

## Legacy of a Shattered System: The Russian-Speaking Population in Latvia

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The issue of democracy in the Baltic republics has recently captured headlines as a result of the Russian insistence on linking the issue of troop withdrawal to the treatment of the Russian-speaking population in these republics. Russia's sudden interest in minority rights is significant, if not constructive, for the world community. At times before, however, Russian, Western and Baltic "democratic" leaders seem to have turned a deaf ear to the Russian-speaking population of this region. Current accounts speak of the fifteen new states that have appeared in the Eurasian space. However, these new states were born within the borders carved by Joseph Stalin, inheriting sizable national "minorities" and many nationality problems—the human legacy of Soviet social engineering. The fate of democratization in the former USSR, in part, hinges on the resolution of these very problems.

The development of democracy, national consciousness, state-building and the observation of minority rights in the former Soviet republics represent difficult problems with complicated historical and ideological antecedents. This article aims to reexamine the standard treatment of the Russian-speaking<sup>1</sup> population in Latvia in terms of the complex historical, national and post-Gorbachev issues which shaped the lives of a people in the post-Second World War era. It will examine the notion of the USSR as an empire, the development of national communities in the Latvian geographic space, and the current development of democracy in Latvia and its implications for the lives of the Russian-speakers.

In view of the historical background, it would be an extreme simplification to label the Russian-speakers who moved to the Baltic republics after World War II as occupiers, colonists and immigrants, judging their actions of five, twenty or even forty years ago from a non-Soviet, post-Gorbachev context. These terms contain inherent value

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judgements that are based on notions of state, colony, empire and a conscious decision to leave ones' homeland that must be evaluated in terms of the Soviet reality of those times, not in Western or Baltic notions of the era, in order to render an accurate picture of Russian behavior within the empire and its relation to postwar events.

The nature of the Russian (later Soviet) expansion tends to defy classical Western definitions of both empire and nation-state and all of the roles and implications of these terms. Richard Pipes states:

The expansion of Russia had a very different character from that known to the Western experience. Being a continental power without natural frontiers and ready access to the seas, Russia has traditionally expanded along its frontiers. Historically, the process of nation-building, which began in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, led to the conquest and absorption of the other ethnic groups, starting with various Finnic and Turkic nationalities, and eventually including groups representing many Asian and some European populations. The chronological and geographic contiguity of the processes leading to the building of both nation-state and empire has had the effect of blurring the two phenomena, tending to make Russian remarkably insensitive to ethnic problems.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of where the Russian homeland begins and ends is a delicate matter, and the answer often depends on who is asked. It is a vital question in Russian history that the Russians themselves cannot agree on. Applying contemporary Western connotations of "immigration" and "colonization" to the migration of Russians presents many problems due to the very nature of Russian historical development. The 1939-1945 "regathering" of Russian imperial lands, as undertaken by Stalin, had the same controversial character. Were these territories in the Soviet political and psychological context imperial lands that had gone wayward or colonies to be conquered and regions to be "occupied" in the traditional sense of these words? Leaving value judgement aside, the fundamental approach to understanding Soviet behavior is an analysis of perspective and intent.

The period 1914-1953, as a series of interrelated events (World War I, the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the "Stalin Revolution" and World War II), forms a unique historical period of war, revolution, and terror for the inhabitants of the former Russian empire. Some former inhabitants of the Russian empire, such as the Balts, Finns, and peoples under Polish

control experienced a twenty-year respite from these processes; Russians, Ukrainians and others did not. These twenty years, therefore, were for some peoples the defining period of their national existence, for others not. The period produced a chasm in judgment that continued to divide them for years to come.

In the Baltic states, cultural awakening and their achievements in establishing national economies were impressive. In a relatively brief span, their progress was remarkable, having established multi-party parliamentary democracies and having enacted successful land reform. They integrated themselves into the system of Western democracies, joined the League of Nations and began to fully participate in the international arena. Their cultures flourished by building upon the achievements of nineteenth century national movements and studies in folklore and ethnography. But this golden age was vulnerable. Being outside the borders of the reconstituted empire did not mean they were outside of the emperor's appetite.

From the time of their creation, these republics were vulnerable to outside attack, surreptitious activities, espionage and intrigues. The threat from local Communists and two increasingly powerful neighbors was enough to bring about the banning of Communist parties and later, all rival parties in the three Baltic republics. The move away from democracy to one-party dictatorships in the late 1920s and 1930s brought about regimes that were characterized in Latvia as "authoritarian regimes, corporate and national in character but clearly not fascist;"<sup>3</sup> in Lithuania as a nationalist regime that was "authoritarian and restrictive," but also "not fascist;"<sup>4</sup> and in Estonia, "world depression and the spread of fascism led to a 'preventive dictatorship.'"<sup>5</sup>

At the same time in the empire, a different nation-building process was underway. The 1920s brought about the pacification and subjugation of the errant nations, large-scale suppression of religion, War Communism and later the New Economic Policy and socialist cultural pluralism. The 1930s was a time for collectivization and the subsequent destruction of the Russian and Ukrainian village. Industrialization, mass deportation and arrest were taking place as the face of the countryside was being rapidly transformed. Russian culture was being systematically torn apart and recast selectively in the mold of "Soviet" culture. The Soviet peoples were subjected to the xenophobia, terror, indoctrination and rewriting of past and future histories. They were made into lambs and *Stakhanovite* (after Alexei Stakhanov, the Stalinist model miner) fulfillers of the plan.

The empire had been humbled in World War I by the "Imperialist

Powers." The shame of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the victories of the Balts, Poles and Finns in their successful independence struggles and international machinations were equally irking to Stalin and his hierarchy. With the world revolution on hold and "socialism in one country" ever progressing forward, it was only a matter of time for territorial pretensions to resurface. In 1939, the Balts' respite from the all-Union revolutionary process was winding down. In July 1940, it was over.

The two populations, imperial and extra-imperial, were separated by only twenty years of time, but were worlds away in outlook, democratic development and way of life. A difference had always existed between the western regions and the Russian heartland, but the difference became more pronounced in the interwar period. It was inevitable that the two populations would at some point meet. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact provided the reason.

The forced incorporation of the Baltic republics in 1940-41 and again from 1945-49 brought the revolutionary cycle full circle. In the minds of Soviet leaders, they had regained what had been wrongfully taken from them. The Great Terror of 1937 was repeated in the three Baltic countries, introducing the population to what it had "missed" during two decades of independence. Mass deportations and executions were designed to break the will of these republics. The Soviet leadership was bringing lost sheep into the fold by giving them a crash course in Stalinism. The annexation of the Baltic countries brought about a new situation in the USSR: an independent, free-thinking element had been introduced into the corporate body and could contaminate if it was not controlled or exterminated. Like the Russian soldiers returning from Paris after the defeat of Napoleon, the Balts had not only seen the West, they *were* the "West" for their Soviet compatriots.

With the historical background complete, it is now possible to view postwar developments in terms of a current theory of nationalism and nation-building. Benedict Anderson has proposed that nations are "imagined communities," imagined as both inherently limited and having sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> Roman Szporluk in accepting this theory stated: "It matters a lot *what* a nation imagines itself to be...the significance lies in the *content* of its nationalist self image."<sup>7</sup> Thus, imagined communities are delineations of the mind, based upon the vision of at least some individuals living in a geographic space. Not all imagined communities are nation-states and not all the people living in a nation-state inhabit the same imagined community. Various imagined communities are active in the same geographical area. Imagined communities transcend the

boundaries of race, nationality, citizenship and other factors—instead, containing a vision of self-definition. The vision of belonging to a community of interests enables people to designate themselves in different manners. Earlier this notion of belonging may have had class, religious, tribal or kinship connotations. Increasingly, the terms citizenship and nationality gain importance.

Imagined communities can change and evolve. New imagined communities can arise and old ones can lose significance. National movements in the nineteenth century began with individuals, who despite political, class or religious divisions, envisioned themselves belonging to the German "nation," Czech "nation," etc.. These movements offered the vision of a different type of life, or a different cultural alternative. They created national awareness and national awakenings based on folklore, as well as the spread of literacy and language standardization. Inspired by nationalism and nineteenth century political upheavals, states were born that conformed to nations and their aspirations (nation-states). It was in this milieu that the Baltic republics appeared.

Their national awakening and period of independence convinced them that self-determination was much more desirable than living in the empire. Democratic ideas, if not traditions, took root. The most important transformation for the 1920s and 1930s took place in the minds of people, not in the establishment of three vulnerable republics in an unstable area of Europe where borders recede and countries can disappear overnight. After people had lived in the imagined communities of their own ethnic republics, there was no turning the clock back to the days of the empire in their minds.

Latvia is the republic in which the greatest effects of Russian migration are felt and the most volatile demographic split exists. Latvians now comprise about 53% of the republic's population as compared to 70 to 80% before the war. With the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union, two imagined communities developed in the "Latvian" geographic space. The first was the imagined community of the interwar Latvian Republic—an expression which still existed in the cultural and political aspirations of a considerable portion of the Latvian people. The second coincided with the founding of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic which drew its constituency from Latvian Communists, portions of the native population and Russian migrants. All were "citizens" of the Latvian SSR and thus of the USSR, but all were not united in their conception of the imagined community in which they lived. Some pictured their homeland as stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific, others

from the Baltic to Latgale (Latvia's easternmost province). This inherent contradiction in orientation was the embryo in which the current political situation developed.

Returning to the question of the Russian-speaking population as "colonizers," and "occupiers," the following point made by the authors of a work on Soviet nationalism, *Soviet Disunion*, is illustrative because it has been made in almost all treatments of the given subject. "With relatively few exceptions, they [Russians] have not bothered to learn the local languages and have tended to regard these sovereign republics as an extension of the Russian motherland."<sup>8</sup> The first problem arises with the phrase "sovereign republics." As a result of the political reality of the times, these sovereign republics had ceased to exist as "sovereign republics" and constituted an incorporated (legality notwithstanding) part of the USSR. The placing of Western or contemporary connotations on this term in a Soviet psychological, and more importantly, political context for 1945-1985 can lead to biased value judgements. Certainly for Western scholars and Balts, who could understand the transformation of 1919-1939, there is no doubt on the matter. But for the *sovietskie lyudi* (Soviet people) who had lived exclusively within the Russian and later the Stalinist-Soviet empire, there was no understanding the transformations that had taken place in the world outside. In fact, to speak of these republics as having real sovereignty in the postwar era would have elicited surprise from Soviets and Sovietologists alike. Only in the Gorbachev era could the sovereignty card be played.

The second problem focuses on the issue of the Russian-speaker's intent in the period. They never viewed themselves as colonizers, occupiers, or immigrants; they were simply moving to "fraternal republics" in a different area of their homeland, and attached no extraneous value judgement to the matter. They never *intended* to leave their homeland, and in a real sense, resided in it until August 1991. Their actions, prior to that time, must be viewed within all-Union developments.

The fact that they never learned the local languages only substantiates that they were living within their own imagined community. The dynamics of the nation-building process made "new" territories automatically the extension of the motherland. The callousness or insensitivity of their actions takes place only when applying Western or Baltic-centered values to the Soviet political reality of those times. By applying these values, our understanding of events is filtered through a minority or "outside" (in the sense that such views were closed to the majority of Soviet citizens) views of events, which can be as dangerous as the Soviet

view. Like American settlers in Hawaii, Russian-speakers never became fluent in the local language and did not participate in this culture; the dominant political culture and nation-building process did not demand or encourage such behavior. In fact, such behavior was considered abnormal by the dominant political culture<sup>9</sup> in the Soviet context.

Incorporation made Soviet life a reality for all who inhabited Latvian space. The Balts, and subsequently the West, saw the issue as one in which Russian carpetbaggers were streaming in to dominate their republics. While the share of carpetbaggers among Russians was probably not modest, the fact that these republics had lost sovereignty must be considered. On the macro-level, Soviet demographic and social engineering plus economic planning changed the face of the land. On the micro-level, people migrated for various reasons. Under Soviet law, people had the right to change their place of residence. Although few Balts exercised this right, it only reinforces the idea that they lived within the confines of their own imagined community. Obvious inequities did exist within society (housing, leadership positions, Russification, etc.), but the average Russian had as much control over this as the average Latvian did.

Migration came in several waves. Many of the first Russian-speakers came into Latvia on advancing tanks. They saw the "West" with their own eyes, and then returned home to find that their towns and villages had been ravaged and leveled by either the Nazis or the advancing Red Army. Amid the destruction and devastation in Byelorussia (Belarus), Ukraine and western Russia, the relatively (by western Soviet standards) unscorched Baltic lands were a place where one could begin anew. It was this group who worked alongside the Balts to rebuild infrastructure and industry and to a lesser extent, became the purveyors of Soviet power.

Industrialization was one of the prime factors in bringing Russian-speakers to Latvia. Huge industries, many of them military in nature, developed under Soviet planning. They required workers who were well trained and, in many instances, loyal to the regime. Incidentally, it was mostly well-educated Russian-speakers who took these jobs. Contrary to current, almost "popular" accounts, Russians in the Baltic republics do not perform just menial jobs. They account for a highly educated and highly diversified section of the work force. It has even been suggested that Russians in the Baltic republics show a higher per capita level of education than the Balts themselves.<sup>10</sup> Many came for personal reasons (family ties, housing, employment). Others came looking to see the "West" firsthand or to partake in the higher standard of living.

Under the Soviet system, the two imagined communities inhabiting Latvian space continued to pursue divergent goals. A segregation, partly official, partly self-imposed, insured that both communities developed according to their own cultural pressures. In Karl Deutsch's terminology,<sup>11</sup> social communication between these communities was almost nil. Latvians successfully endured Russification, while preserving their own culture. Russian-speakers became a little more "Western" within their own imagined community. A geographical determinist would insist that proximity to the West, the Protestant Latvian heritage and environment and even the bourgeois architecture of Riga had at least some effects.

The channeling of pupils into either the Latvian or Russian educational systems served to further segregation. The urban nature of the Russian-speaking population and the rural stronghold of the Latvian population widened the gap further. Diversification of industry insured that Russian-speakers were predominant in all-Union industries; Latvians worked in republican enterprises, agriculture and the cultural sphere. Low native birthrates, combined with constant Russian migration into Latvia, changed the demographic situation in the republic; however, the numbers of net migration are reduced considerably if everyone born on Latvian soil is considered to be a native of Latvia. In addition, there has been a constant flux on the part of Russian workers, particularly in construction, who eventually left Latvia after a few years of working there.

Thus, during the years of Soviet Latvia, primarily two types of Russian-speaking populations developed in Latvia: permanent and transient. Many Russian-speakers relocated to Latvia with the intent of establishing homes; others were sent there by the Soviet government through the Party, military, *raspredelenie* (the assigning of university graduates to initial places of work); or came as workers looking for the "long ruble." The former represent the permanent Russian-speaking population; the latter were a transient element, although some portion of this category remained permanently.

A suggested major result of the Soviet period in Latvia was not that Latvians considered themselves to be "Soviets," were Russified, assimilated or were in some way comfortable with living in the empire. The major transformations took place in the minds of Russian-speakers who began to identify the fate of Latvia, for whatever reason, as their fate. Many no longer identified themselves with Russia or places they had left behind many years earlier. Indeed, tens of thousands of Russian-speakers born and raised in Latvia only know it as their home. Except for short

periods of vacation, military obligation, or education, they have spent their formative years or entire lives in the Latvian environment. The educational system's failure to "Latvianize" them in language and culture does not exclude that their daily experience, variety of foodstuffs available, cultural milieu and places of residence constitute a uniquely "Latvian" environment, starkly different from that of Russia, Ukraine and other regions. They dress, act and rationalize differently than most of their acquaintances in Russia, and in Latvia, for that matter. By early 1991, a *Moscow News* poll indicated that only 52% of Russians in Latvia considered themselves to be citizens of the USSR.<sup>12</sup> Slowly and gradually, a new imagined community of "Baltic" Russians had developed.

Those tangible results and feelings began to be felt under Gorbachev. Despite the fact that Latvia's Popular Front had passed a resolution describing Russians as a "huge mass of badly qualified and uncultured people" who pose a direct threat to Latvia, a considerable portion of Russian-speakers already supported Latvian national independence.<sup>13</sup> The fact that 75% of the population of Latvia supported the 3 March 1991 referendum, calling for democratic development and independent statehood for Latvia, represents a transformation in the minds of up to half of the republic's Russian speakers. In addition, Eric Rudenskiold points out, the fact that in the spring of 1990 a clear majority of ethnic Latvians were elected (135 Latvians compared to 49 Russian-speakers) to Parliament indicates that Russian-speaking voters were confident enough to put their fate in the hands of ethnic Latvian legislators.<sup>14</sup> Both Latvians and Russians stood at the barricades in defense of the Latvian Parliament in January 1991, as the hopes for democracy and independence reached a peak.

While it would be helpful to examine all the facets of democratic development and the feelings of the ethnic Latvians, the scope of the present study cannot.<sup>15</sup> It is sufficient to note that roughly two political tendencies have shaped Latvia's democratic development. One is the struggle of the national-radicals (Congress of Citizens, the Satversme parliamentary fraction, etc.<sup>16</sup>) against the more moderate tendencies (National Front Co-founder Dainis Ivāns, at times president Anatoli Gorbunovs, the *Ravnopravie* [Equal Rights] parliamentary faction and others<sup>17</sup>). The main debates have centered on the status of Russian-speaking residents in Latvia, and the legality of the present government as a successor to the prewar republic. As of yet, no strong political organization has developed among Russian-speaking residents.

The temptation to simplify the debate and declare "Latvia is for Latvians!" has loomed large in the political sphere. At this time, the Latvian people are themselves re-conceptualizing their imagined community. The message and content of "being Latvian" is under discussion. "Latvianness" is a criteria for political loyalty. Mixed marriages, Latvians who studied in the Russian educational track, Communist party membership (after January 1991) and support (or rather, lack thereof) for the national independence struggle have come under scrutiny. Billboards and street signs have become purveyors of political correctness.<sup>18</sup> The imagined community of the Latvian prewar republic has no place for over a million Russian-speakers. The question of whether or not it is sufficient for a person of Russian heritage to just be fluent in the Latvian language, or if some greater criteria of "Latvianness" must be present in order to legitimize his or her position in society, is still under debate. The tendency toward ethnocentrism is ever present, yet contradictory to demography in today's Latvia.

With the 1990 parliamentary elections, the issues of democracy and sovereignty become important. The 1990 elections represent a watershed in political development. For the first time since the 1930s, a universal, democratic and contested election was held in Latvia. From this point onward, the Latvians began taking more and more control of their own affairs and we can speak of a measure of sovereignty. Given a mandate by a significant portion of the Russian-speaking electorate, the Latvian Parliament has worked to disenfranchise non-ethnic Latvians. Former Latvian Foreign Minister Jānis Jurkāns (who was pressured to resign due to differences with the prime minister over the treatment of Russian-speakers), while still in office, stated: "We said in the West, and we wrote in all our official documents, that we are building a democratic state with rights for all. But then we retreated from this. We gave the radicals an opportunity to tighten the screw against those who stood with us at the barricades and voted for independence."<sup>19</sup> Ironically the first free, universal and democratic elections in nearly sixty years in Latvia may prove to be the last for some time to come.

It has been estimated that by enacting a Latvian language requirement as a basis for receiving citizenship, nearly 80% of the Russian-speaking population (roughly 40% of the electorate) would become disenfranchised.<sup>20</sup> The requirement itself is not unrealistic, but the lack of study materials, economic hardships, and implementation of deadlines are not timely. In addition, the political issues of what type of exam will be administered, who will receive the responsibility for creating it, who will

grade it, and the possibilities for corruption are daunting.

The October 1991 passage of a draft law on citizenship would grant citizenship only to citizens of the Latvian Republic before 1940 and their direct descendants. Those whose progenitors arrived in Latvia after 17 June 1940 would be required to have maintained at least a sixteen year period of continuous residence in Latvia, pass a language examination, renounce other citizenship, and give an oath of loyalty to the Latvian Republic. Jānis Jurkāns commented on the law stating that it "is not aimed at furthering democratization of society."<sup>21</sup>

Democracy has become a weapon of disenfranchisement, disempowerment, and degradation of the Russian-speaking electorate. The unified goals of April 1990 have been diverted under the pressure of national-radicals and nationalists. In July 1992, the European Council refused to accept Latvia's membership on the grounds that the current citizenship law is at variance with international norms and that nearly half of the population would lose the right to vote.<sup>22</sup> The argument is made that the citizenship law is more generous than many established in Europe and therefore, not at variance with norms. However, two points are glaringly apparent. European laws are not enforced retroactively, and the level of political culture in Europe is more developed.

Granting "permanent resident" status to Russian-speakers seems at first to be a reasonable compromise, representing in the long term a hope for future democratic development. However in the short term, the disempowerment of such status is of crucial importance. During the residence period in which permanent residents must pass examinations and wait to receive citizenship, several of the most important issues concerning the future of the republic are being resolved. Legislators, who were elected in part by Russian-speakers, will not be inclined to listen to the voices of an electorate that will not be voting in upcoming elections. Instead, they cater to the whims and vulnerabilities of ethnic Latvian voters by promising the resolution of material problems by political means. In 1975, Richard Pipes predicted: "The coming conflicts involving the nationalities and Great Russians are likely to center on access to jobs, housing, schooling and commodities."<sup>23</sup> It is precisely in these terms that the current situation in Latvia must be viewed.

Since the implementation of a law on language in April 1992, the issue of jobs has acquired considerable importance. The law stipulates minimum Latvian language proficiency requirements for four categories, ranging from managerial to custodial jobs. If, as indicated above, 80% of the Russian-speaking population is not proficient in Latvian, it follows that

a considerable portion of them would fail the examination, possibly losing their jobs. This law was used to remove Russian factory directors and administrators and is interconnected with the closing of former all-Union industries or placing them under Latvian control. Mass unemployment and social unrest could result and lead to instability.

More importantly, the issue of citizenship versus permanent residency could cause even greater problems in the area of housing. The severe housing shortage and draft projects on the privatization of housing pose grave social consequences. The chairperson of the Apartments Commission, Supreme Council Deputy Brigita Zeltkalne stated: "The political aspect of privatization might be solved in a simple way—only for citizens of the Latvian Republic."<sup>24</sup> Such a law could provide a legal basis to evict nearly half of the present population. Other proposals for the selling of housing for Latvian rubles only weaken the position of those non-citizens who stand to lose jobs as a result of the language law and the closing of industries staffed predominantly by Russian-speakers. The situation is exacerbated by the housing shortages in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, which effectively limit all possibilities of voluntary repatriation to these areas. Not able to sell their only asset (their apartment), the transient segment (who possibly voted against independence) have become trapped in a foreign land. The bitter experience of the repatriated Russians from the Caucasus and Central Asia indicate that staying put in Latvia is preferable to repatriation. Such a restless, trapped element does not aid social cohesion.

The issue of schooling is also vital. The educational system, which should serve as a device of social cohesion, is undergoing rapid changes. The state's prerogative to principally fund education in the state language is understandable. But the transition from Russian to Latvian in Russian schools is, for both students and administrators, a traumatic one. The shortage of Latvian language teachers and the notoriously poor quality of the teaching of Latvian in Russian language schools is a cause for concern.

While seemingly not so acute, the issue of commodities represents a huge problem considering that a law on property ownership (passed incidentally only days after the citizenship law) gives only citizens the right to own property and acquire "other resources."<sup>25</sup> A recent account estimates that 70-80% of the private sector capital is in the hands of Russian-speakers.<sup>26</sup> This law could create a situation in which the republic's best and brightest entrepreneurs could not own property.

The approach toward democratization in Latvia and the treatment of its Russian-speaking population is of significant importance. It is not an

issue of thousands of Russians who illegally streamed across the border at night, evaded legal authorities for years, worked without authorization, contributed to a shadow labor market and destabilized the nation, but the legislative approach is geared in that manner. The Russian-speaking population entered and remained in Latvia under its own laws (of the time), paid taxes, contributed to the well-being of society by investing time and capital in Latvia and making homes in accordance to local laws. The degradation they sometimes experience is frustrating. Bohdan Nahaylo stated: "Now, even the Russians who until recently felt comfortable in the western non-Russian republics had begun to sense what it meant to be unwelcome and to be regarded as second-class citizens."<sup>27</sup>

The fate of democratic development in Latvia will reflect and, to some extent, determine the democratic development of Russia as a whole. Although the era of cooperation between Latvian and Russian "democrats" ended with the attainment of independence, the Baltic republics always were a bell-weather region for tendencies in the USSR. They took the lead in cultural revival, economic reform and finally, the move toward independence. The future of the entire Eurasian space hinges on avoiding social unrest and economic disaster. The future of democracy is hopeful, but tenuous. Many lessons remain to be learned. In a democracy, there are no second-class citizens. A multi-party democracy which disenfranchises almost half of its population can hardly be called a strong example of democratic development.

The problem of the Russian-speakers in the Baltics and the other former Soviet republics is an international one. These are people who lived their lives in a state that no longer exists. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, they were left, in some cases, disenfranchised, disempowered and in new "foreign" lands without passports or citizenship. The sharp reactions of Yeltsin and Russian nationalists are a product of the same national-radical and ethno-chauvinist policies and tendencies in the republics. The possibilities for voluntary repatriation at the present time are slim due to the severe economic problems, and, more importantly, to the unsolved housing problem. Without material assistance for those who want to repatriate, and legal protection for those who remain, the situation can only deteriorate.

The success of democracy in Latvia and other Soviet republics depends on creating a situation in which minorities and "non-native" elements will be allowed to develop their own institutions and cultures. At the same time, an environment must be promoted in which non-natives will voluntarily find a niche within the native population's imagined

community. This is not done through Soviet-style administrative *diktat*, nor through requiring someone under intense pressure (and during economic collapse) to learn a language and pass the most important exam of his/her life simply to keep a job, apartment or residence in a given country. Democracy should become a tool for representing minority interests, not disenfranchising them. Social communication must begin despite the segregation of the old. The Latvians' idea of their imagined community should be expanded to include all those who made Latvia their home. Both populations have a vested interest in a free and democratic Latvia. Both populations are united by a love for the Latvian geographic space, whether it be the medieval streets of Riga or the tranquil Latvian forest. For the sake of the Latvian Republic and democratic development, the term "Latvian" should once again encompass all who live in the Latvian geographic space, whether they were born Latvians or chose to *become* Latvians.

## Notes

1. The terms "Russian-speaking" and "Russian-speakers" will be used here and throughout to denote the 48% non-ethnic Latvian element of the population. Ethnic Russians only comprise about 34% of the republic's total population; Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, Jews and Lithuanians make up the other 14% of the non-ethnic Latvian element. Despite the obvious pro-Russian bias of the term and its disregard for the cultural distinction of other national groups, its use does have a basis. Due to Soviet nationality policies, neither native-language education nor media were provided for these groups. The term "Russian-speaking" therefore conforms to those people who due to the Soviet social engineering process attended Russian language educational institutions and probably received the bulk of current information through Russian language media. The term "Russian" refers specifically to ethnic Russians.
2. Richard Pipes, "The Nationality Problem," *Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities*, ed. Zev Katz (New York: The Free Press, 1975), p. 2.
3. Frederic T. Harned, "Latvia and the Latvians," *Handbook...*, p. 99.
4. Harned, "Lithuania and the Lithuanians," *Handbook...*, p. 123.
5. Rein Taagepera, "Estonia and the Estonians," *Handbook...*, p. 77.
6. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso and NLB, 1983) for a detailed description of the imagined community concept.
7. See Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich Liszt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 164, for Szporluk's comment on Anderson.
8. Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), p. xii.
9. "Dominant political culture" within this context is used to denote the official Soviet

nationalities policy, in which Russification and efforts to make Russian the language of ethnic communication on a Union-wide basis were stressed. Any wide scale deviation from this policy undermined it and was "abnormal" behavior.

However, despite allowing the teaching of republican languages in Russian-track schools, the situation did not improve.

10. Romualdas J. Misiunas and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence: 1940-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p. 207.
11. See Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1966) for a treatment of the implications of the effects of social communication on the nation-building process.
12. «Khotyat li russkie bezhat?» (Do Russians Want to Leave?), *Moscow News*, 27 January 1991, pp. 12-13.
13. Eric Rudenshiold, "The Ethnic Dimension in Latvian Politics," *Soviet Studies*, 44 (#4, 1992): p. 625.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 613.
15. Eric Rudenshiold's study is a thorough statistical analysis of demography, ethnic attitudes and political trends in the Gorbachev era. His analysis of political parties and appraisal of ethnic Latvian sentiment is comprehensive. The chief weakness of the study is its treatment of citizenship politics and issue of disenfranchisement, which looms largely in the present situation.
16. These groups represent a loud and vocal nationalist force. Their positions on citizenship, property ownership, privatization and restoration of the 1922 Latvian constitution are uncompromising: all rights are only for prewar citizens and their descendants. The Congress of Citizens in particular has been responsible for attempting to establish a "shadow government" in support of its claim that the current government is not the constitutional successor to the republic. It also has formed paramilitary organizations.
17. The moderate forces have called for a "zero-variant" in citizenship that would extend rights to all residents of the republic. The moderates have been accused of taking too much of a "pro-Russian" stance on issues of troop withdrawal and minority rights and have been forced to retreat under pressure of the national-radicals. If Russian-speakers were enfranchised, a coalition of Russian-speakers and the "silent majority" of Latvians would probably become possible. The *Ravnopravie* faction is the successor to the Communist-backed and unpopular Interfront movement. However, its deputies have proved to be fairly progressive and innovative in distancing themselves from that movement.
18. Acquaintances in Latvia have related to me the interesting saga of the changing billboards and street signs. At first, all Soviet-era street names and business names disappeared. Then, monuments began disappearing (most notably Lenin, but also the monuments to Latvian Communists), and finally the eternal flame at the mass grave of Soviet war casualties was reportedly extinguished. Then, a law was passed stating that all signs and announcements not in the state language had to provide a Latvian translation. Apparently not satisfied with that measure, a new ordinance was introduced stating that all signs and business names had to be made in the state language, but that translations into other languages could be used, provided that the size of the lettering was not larger than or equal to the Latvian version. Russian visitors have noted that Russian signs have virtually disappeared

- in Riga, a city with a majority Russian population.
19. *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, No. 31, 29 July 1992, p. 9. *FBIS-SOV-92-152*, 6 August 1992, p. 9.
  20. Rudenshiold, "Ethnic Dimension," *Op cit.*, p. 625.
  21. Moscow Baltfax, 1741 GMT, 18 October 1991. *FBIS-SOV-91-203*, 21 October 1991, p. 56.
  22. Radio Rosii Network, Moscow, 1730 GMT, 7 July 1992. *FBIS-SOV-92-130*, 7 July 1992, p. 83.
  23. Richard Pipes, *Handbook...*, p. 5.
  24. *Nacionāla Neatkarība*, Riga, as quoted in "Press Review," *The Baltic Independent*, Tallinn, No. 132, Vol. 3, 16-22 October 1992, p. 9. (*The Baltic Independent* is one of several English language newspapers being printed in the Baltic republics. While its scope includes all three republics, its Estonian and economic coverage is the most thorough. In its present incarnation, it is somewhat a combination between Op-ed and high school journalism. Its pieces are long on opinion, short on professionalism and intermixed with both subtle and not-so-subtle Russian-bashing. Recently, it has begun to expand its coverage, and has tried to bring in American journalist interns to liven the situation. Despite all criticism, it is a good source for gleaning information on current events in the Baltic states).
  25. Moscow Baltfax, 2002 GMT, 22 October 1991. *FBIS-SOV-91-206*, p. 24, 24 October 1991.
  26. Vladimir Emelyanenko, «Latviya: stanet li kolonizator grazhdaninom?» (Latvia: Will the Colonist Become a Citizen?) *Moscow News*, 4 October 1992, p. 4.
  27. Nahylo and Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion*, p. 327.