

Russian-Speaking Population in the Baltic States: A “Fifth Column” or An Integral Part of the Local Society?

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Abstract

The problematic relation between the titular nations (majority) and Russian-Speaking Population (minority) in the Baltic Republics is related with historical experience and also with the construction of the image of a “national enemy” among a certain number of the native populations. Are Russian-speakers a “fifth column”, or are they an integral part of the local societies in the Baltic States? This empirical study uses the methods of process tracing, analytical narrative, discourse analysis, and interviews to answer this question. It finds the latter to be the case. It also argues that (1) historical experience was decisive while elaborating the ethnic and citizenship policies of the newly-restored independent states; (2) centralization and “nationalization” of state powers were caused by the threat of potential external sponsorship of ethnic cleavages, and foreign influence on domestic and international affairs; and (3) accession to NATO and the EU became a strong facilitating factor for more inclusive citizenship legislation and integration of the entire Baltic society, including both titular and non-titular populations.

Introduction

“We are not the “fifth column”!”²⁶

There are three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Each one of them is small, both in territory and population size, and they each share a more or less common history and route toward the development of their modern statehood. All of them have faced serious challenges after the restoration of their state independence. One of the main problems was connected with the ethnic minorities residing within the states, and political forces from the Russian Federation looking to achieve their geopolitical goals in the region with the help of these minorities. This led to establishing the perception of a “fifth column” regarding the Russian-speaking population in Baltic societies. In this article, I have two main goals: 1) to investigate whether the Russian-speaking population is indeed the “fifth column” used by external political forces in the Baltic

²⁶ Interview with Irina Ivaskina, Project Coordinator, Latvian Transatlantic Organization, on April 14, 2008.

States or not; and 2) to study the reasons, and to find an explanation for the establishment of this perception.

This issue has been researched by various scholars in recent years. It was discussed and studied by the authors of Baltic, Russian and foreign origin in their works. Hence, I will present the problem in the whole of its complexity and not only from the prism of one particular country. While analyzing the works presented by different authors of different national origins and accordingly representing different schools of thought and national positions, I will try to achieve maximum neutrality and non-biased approach towards the subject of my research, and eventually to enrich the existing literature focusing on this topic. In this respect, my field research in Latvia and Estonia was of extreme importance because it gave me a chance to study the issue at the place of its origin. It allowed me the opportunity to meet with many of the scholars studying this field; politicians previously and currently involved in creating and developing citizenship policies, NGO representatives as well as Russian-Speakers. These meetings and interviews enabled me to study the subject from a different point of view and make well-balanced deductions.

As my research is mainly based on the empirical studies and analyzing the real facts from the history and the present political situation, I use the methods of process tracing, analytical narrative, and discourse analysis. The method of interview used during my field trip while meeting with academics, politicians and NGO activists was deeply valuable in order to collect new information and check the assumptions and findings already been made.

I would also like to point out potential limitations of the research. First of all, I do not know any of the state languages of the Baltic Republics (Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian respectively). This, of course, has limited my possibilities to get acquainted with literature, legal and archival documents in these languages. However, I know Russian, which is the second most spoken language in the Baltic region and has helped me to compensate for the lack of the other languages. In addition, due to the limit of funding and time I was not able to make a field trip and conduct interviews in Lithuania that could be outlined as another possible limitation of the research. Nonetheless, taking into account the fact that the main scope of investigation and study have been put on the two other republics - Latvia and Estonia due to the

higher number of Russian-speakers and legal and societal problems with them in these republics, the latter possible limitation also does not seem to be crucial or to be a serious shortcoming for the work.

Before proceeding to the theoretical and empirical analysis, I feel it necessary to define two the most important and crucial terms I am using in this article, the “Russian-speaking population (minorities, or Russian-speakers” in some cases), and the “fifth column”. Clarification and further definition of these two terms is essential in order to avoid any misunderstanding and to show the limit of the scope of my research.

The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) in its report “Minorities and Majorities in Estonia: Problems of Integration at the Threshold of the EU” states:

The term ‘Russian-speaking minorities’ denotes millions of former Soviet citizens who predominantly use Russian in their everyday life and who have been living outside the Russian Federation since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, mostly in the former Soviet republics. However, the term is not precise as to their ethnic origin, mother tongue or current citizenship. People are grouped together under the term because they have similar identity problems and have to cope with the official language policies of their countries of residence. The term is often criticized on political grounds for masking diverse needs of various ethnic groups and for promoting the hegemony of ethnic Russians in dealing with minority issues (Järve and Wellman 1999, 5).

I share the main concept and explanation of the term given by the ECMI and in my thesis will use the term “Russian-speaking population (minorities, or Russian-speakers)” while addressing the former Soviet citizens of various nationalities (including Jews and Poles as well), and not only ethnic Russians.

The term “fifth column” is often used in both official and informal narratives while addressing the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic Republics. Here, I have to stress that in order to stay absolutely neutral and not to show any preference to this term, I will always use it in quotation marks that will signal to a reader the distance and non-association of the writer with the terminology.

I will also outline and determine the purpose of the usage of quotation marks in this article. Wherever they are not being used to show the

citation from another source, the quotation marks in the text are used to indicate that the writer fully realizes that a word is not being used in its current commonly-accepted sense, and he has a fully neutral attitude to the certain word.

The first section discusses the impact of the historical memory, and presents differences between majority (titular nations) and minority ("Russian-speakers") while evaluating the past events. In addition, it underlines and further explains the main reason of differences of ethnic compositions of the populations in Latvia and Estonia on one hand, and Lithuania – on the other one. The second section displays the empirical explanation for the first argument of the article – historical experience was decisive in elaborating the ethnic and citizenship policies of the newly-restored independent states. The following section explains the necessity of seeking security and stability guarantees provided by the European Union and NATO from the Baltic States side, and describes the process of affiliation in these organizations. The concluding section re-emphasizes the main goal of this paper and presents an answer to the research question. It also provides some additional facts and figures for strengthening the main arguments of this research.

History Matters: Impact of the Soviet and Nazi Occupations

There are still differences in interpreting the history and evaluating the processes which were taking place during the previous decades (from the 40s till the late 80s of the twentieth century) between the titular nations of the Baltic States and Russian-speakers. These differences are strongly connected with two existing competing narratives – Occupation and Liberation. While for the Baltic national elites, and most of the titular population, the incorporation in the Soviet Union of the independent republics was understood and is still perceived as a forceful act equal to the occupation, the Soviet or current Russian officials have never used the word "occupation".

Furthermore, the debate heats up concerning the assessment of the fact when Nazi troops had to leave the Baltic countries under the pressure of the Soviet Army in 1944. Most of the native Baltic people consider this as the re-occupation from the side of the USSR, while for Russian-speakers it is perceived as the liberation from Nazi occupation. The April, 2007 street clashes around the problem of dealing with the bronze statue of the Soviet Soldier in the centre of the Estonian capital, Tallinn, have

shown extremely well all the deepness of the problem of interpreting and assessing the very facts of the not so distant past.

The process of Sovietization, which took place after the forceful incorporation of three independent Baltic republics into the Soviet Union in 1940 and in 1944 after Hitler's troops had to leave the territory, was identified as Russification; the personal experience of the Baltic people with Stalinist terror and crimes and the identification of "Russian" with "Soviet" triggered the development of this negative feeling.

After recapturing the Baltic region in 1944, total disappointment of the local people appeared. Red Army soldiers behaved like they were on an enemy territory: they stole, raped, plundered and murdered; another negative factor became the refugees from starving areas in Russia, the so-called bag people appeared in the Baltic republics in 1946-47 and they committed a large number of crimes (Mertelsmann 1997, 53). In addition, the post-war years saw enormous in-migration, mainly of Russians and other Slavic nations (Belarusians, Ukrainians). Table 1 shows the ethnic composition of the populations of three Baltic Republics in absolute numbers and outlines the great changes that took place after the Sovietization of the region, especially in Estonia and Latvia.

Table 1. Ethnic composition of the Baltic Republics before and after Soviet annexation (in thousands)

Estonia			Latvia			Lithuania		
	1934	1959		1935	1959		1938	1959
Estonians	977	893	Latvians	1,473	1,298	Lithuanians	2,075	2,151
Russians	34	240	Russians	207	556	Russians	59	231

Source: Parming 1980, 399.

The tendency was showing the growing number of new-comers and decline of the titular people. However, in Lithuania there was not such a dramatic decline of the proportion of the native people and even there was observed rising numbers of Lithuanians unlike those of Estonians and Latvians.

This difference in migration numbers which occurred during the Soviet rule in the Baltic Republics has resulted in different attitudes of national

political elites while elaborating the citizenship policies of the newly restored republics in the beginning of 1990s. Van Elsuwege (2004, 4) tries to explain the relatively small number of Russian-speakers in comparison to the other Baltic republics due to Lithuania's specific historical and socio-economic development. First, Lithuania had a long tradition of independent statehood which went back to the middle ages. It came under Russian dominance after the disintegration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, more than a century after the incorporation of the Baltic provinces into the Russian empire of Tsar Peter the Great. Consequently, the northern part of the Baltic region had a longer tradition of Russian settlement. Secondly, Lithuania was not so much affected by the industrial revolution at the end of the nineteenth century. The Soviets considered the Lithuanian republic as a primarily agricultural area, which largely reduced the influx of Russian migrant workers (van Elsuwege 2004, 4).

Parming (1980, 401) mentions the higher fertility in Lithuania as one of the reasons of the relatively stable proportion of Lithuanians in the whole population of the country, but he outlines a very strong resistance to Soviet rule displayed by Lithuanians during both the 1944-50 period and during the early 1970s. He adds that the 1972 unrest in Lithuania was so serious as to require the intervention of Soviet military units to restore order that was an unusual occurrence on the All-Union scale. NATO Research Fellow Juris Prikulis (1997, 47), in the final report about migration and repatriation issues in Latvia, agrees this is one of the major obstacles to immigration and speaks about the anti-Soviet guerrilla activity; he believes that many potential immigrants thought twice about their move to Lithuania due to the guerilla activity.

The peak of anti-Soviet activities was in January 1991 when Soviet military troops made bloodshed in Lithuanian capital against peaceful demonstrators who protected the Lithuanian radio and television centre (BBC NEWS 1991, Lithuania/Politics). Just before the radio station was shut down, an announcer said: "We address all those who hear us. It is possible that (the army) can break us with force or close our mouths, but no one will make us renounce freedom and independence" (BBC NEWS 1991, Lithuania/Politics). These words clearly show the level of the struggle of the local people for freedom and sovereignty.

The conditions of the growing number of immigrants, the majority of whom were settled in the main cities of the countries and were given the

positions in all spheres of industry, transport, communication and state governance, diminishing status of the native languages and raising of the Russian one, made titular people of the Baltic region to think that they were becoming guests in their own homes and the new-comers were the initial reasons of all their misfortunes. Since “Soviet” was perceived as identical to “Russian”, the meaning of both words was mixed. To a certain extent, the fact was ignored that Russians also suffered from the same Stalinist dictatorship. Behind those images of an enemy there could be found ideas of collective guilt and collective responsibility of ethnic groups (Mertelsmann 1997, 49). The approval of the idea becomes even more clear after taking into account the joint Estonian-Latvian *samizdat* document from 1975, which referred to the Russians as “civil garrisons” which are “an ominous tumor in the body of the Estonian and Latvian nations” (Parming 1980, 403). Thus, it is clear all these perceptions and historical memory, as well as the behavior of some of Russian-speakers politically un-loyal to the Baltic States played a crucial role in establishing and usage by some nationalistically thinking activists of the term “fifth column” in relation with the Russian-speaking populations.

Citizenship Policies of the newly-restored independent Baltic States

Hughes and Sasse (2003, 2), based on the analysis of the previous works by Lipset, Stepan, Linz and others, report that the most widely employed paradigm for understanding the process of post-communist change is that of “transition to democracy”. They outline that when transitology does address the issue of minorities, their presence in a transition state is viewed as a major obstacle to democratization; furthermore, minorities represent a challenge to democratizing nation-states that has serious potential for political instability and, consequently, are best managed by centralization and assimilatory policies (Hughes and Sasse 2003, 3).

Ethnic Control vs. Power-Sharing Approach (Consociationalism)

Herd and Lofgren argue that the experience of Sovietization was critical in shaping the post-independence Baltic political, economic and societal landscape. The Sovietization project was advanced within the Baltic States on three key fronts: first, it was advanced in political and economic terms through the vertical integration of the Baltic States by forced assimilation into the Soviet Union with the status of Soviet

Socialist Republics; second, in psychological, cultural and linguistic terms, this project was advanced through horizontal competition that aimed to promote the Sovietization/Russification of all aspects of life within these republics; mass migration into the three Baltic States from the rest of the Soviet Republics, particularly the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic (RSFSR), reinforced this interlinked process (Herd and Lofgren 2001, 278).

O'Loughlin points out that nationalism in the new states and territories which emerged from the former Soviet Union was not the result of a "sleeping beauty" phenomenon, awakening after decades of communism that submerged cultural loyalties to the ideological preference of the "Soviet Citizen" (O'Loughlin et al 1998, 341). He adds that "Soviet nationalities policy was instrumental in the making of nations and nationalism and as indigenes became more economically and politically mobilized as a result of the growth of educated indigenous elite, they became more nationalistic and pressed for more control of resources in the territory of indigenes" (O'Loughlin et al 1998, 341). This claim finds empirical support in the national movement in the Baltic States. As Muiznieks (2006, 14) describes, with political liberalization in the late 1980s, demands to halt migration, upgrade the status of the eponymous languages, and make the titular nations "masters of their own land" exploded into the public realm of the Baltic society.

Pettai and Hallik (2002, 505) argue that one of the key reasons for ethnic peace and stability in Estonia over the decade of the 1990s was a considerable degree of control instituted by the Estonian political community over its sizeable Russian-speaking minority. They analyze this control using Lustick's three main indicators of segmentation, dependence and co-optation (Pettai and Hallik 2002, 505). For them, Estonian moves to restrict automatic citizenship after 1991 to only pre-1940 citizens and their descendants was an essential opening step toward segmentation of the non-Estonian minority. Secondly, they see economic changes in the country as a result of market transition altered considerably the economic resource base of both the Estonian and non-Estonian communities; here the net effect was a considerable increase in the dependence of the latter on the former. Lastly, they examine the extent to which the Estonian political elite have practiced a policy of co-optation among key non-Estonian leaders (Pettai and Hallik 2002, 506).

For the theoretical analysis it is important to outline the difference made by Lustick between two theoretical approaches of consociationalism (power-sharing) and control. He argues that both of these approaches could be seen as alternative explanations for stability in divided and segmented societies; however, whereas consociationalism focuses on the mutual cooperation of subnational elites as decisive, a control approach would focus on the emergence and maintenance of a relationship in which the superior power of one segment is mobilized to enforce stability by constraining the political actions and opportunities of another segment or segments (Lustick 1979, 327). These conceptual distinctions, indeed, help to see the clear difference between the two approaches and the policies implemented in each of the systems in a real life.

According to Lijphart, the power-sharing can be defined in terms of four characteristics. The two primary characteristics are the participation of the representatives of all significant groups in the government of the country and a high degree of autonomy for these groups. The secondary characteristics are proportionality and the minority veto (Lijphart 1990, 494). It is clear that none of these characteristics has been present in the state-building process in any of the Baltic States. In this respect, it is interesting to see the interview between his two terms as Prime Minister. When asked whether the Belgian model (with each cultural pillar having autonomy) or the French (nationally homogenous) model was more appropriate for Estonia, Vahi responded:

Still I would propose for Estonia the French model. (...) I see the Estonian state as a model for such a nation state, where the dominant nationality is Estonian, the state language is Estonian, where non-Estonians have been granted human rights, and also economic rights. (...) The integration of non-Estonians with Estonia, Estonian culture and language – I think is very important (Laitin 1998, 94).

As Laitin reports, when he posed the same question to Juris Baldunciks, then a member of the Latvian Academy of Science, Baldunciks insisted that Latvians would never accept a “pillared” society! (Laitin 1998, 94)

Although it is very difficult to characterize any country with divided and segmented society and to state that it uses the pure model of any of the above mentioned two systems, nevertheless, it is obvious that Baltic national elites, while restoring statehood of their independent republics,

completely refused any possibility of using the power-sharing (consociational) approach and the more “elements of control” approach could be mentioned in their actions.

Restoration of State Sovereignty

The independence struggle at the end of the 1980s had an ethnic coloring: an absolute majority of titular people were supporting state independence, while non-titulars (mainly Russian-speakers) were belonging to the pro-Soviet movement (Muiznieks 2006, 14). Järve and Wellmann (1999, 7) believe that demographic fears and political suspicions gave ammunition to those who wanted to limit the weight of Russian-speakers in decision-making. As Spruds (2004, 9) reports, the new nationalistic political elite set itself a twofold task: to ensure its dominant position in the country, and to establish new forms of political and social life. He explains that given the high proportion of Russian-speaking people, granting citizenship rights to them would lead to a high proportion of representatives of this group in the national legislature; this, in turn, would limit representation of the national elite in the parliament, and would therefore reduce their influence on decision-making (Spruds 2004, 9). Valdis Birkavs, the former Prime and Foreign Minister of Latvia, stressed in early 1993 that “the creation of a two-community state rather than a nation-state will entail the introduction of a second state language, of equal political rights, and...the possibility of dual citizenship in the future...This is no way acceptable to the Latvians” (Spruds 2004, 9).

That was why the political choice that Estonia and Latvia made during the collapse of the Soviet Union was not only to restore the pre-war Estonian and Latvian independent republics but also to restore the citizenship and to follow the principles of *ius sanguinis*²⁷ and naturalization in their citizenship legislation. As Järve and Wellmann (1999, 6) explain, this meant that only those current residents of these two countries who were the citizens, or at least one of whose ancestors was a citizen of the Republic of Estonia or Republic of Latvia by 1940 when the republics were invaded by the Soviet troops, would be given citizenship. This process left hundreds of thousands residents of these two Baltic countries in the position of being a non-citizen with no

²⁷ *Ius Sanguinis* - (*lat. Right of the blood*), designates the principle, according to which a state lends its nationality to children, whose parents or at least one parents are citizens of this state. (See Descending principle, Economy-point.org, <http://www.economy-point.org/d/descending-principle.html>)

political rights and accordingly no opportunity to take part in the decision-making process. In the proportional measures, the non-citizen residents constituted nearly 40% of the whole population in the both cases (Herd and Lofgren 2001, 278).

In this respect it is extremely interesting to consider the official and legal argumentation given by the Constitutional Court of Latvia in one of its judgments:

Regaining of independence after the period of occupation of Latvia gave the legislator the possibility to determine the citizen aggregate of Latvia. Continuity of Latvia as international legal subject created the legal basis for not automatically granting the status of the citizen to a certain group of persons. The legal basis of continuity of Latvia is fixed in the May 4, 1990 Supreme Council Declaration of the Renewal of the Independence of the Republic of Latvia (Case No. 2004-15-0106).

In the concluding part of its judgment, the Court states that after the passing of the Non-Citizen Law appeared a new (up to that time unknown) category of persons – Latvian non-citizens. Latvian non-citizens cannot be compared with any other status of a physical entity, which has been determined in international legal acts, as the rate of rights, established for non-citizens, does not comply with any other status. Latvian non-citizens can be regarded neither as the citizens, nor the aliens and stateless persons but as persons with "a specific legal status"; in addition, the Court mentions that non-citizens shall not be regarded as stateless persons, because – in accordance with Section 1 of the Immigration Law – alien is a person, who is not a Latvian citizen or a non-citizen of Latvia (Case No. 2004-15-0106). The last statement is, indeed, of great importance when the state official authority declares that non-citizen status does not mean that a person is a stateless one. This declaration is a positive one in its legal nature, of course.

Lithuania, with its much smaller and better integrated minority, chose a more inclusive approach to citizenship, adopting a "zero option" policy of granting citizenship to all residents on Lithuanian territory regardless of nationality and without any language requirements at the time of re-establishing independence. This stance could be explained by the relatively high number of ethnic Lithuanians (approximately 80%) for the moment of restoration of state sovereignty (van Elsuwege 2004, 3). During my interviews with scholars and politicians in Latvia and

Estonia, I found an additional explanation for the difference between citizenship policies of Latvia and Estonia on the one hand, and Lithuania on another. As it was outlined, besides the demographic factor, Lithuania -as the result of Soviet incorporation- gained the territories (Vilnius and Klaipeda region) which were not parts of the pre-war Lithuanian Republic. These territories were inhabited by people those were not the citizens of the Lithuanian independent republic; that is why while restoring the state sovereignty, Lithuania was not so free to restore prewar citizenship as well.²⁸

However, it must be mentioned that even with its decision to choose the so-called zero option and grant citizenship to all her residents, some of the Russian-speakers were still dissatisfied by the politics of the new state and one of the explanations was that they did not have Russian citizenship as well (Lebedeva 1997, 184), which shows that some part of the Russian-speaking population could never be satisfied with the state's official policy towards them, especially while implementing citizenship policies.

As Lebedeva (1997, 124) points out, the strong national movement for state independence in the Baltic region brought official recognition of the state independence of all three republics by the act of the State Soviet of the USSR under the signature of Mikhail Gorbachev (then the President of the USSR) on September 7, 1991. The importance of this historical fact was highlighted by Aarne Veedla²⁹ during an interview with him. As he underlined, since the moment of official recognition of state independence of the Baltic States by the Soviet Union (September, 1991), there appeared citizens of Estonia and citizens of USSR residing in the Estonian Republic. Hence, as he argues, Estonia should not be blamed; that after the dissolution of USSR in December, 1991 hundreds of thousands of people (former soviet citizens) were left without citizenship.³⁰

²⁸ Interview with Axel Kirch; Nil Ushakov, Member of Saeima, on April 15, 2008; Dmitrijs Nikolajevs, President, the Latvian National Community "West Russians", on April 15, 2008; Nils Muiznieks.

²⁹ A figure actively involved in the independence movement and nowadays advisor to the member of Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) and former Minister of Foreign Affairs - Kristiina Ojuland.

³⁰ Interview with Aarne Veedla, April 12, 2008.

It is also worthwhile to analyze the legal framework regarding the citizenship existing in both Latvia and Estonia. The Citizenship Law adopted by the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) on 22 June 1994 and proclaimed by President Ulmanis on 11 August 1994 (with several amendments) stipulates that Latvian citizens are also Latvians and Livs³¹ whose permanent place of residence is Latvia, who have registered in accordance with the procedures set out in law and who do not have citizenship (nationality) of another state, or who have received an expatriation permit from the state of their former citizenship (nationality), if such a permit is provided for by the laws of that state (Citizenship Law of Latvia 1994, Sections 1 and 2). As it could be seen, being ethnically Latvian or Liv is enough for the person to obtain the Latvian citizenship, while the former citizens of Soviet Union of different ethnic origin have to go through the naturalization process in order to be granted the citizenship. From the other side, a positive trend stated by this law is the fact that a child born in Latvia after August 21, 1991 shall be acknowledged as a Latvian citizen if he/she is a stateless person and his/her permanent place of residence is Latvia (Citizenship Law of Latvia 1994, Section 3.1), that naturally means that number of non-citizens will decrease significantly in the near future.

The Law on Citizenship adopted by the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) on January 19, 1995 and proclaimed by the President Lennart Meri on January 31, 1995 besides usual preconditions set for naturalization process, also contains the special article which states the rule of receiving Estonian citizenship for special service:

Special service shall be accomplishments in science, culture, sports or some other sphere, which have contributed to Estonia's international reputation. Estonian citizenship for special service may be given to no more than five persons in any one year. Any member of the Government of the Republic may make a proposal to grant Estonian citizenship for special service. The granting of Estonian citizenship for special service must be justified by the Government of the Republic (Law on Citizenship of Estonia 1995, Article 10).

³¹ The Livonians or Livs are the indigenous inhabitants of Livonia, part of today's Republic of Latvia, (See Encyclopedia Britannica Online, www.britannica.com/eb/article-9048608/Livonia)

The impact of this special article is outlined by Laitin as well:

Prime Minister Tiit Vahi gave the gift of citizenship to people with whom he had good bargaining relations, much to the chagrin of the opposition. But when the opposition leader Mart Laar came to power, he sought to cultivate "his" Russians in the same manner, and Vahi, then out of office, criticized Laar for abusing the practice. Nonetheless, neither Vahi nor Laar gave citizenship to potential fifth columnists (Laitin 1998, 5).

As an additional positive factor from Estonian legislation, could be mentioned the granting of active voting rights in the local elections to the non-citizens; however, they still were not granted the passive electoral right that meant they were not able to be elected for the local council positions. The same has not happened in Latvia, though, the country has no less proportion of non-citizens. Dmitrijs Nikolajevs explained that in Estonia, non-citizens (mainly Russian-speakers) compactly live in two northern regions of the country and constitute a clear majority in those regions. That was why leaving them without voting rights would mean that practically no one would be able to vote and accordingly, the local self-government would not be formed. While in Latvia, they (non-citizens) are spread all over the country and granting voting rights to them would mean that they could change the local political establishment in the whole Latvian state.³²

Nevertheless, despite the positive provisions in the legislation, for the initial period of the state-building process in both Latvia and Estonia, state policies stayed quite restrictive and this was mentioned by various international human rights organizations. Hughes and Sasse (2003, 22) point out as an example of exclusive legislation, Estonia's Law of October 1993 on "Cultural Autonomy for National Minorities" which was limited to Estonian citizens, thus excluding the vast majority of its national minorities from the Russian-speaking population who were denied citizenship.

Spruds (2004, 8) argues that the perceptions of demographic threats to the national survival were strengthened by historical experiences that largely contributed to the formation of feelings of victimization and deeply entrenched national grievances within the Baltic societies; and the Russian-speaking minority was perceived as a potential instrument for Russia to exert its influence on the new states. In 1993, the Latvian

³² Interview with Dmitrijs Nikolajevs.

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georgs Andrejevs stated that "Russia, by using [her diaspora] as a fifth column...is seeking to create a situation enabling forces which are not Latvian to come to power and to annex Latvia to Russia" (Spruds 2004, 8).

Perceptions of nation and state largely derived from the above-mentioned beliefs. An ethnically defined nation-state was considered the only possibility for the survival of Latvian and Estonian culture, language and nation itself.

Accession to the EU and NATO: Facilitating the integration inside the societies of the Baltic States

The Baltic States have all sought to "return to Europe" in the post-Soviet period, a project which has been variously conceptualized by the different political elites of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. For some, it has been considered a logical reassertion or restoration of their natural and rightful position within a "common European home". The President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga explicitly underscored this perception when, following the European Union Helsinki Summit's decision in December 1999 to open up negotiations with Latvia, she stated that Latvia had turned its back to and walked away from the post-Soviet realm forever, to become a democratic and open European Country (Herd and Lofgren 2001, 274). European Commission President Romano Prodi reinforced such a perception in an address to the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament) in February 2000: "When joining the Union, Lithuania will bring with it its love of freedom and democracy, which has been the basis of the restoration of independence" (Herd and Lofgren 2001, 274).

However, the process towards membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations faced two main challenges, and both were directly connected with the problem of Russian-speaking minorities. On the one hand, Russian-speakers (often driven by the Russo-phone political forces) were strongly against entering the Western organizations, especially NATO, that would naturally mean for them to be cut off from the "motherland" - Russia. Tabuns quotes a comment left by a Russian-speaker at an internet-forum which makes the picture clear: "Latvia is a country of frightened idiots - imagine paying such huge amounts of money for the seeming promises of the bandits who occupy the White House!" (Tabuns 2006, 31). On the other hand, the EU and NATO

promoting democracy worldwide could not let themselves to accept states (particularly, Estonia and Latvia) with restrictive citizenship policies towards the ethnic minorities' rights.

To reach their ultimate objective of becoming EU Member States, the Baltic countries had to satisfy the political and economic criteria for accession as identified by the June 1993 Copenhagen European Council. This implied stable institutions "guarantying democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and promotion of minorities" (van Elsuwege 2004, 3). Indeed, neither Estonia nor Latvia was fully meeting these criteria by that moment.

It could not be denied that pressure from Western society and the Baltic's keen streaming towards the entire "European family" played a very positive role and contributed to the beginning of the integration processes in the Baltic countries. As a result, in October 1998, the Latvian citizens (most of them ethnic Latvians) supported the idea of making the naturalization procedure to obtain citizenship easier at the referendum (Spruds 2004, 10). Furthermore, the Latvian government eliminated restrictions preventing non-citizens from working as fire-fighters, airline staff, and pharmacists (van Elsuwege 2004, 11). At the end of 1998 the Latvian government approved the National Programme "The integration of Society in Latvia" which indicated that, "Latvia has never been an ethnically homogenous country. Society must take into account the current situation and future prospects... Latvia is a democratic, national state in which every resident, the Latvian nation, and each national minority has the right to preserve their own national identity" (Spruds 2004, 11).

In Estonia, similar processes have taken place and, in some instances, tendency towards more inclusive policy happened earlier than in Latvia. Already at the end of 1993, Estonian President Lenart Meri established the "Roundtable on Minorities" in order to facilitate inter-ethnic understanding; there was also the removal of language requirements for local election candidates and modified controversial "Aliens Law" (Spruds 2004, 12).

From the side of Russian-speakers it was also clear that it was better to take a seat in the "Baltic Train moving towards Europe" than to be associated with the "fifth column" or the "Trojan Horse" in Russia's hands, which was no longer attractive as much as Europe. Besides direct

economic benefits of being members of the European Community and the appearance of a new stratum – the “European Russians”³³, they also strongly realized that within this new environment they would be better able to internationalize their own ethnic problems and therefore build-up a greater protection of their rights. The clear example of this “thinking in a right way” is the result of the European Parliament elections in 2004. The Russian political alliance – For Human Rights in a United Latvia (FHRUL) did well, receiving 10.66% of the vote and Tatyana Zhdanok became a member of the European Parliament (Ikstens 2006, 45). This result provided FHRUL with another platform as well – Mrs. Zhdanok publicly called for the establishment of a pan-European Russian party and in June 2004, together with politicians from five other European countries, signed a manifesto in Prague establishing such a party (Ikstens 2006, 46).

From the prospective of membership in NATO, it could be deduced that collective security guarantees provided by this organization, made the Baltic States to feel more secure from the possibility of external influence on domestic affairs, and accordingly to make the legislation more inclusive.

The overall positive role of membership in the two Euro-Atlantic organizations (EU and NATO) in the integrative processes between the majority and minority groups inside the Baltic society is clear, especially in the process of making citizenship legislation more inclusive; Nils Muiznieks, the well-known scholar on this issue, who was the Minister for Special Assignments for Society Integration Affairs during the Euro-Atlantic accession period, also agrees with these findings,³⁴ as do all the other scholars, active politicians and NGO activists with whom I had meetings and interviews during my field trip.

Conclusion

While speaking about the process of integration, Evhen Tsybulenko, Head of Human Rights Centre, compares it with a very simple chair standing on four legs (Radio 4 Tallinn Estonia 2007, Talk Show/Politics). One of these legs, he believes, is the knowledge of state language; and without one leg the chair cannot be steady. At the same time,

³³ Interview with Tanel Mätlik.

³⁴ Interview with Nils Muiznieks.

Tsybulenko argues, it is impossible to stay on the only leg as well. Thus, he deduces that while keeping in mind the importance of the knowledge of the state language, there should also be taken into consideration other problematic issues such as the respect to the rule of law, democracy, equal rights, etc. He also finds the problem of educating the youth a very keen one, and believes that school should take a more active part in the raising of legal-awareness and understanding of the main concepts of the state and law among the young generation (Radio 4 Tallinn Estonia 2007, Talk Show/Politics). I absolutely agree with this, because building the common society and state, without tensions on the interpretation of the historical past which was controversial not due to ethnic but mainly because of political differences, is the very role which clearly belongs to the future generation.

Maimone also points out the importance of speaking the same language; however, she notes that even if Estonians and Russian-speakers have the same language, it is not obvious that their attitudes and opinions would be any more similar than they currently are (Maimone 2003, 24). And, she makes a comparison with the situation in the United States where the vast majority of African-Americans speak English, the same as the majority of other Americans, and concludes that the differences in the attitudes of Russian-speakers and Estonians are not that much larger than differences between African-Americans and Americans (Maimone 2003, 24).

Undoubtedly, some Russian-Speakers do not constitute an integral part of the local - Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian society but it is also obvious that many of these people have already integrated into the local societies and feel they belong to the states where they live; therefore, they are not and should not be treated as a "fifth column". Though the integration process is still going on and no one could definitely claim any concrete time when the titular and Russian-speaking minorities will live in an absolute harmony, one fact remains the most important - the worst possible scenario of interethnic relations has already been avoided. Nowadays both parts of society are building interethnic relations in a constructive and legal framework, especially, the young generation which cares more about the social welfare and economic development of the country, where they all live and co-exist. In this respect, Pettai and Kallas's report is extremely important, that although polls among Russian-speakers showed that almost 80% believed the decision to move the "Bronze Soldier" was wrong, nearly 70% still

considered themselves a part of Estonian society (Pettai and Kallas 2008, 20).

From their side, the Baltic States have also been sure to make their legislation and policies in accordance with the high standards set up by the civilized community. The clear approval of this positive stance is the Democracy Score given for each of the three countries by Freedom House, which is considered to be one of the main watchdogs on human rights protection and democracy. With these Democracy Scores the Baltic States have the leading positions among 29 countries representing the New EU and former USSR and Yugoslav states (only Slovenia did better³⁵).

I began with a question: are the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic States a “fifth column” or an integral part of the local society?; and I have shown that Russian-speaking population in the Baltic States despite all the challenges faced, a great desire and efforts made by the interested external political forces, have not been turned into and used as the “fifth column” against the states of their citizenship and/or residence.

It is very natural that there are ethno-cultural differences and distinctions in political beliefs and opinions between the representatives of the titular nations and the Russian-speakers; integration does not and should not mean assimilation. However, I believe the official discourse and legislative changes will make government policies even more inclusive. This will allow citizens³⁶ as Muller (2007, 19) points out “to feel at home in the state”. There still will exist for a long period of time distinctions along the ethno-cultural lines between the majority and minority groups, though these distinctions will not turn into a dangerous and destructive threat to society, thus, leaving no room for any further threat of using Russian-speakers as a “fifth column” in the Baltic States.

³⁵ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit, Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia*, (2007), New York, 42.

³⁶ In this case, I would add “non-citizens” as well.

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