this school year five or even 10 years ago. That is why the conversation took place without any mutual accusations or unnecessary hostility.”* (Latvijas Avīze, 20 August).

The Russian language newspapers smirked at the unanimity of views among the principals. Authors said that this was because only those principals who supported the education reforms were invited to attend the meeting (*“Among those of their colleagues who are critical about the reforms, none was invited to the meeting. This means that there is still no honest dialogue about the 2004 reforms. This was a party at which the supporters of the reforms could be shown off.”* – Vesti Segodnya, 20 August).

Second, the Russian language newspapers argued that the principals who were at the meeting were afraid to express their true views:

“Even many loyal principals who stand further away from the representatives of power have negative things to say about these reforms (first making sure that the tape recorder is not switched on). When they sit at the table with ministers, it is doubtful that they might ever start to express their concerns with innovations in education.” (Telegraf, 20 August).

In the Latvian language newspapers, too, there was an accent on the duties of the principals in terms of implementing minority education reforms, not on the actual views of the principals: *“If a law on education reform has been approved, then the schools say that they will implement it.”* (Diena, 20 August). Problems which school principals mentioned in the context of the education reforms were not linked to any possible lowering in the quality of education – something that was the main argument of the opponents of reforms.

The hunger strike

Diena wrote about the hunger strike in a humorous style, thus suggesting that the protest was nothing serious: “Five men finally took their places on a ceremonial dais that had been put together with some wood which was covered with plywood. One of them ceremoniously announced that ‘I declare the hunger strike to be open!’, and “The entire bloom of founders of the protest headquarters was there” (*Diena*, 24 August).

Statements that were made at the event by headquarters activists and members of PCTVL were paraphrased, as opposed to quoted directly, in the *Diena* report, thus reducing their believability.

When the Russian language newspapers wrote about the hunger strike, by comparison, they stressed the courage and self-denial of the participants, arguing that this was a final step of desperation after other types of protest had been tried out. This was a type of non-violent resistance to a repressive government, wrote the papers. They provided detailed descriptions of the participants in the hunger strike and of their views, thus encouraging readers to identify with them and to feel sorry for them.

The events of September 1

Both the Russian language and the Latvian language newspapers emphasised the extensive security steps that were being taken on September 1, the large number of law enforcement officials on the scene. The activities of the police were described in detail and, in many cases, positively. In some cases the Latvian language and Russian language newspapers differed in their coverage – with respect to the number of people taking part in the demonstration, for instance. There were much greater differences, however, in the way in which the events were interpreted and in the meanings that were presented to readers.

The protest at the Victory Monument

There was extensive reporting about the demonstration which opponents of minority education reforms staged at Victory Park, and that was true both in the Russian and the Latvian newspapers. Latvian language articles were dominated by the moods of irony and fear. Participants were described in a funny way, stressing those things that were said which were silly, but ignoring the essence of the protests:

“ ‘Let us laugh at the reforms as if we were children – ha, ha!’, said Pliners, who had 30 years of experience as a teacher, and the other participants joined him in this naïve action.” (*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 2 September)

“Those who took the stage largely distinguished themselves with speeches that were full of pathos. The greatest joy among those who were present was fired up by one young man who said that Latvia is engaged in ‘Fascist experiments’ with students.” (*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 2 September)

The Latvian newspapers depicted the participants at the demonstration as a mob of people who were uncritical and unthinking, people who were being manipulated by the organisers of the protest: “The protesters repeated the slogans that resounded from the stage in an organised way”, “They continued to applaud, supporting everything that was said on stage.” (*Diena*, 2 September).

In the Latvian newspapers the protest actions repeatedly were described with the word “show” thus emphasizing that the actual aims of organizers are ostensible and are sidetracking attention from the essence of the protest:

“...some kind of show was needed [for remonstrants]” (*Diena*, 2 September)

“This event took place exclusively so as to gain publicity among the Russian audience”, “A show with people chaining themselves to things.” (*Latvijas Avīze*, 3 September)

Similar moods could also be found in the Russian language newspapers (“The protest took place in accordance with a well developed scenario – the slogan ‘Hands off of Russian schools’ (..) and so forth” – *Telegraf*, 2 September). The Russian language newspapers also went to great lengths to focus on the presence of the foreign news media at the protest (*Chas, Vesti Segodnya*, 2 September).

There was a certain level of tension in the Latvian and the Russian language newspapers when they reported on the events of September 1, but it seems that the sense of fear and danger was more distinct in the Latvian newspapers – “They [the demonstrators] were watched by a long row of police officers” (*Diena*, 2 September). Both Latvian and Russian journalists had expected “provocateurs” to create danger, and the image of these “provocateurs”, as presented in the newspapers, seemed to be an amalgam of the Russian special services and of simple drunks: “There was one provocateur dressed in a red jacket and cap. He waved the emblems of the defenders of Russian schools under the noses of those who were nearby” (*Diena*, 2 September), “A spontaneous and unauthorised protest which was provoked near the building of the Cabinet of Ministers by activists from the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters” (*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 2 September), “Headquarters men provoke disorder” (*Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*, 2 September).

The fact is that from early in the morning until late at night, events on September 1 were comparatively peaceful, but the fears were still there: “As of 10:30 PM, there were no reports of any significant incidents” (*Diena*, 2 September).

The Russian language newspapers argued that this was a truly massive demonstration, adding that people from various social groups and from various cities in Latvia had taken part.

The concert in Dome Square

Latvian language newspapers wrote about the concert that was organized by the Ministry of Education and Science to a greater degree than the Russian language newspapers did. Latvians described the concert in glowing terms, stressing the size of the audience: “Thousands of young people celebrated the beginning of a new school year at the concert. (..) The square was full of purposefully happy-go-lucky kids – Latvians, Russians, with big, drooping pants, in costume or in a suit, some of them a bit drunk” (*Diena*, 2 September). The newspaper accented the peaceful mood of those who attended the concert (thus indirectly contrasting them to the supposed aggressiveness of the anti-reform demonstrators): “Edgars said that he is afraid of fighting and that he would have to run away, but he does not understand why there should be any fighting in the first place” (*Diena*, 2 September).

The Russian language press stressed that the aim of the concert was to keep Russian young people away from the demonstration at Victory Park, and also the fact that government money was spent on the concert (*Telegraf*, 20 August).

The “Empty Schools” strike

The Russian language newspapers and the Latvian language newspapers focused on this event in very different ways. The Latvian newspapers claimed that the strike simply failed, because most minority students went to school. *“The ‘Empty Schools’ strike that had been announced by the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters did not gain much support on the first or the second day”* (Diena, 4 September). The Russian language newspaper *Telegraf* agreed, with a newspaper headline which read *“The schools are not empty”* (Telegraf, 3 September). Latvian newspapers quoted only those who supported the education reforms, and this created the impression that no one had any different views or, even more, the courage to express such views. *“Even the principal of the No. 21 High School did not even try to hide her negative views vis-à-vis the minority education reforms”* (Latvijas Avīze, 3 September).

If one read the Russian language newspapers, by contrast, one got a very different sense of what was happening: *“The school strike has begun”* (Chas, 3 September).

Both the Latvian language press and the Russian language press quite dogmatically supported one or another position vis-à-vis the “Empty Schools” strike, and if anyone expressed a different view, then all kinds of reasons for their thinking were presented. No one suggested that opponents had really thought things through: *“They simply made use of a chance not to go to class”* (Latvijas Avīze, 3 September); *“The people have not yet become active after the summer”* (Chas, 3 September).

A description of participants

One widely used discourse strategy is to provide a detailed description of that which is desired and a very abstract and generalised description of that which is out of line with the author’s perspective. In articles about education reforms, for instance, the Russian press more often described individualised social actors, thus encouraging readers to identify with their views.

In Latvian newspapers, by contrast, opponents of education reforms were lumped together and discredited with various techniques. Most often newspapers wrote about the selfish interests of politicians who were said to be manipulating with Russian speaking residents and who were trying to create disorder and threats against public security:

“The anti-reformists [hope to] attract political attention to themselves.” (Diena, 20 August);

“An empty barrel makes a big noise.” (The president of Latvia, quoted in Diena, 20 August);

“... would not permit all kinds of provocateurs to mess things up.” (Latvijas Avīze, 21 August).

Latvian language newspapers on more than one occasion made reference to slightly mysterious “forces” that were opposing the education reforms, which suggested that readers should think about unknown and unpredictable dangers:

“... representatives of the forces which oppose education reforms”, “... if there are forces which think ...” (Diena, 20 August).

Latvians and Russians

In discussing representatives of the two ethno-linguistic groups, the Latvian and the Russian newspapers moved from “us” to “them”. Latvian newspapers wrote about “Latvian and Russian students”, while Russian newspapers focused on “Russian and Latvian children”.

The Russian language press often wrote about the “Russian community” or about two communities (“*The Russian community of Latvia*” – *Chas*, 2 September). In the Latvian language press, by contrast, the word “community” appeared only in tandem – a state with two communities or a society with two communities. This is a negative scenario of the future, or a reality which Latvians consider to be unacceptable.

Both the Russian and the Latvian newspapers sought to justify their views by reporting on people “from the other side of the issue” who happened to agree with the newspapers’ thinking about the issue. *Vesti Segodnya*, for instance wrote about children “*from three Latvian schools (!) who talk to their peers about the essence of the reforms and provide information about the protests. That is why some 70 students regularly protest together with the Russians*” (*Vesti Segodnya*, 6 February).

The Russian newspapers also stressed the view that Russians are not immigrants in Latvia, that they more resemble an historical minority:

“The traditions of the Russian language in this land stretch back into the depths of the centuries. Many hundreds of years ago, Russian people lived here, they were a part of the indigenous population of Latvia.” (*Chas*, 2 September)

Students in minority schools

In both the Latvian and the Russian language newspapers, the word that was used most often to discuss students was “children,” but there were different discourse-related goals in each case. The Latvian press used the word to indicate that students are unable to take independent decisions on education reforms and to organise protests. This was an attempt to create the impression that students who take part in the protests are there just as victims of the wicked manipulations of adults, with the “children” not even understanding the issue over which they were protesting:

“Children were dragged into the meeting who were younger than 10.” (*Latvijas Avīze*, 6 February)

“The students were fired up by Tatjana Ždanoka, Jakovs Pliners, Genādijs Kotovs and their comrades, who had armed themselves with megaphones. Not allowing the mob to relax or to lose its militant spirit, they occasionally repeated the things that had to be yelled.” (*Latvijas Avīze*, 6 February)

“They, too, could not really say what education reforms really mean. Among the protesters were many children of elementary school age, and they could say nothing about the essence of the reforms other than phrases and slogans that they had heard elsewhere.” (*Latvijas Avīze*, 6 February)

The Russian language press, in turn used the word “children” to stress the fact that students are unprotected against the malicious decisions of politicians. The Russian language newspapers argued that Russian students are perfectly capable of evaluating the situation and of coming up with their own independent views about the education reforms. Students who took part in the protests, wrote the Russian language press, were there to express their personal view, they were not the victims of

manipulation by Russian politicians, they were not kids who simply wanted to skip class. The Russian language press praised the students for being so mature at an early age, so able to demonstrate civic courage and initiative.

“The children followed one another onstage, they all had things to tell the audience.” (Chas, 2 September)

The Russian language newspapers also frequently accented the belonging of the students to the Russian ethno-linguistic community, using the phrase “our children” on more than one occasion. This stressed the difference between the Latvian and the Russian community, encouraging readers to identify with the educational problems of Russian students in specific.

Latvian newspapers, seeking to diminish the importance of the protesters in the eyes of readers, provided detailed descriptions of the less than cultural behaviour of some participants in the protests.

Politicians

Here we must specifically look at MPs from For Human Rights in a United Latvia (PCTVL), as opposed to MPs from other parties. Politicians were described differently in the Latvian and the Russian press. The Russian language press offered PCTVL politicians much more extensive opportunities to express their views and describe their activities. The Latvian press carried the views of these politicians much less often.

Latvian newspapers tended to describe PCTVL as a party that is dependent on Russian politicians (*“... both the bees from the local headquarters and their beekeepers in Moscow” – Diena, 2 September*).¹¹ The party’s members were said to be selfish and focused only on their own political interests in encouraging Russian speakers to protest: (*“These reforms are just an excuse for political activities” – Latvijas Avīze, 21 August*). Journalists often wrote about PCTVL politicians with scorn and irony: *“... Buzajevs, Pliners and the rest of the well known company” (Latvijas Avīze, 21 August)*.

The Russian language newspapers, for their part, treated MPs from PCTVL as true authorities and as the main defenders of Russian speaking residents of Latvia, presenting them (as opposed to Latvian politicians) in a very flattering light indeed. It was stressed that leftist deputies could not do their work properly because they were constantly in opposition: *“None of the MPs, except only for a few from PCTVL, came out to speak to the children” (Vesti Segodnya, 6 February)*.

Politicians from other parties were often described in the Russian press as nationalists who don’t care about the problems of minority groups: *“For the first time in many years, the head of government invited the administrators of non-Latvian educational institutions to meet him” (Chas, 20 August)*.

“... consider Latvia to be a democratic country in which radical nationalists are in power – people whose eyes and ears are closed against the needs of other communities” (Chas, 23 August)

“Our politicians are unprofessional. The government must be sacked!” (Vesti Segodnya, 2 September)

¹¹ The reference to “bees” is not accidental – the party’s acronym in Russian can be read to sound like the Russian word for “bees”.

The work of government institutions was also presented in a better light in the Latvian press than in the Russian media. Representatives of various government institutions were described very positively, creating the impression that these are sensible men and women who do their work in a timely way and care about local residents (see, e.g., *Diena*, 20 August). In terms of discourse, readers are encouraged to think that they can fully trust in the work of government institutions – the reforms are proper, and public safety is not endangered.

The Russian language newspapers, by contrast, argued that the state is a repressive organ: “*It is of advantage to the state to oppress each of us individually*” (*Chas*, 2 September).

“*Over the last 13 years, the state and this regime have proven to us that they will not care for us. They spit in our direction. What is more, they want our children to face even more difficult lives than we have faced.*” (*Chas*, 2 September)

Russian language newspapers also tended to take positive expressions on the part of the state and to turn them into something negative. When the education minister, for instance, said that he would be ready to consider the possibility of allowing students to choose the language in which they take their final exams, *Chas* had this to say: “*Did Radzēvičs misspeak, or did he make the promise so as to settle down the protests? Time will tell.*” (*Chas*, 20 August).

The Russian Schools Defence Headquarters

The way in which the members and activities of the Russian Schools Defence Headquarters were described in the Latvian and the Russian press differed radically. The Latvian press tended to describe these people as the perfect manifestation of evil, while the Russian press often idealised and glorified the members of the organisation as selfless fighters for the future of the entire Russian speaking community.

Russian newspapers wrote in great detail about the activities of the organisation, readers learned all about the activists. The “imagined reader” carefully monitored everything that was happening in relation to education reforms, the reader was well informed about the activities of the headquarters, as well.

In the Latvian newspapers, the organisation was presented as something marginal (“...*the so-called Russian Schools Defence Headquarters – Latvijas Avīze*, 3 September), a radical organisation with a tendency toward criminal activities. Members of the organisation were scornfully described as agitators, provocateurs and encouragers of public disorder.

Principals and teachers at minority schools

It was assumed automatically in the Russian language press that all Russian speakers were opponents to the education reforms, and if anyone failed to protest or went so far as to express support for the reforms, the newspapers sought all kinds of reasons for this. Never was it suggested that individuals were expressing their frank, true and independent views. Fear to express opposition to the state’s reforms was most often cited as the reason for dissention. This was most often a description that was applied to minority school principals and teachers who refused to protest against the education reforms. It is the job of principals to bow before the orders of the Ministry of Education and to fulfil the laws of the Republic of Latvia, wrote the newspapers. Teachers, in turn, are subordinated to their principals.

“Many teachers were on our side, but they cannot openly express their position, because they depend on the school administrators.” (Chas, 3 September)

“Many teachers quietly support them [the headquarters activists], because they realise that the reforms will probably lead to their dismissal and replacement with inexperienced interns.” (Vesti Segodnya, 6 February)

In the Latvian language press, by contrast, most of the quoted school principals and teachers were supporters of the education reforms. When they made critical statements, the newspapers presented these without suggesting that the teacher or principal in question was actually an opponent of the reforms.

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