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Features of the Russian Population Collective Identity in Latvia in the Period 1991–2021

Vladislav Volkov

Keywords: Latvia, collective ethno-cultural identity, recognition of identity, minority education, Russian population, political behavior, social memory.

Abstract: Russians' collective ethno-cultural identity in Latvia is concentrated around the values of the Russian language in the private and public life of this ethnic group. At the same time, nation-building in Latvia is focused on the dominance of the Latvian language and culture in the public space. In reality, this is manifested not only in the differences in the legal possibilities of the Latvian identity and the identity of ethnic minorities, but also in the dissemination of ideas in the public consciousness about the different life chances of the bearers of this identity. This collision leads to the politicization of the Russian collective identity, as well as to the need to provide it with more solid ideological foundations in historical memory, in reproduction thanks to the education system.

1. Russians in the ethnic structure of the population of Latvia

Latvia is a country where the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population is a long-lasting historical as well as political phenomenon. The geographical proximity of Latvia to Russia contributed to the settlement of Russian Old Believers on its territory in the second half of the 17th century. However, a significant increase in the number of Russian and Russian speaking population was associated with the entry of Latvia into the Russian Empire in the 18th century, and then into the USSR in the 20th century. According to the materials of the first all-Russian population census (1897), 231.2 thousand Russians, or 12% of the population, lived on the current territory of Latvia, and more than 300 thousand before the World War I. The Russian population in Riga, the largest city in the Baltic provinces, during this period comprised about 100 thousand people, or 20% of the total number of inhabitants (Skujenieks 1925, p. 68). During the period of independent Latvia (1918–1940), the number of Russian population decreased to 206.5 thousand (1935), although it still was the largest ethnic minority of the country (10.6%) (Skujenieks 1936, p. 292). The largest number of Russian population in Latvia was observed during the last years of the USSR, which was caused mainly by migration from the regions. In 1989, 905.5 thousand Russians, or 34.0% of the total population, lived in Latvia (Iedzīvotāju skaits ... 2021). During the restored independence of Latvia since 1991,

the number of Russian population has reduced by half due to emigration, as well as negative demographic growth. At the beginning of 2021, 463.6 thousand Russians lived in Latvia, which was 24.5% of the total population of the country, and their share in the population of Riga comprises 36.0% (Iedzīvotāju skaits un īpatsvars ... 2021). The share of the Russian population among other ethnic minorities is high – 64.2% (Iedzīvotāju reģistra statistika ... 2021). The high proportion of the Russian population in the largest cities of Latvia, as well as in Latgale, led to the consolidation of the collective identity of this ethnic group. Among all the largest ethnic groups in Latvia – Latvians, Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Poles, who make up 94.9% of the total population (2017. gadā pastāvēgo ... 2018) only for Latvians and Russians, the language of their ethnic group is their native language. Latvian is the native language for Latvians in 95.7% of cases, Russian is the native language for Russians in 94.5% of cases, Ukrainian – for Ukrainians in 27.2%, Polish – for Poles in 19.4%, and Belarusian – for Belarusians – in 18.8% (Calculated by: Iedzīvotāju tautība ... 2021). Only Latvians and Russians, in comparison with other large ethnic groups in Latvia (with the exception of the Roma), are characterized by marriages mainly with partners of their own ethnic origin (2017. gadā pastāvēgo ... 2018). In 2019, Latvian women married Latvian men in 81.0% of cases, 52.5% of Russian women married Russian men, 9.9% of Ukrainian women married Ukrainian men, 7.7% of Polish women

married Polish men, and 7.6% of Belarusian women married Belarusian men. At the same time, the share of Russian women marrying Latvian men has increased compared to the Soviet period. In 1970, this share was 16.8%, in 1980 - 15.5%, in 1990 - 15.9%, in 2000 - 22.7%, in 2010 - 26.3%, in 2019 - 28.2% (Calculated by: ILN050, 2021).

2. The role of ethnicity in the political behaviour of Russians in Latvia

In all government parties, the share of representatives of the Russian population is either extremely insignificant or absent altogether. Therefore, this group of population is focused on creating its "own" political parties. Russian-speaking political parties, which in their programs focus on the interests of this group of the population (issues of education in Russian, the problem of statelessness among the Russian-speaking population, etc.), occupy a stable niche in the parliament, as well as in the municipal councils on territories with a high proportion of the Russian population. Thus, in the election to the Latvian Saeima (Parliament) in 1993, the parties "Consent of Latvia, revival of the national economy" and "Equality" together had 20 seats in the parliament (out of 100) (5. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). After the 6th Saeima election (1995), "People's Consent Party" and "Socialist Party of Latvia" won 11 seats (6. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). "People's Consent Party" had 16 seats in the 7th Saeima (1998) (7. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). In the 8th Saeima (2002), the political association "For Human Rights in a United Latvia" became the second largest parliamentary faction with 25 seats (8. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). In the 9th Saeima (2006), the "Harmony Centre" and the Association of Political Organizations "For Human Rights in a United Latvia" had 23 seats (9. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). In the 10th Saeima (2010), the "Harmony Centre" had 29 seats (10. Saeimā ievēlētie deputāti 2021), in the 11th Saeima (2011) - 31 seats (11. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). Since 2011, the "Harmony Centre" has been the largest faction of the parliament. In the 12th Saeima (2014), the "Social Democratic Party Harmony" had 24 seats (12. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021), and in 13th Saeima (2018) - 23 seats (13. Saeimas vēlēšanas 2021). The decline in the activity of "Harmony" in these issues over the past few years has resulted in the loss of its leading position in the Riga municipality election in 2020, when "Harmony" and "Russian Union of Latvia" together were able to get only 23.4% of the votes, which did not allow them to form a ruling coalition for the first time in ten years (Результаты выборов ... 2020).

3. Institutionalization of opportunities for the reproduction of collective ethno-cultural identity for ethnic minorities

Principles of the liberal state policy of national identity suggest that the national values common to all residents would also include respect for the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve and develop their collective

ethno-cultural identity, as well as established practices of implementing this identity that have been recognized in civil society, if they are implemented in accordance with democratic principles (Tully 2005, pp. 417-418; Young 1999, pp. 415-421). The principles of liberal multiculturalism in the formation and implementation of the state ethno-policy, in which the common national identity is considered within the framework of "differentiated citizenship", are more consistent with the ethnic minorities of Latvia. The recognition of the collective ethno-cultural identity of ethnic minorities as the most important resource for national identity will make it possible to form an important partner of the state from the carriers of this identity, significantly reduce the risks of subordinated and socially low status of their ethno-cultural identity (Karolewski 2010, pp. 23, 34, 81, 88-99; Wirth 1956, pp. 237-238).

The Preamble to the Constitution of Latvia (2014) establishes provisions on the "Latvian nation" and "people of Latvia" that are not identical in their legal and political meanings. Ethnic minorities, whose guarantees for the preservation of their identity are declared by article 114 of the Constitution, are not considered as an integral part of the "Latvia's nation", but part of "people of Latvia". These differences between the Latvian identity and the identity of ethnic minorities are reinforced by the characterization of Latvia as a "national state" (Latvijas Republikas Satversme 2019).

The programmes of the leading political parties focused on an ethnic Latvian voter link the prospects of the state identity policy with a significant strengthening of the position of the Latvian state language in the life and education systems of ethnic minorities. The programmes of many political parties omit many constitutional provisions on guarantees to ethnic minorities. It is fair to say that the national identity policy, especially at the level of an active political process, is aimed at stimulating nation-building in Latvia, which is still considered incomplete by the leading political forces of this country. The programmes of some political parties of the government coalition ("New Unity" and "For Human Latvia") do not contain the very mention of the presence of ethnic minorities in Latvia (Krišjāņa Karīna ... 2021; Programma pašvaldību ... 2021). The programme of the radical "National Alliance" mentions the native language of the Russian population in Latvia in a negative context (4000 zīmju ... 2021). The election programme of the opposition party "Union of Greens and Farmers" which mainly Latvian voters vote for, has only recently begun to include a provision on the need to respect the right of ethnic minorities to preserve their language and culture (Latvijas Zemnieku ... 2021). In the party programmes of the government "New Conservative Party" and the "Development / For!" party, ethnic minorities are considered as social groups that need to be actively included in the space of the "Latvian language, culture, and worldview" (Jaunās ... 2021), or in the education system is allowed "the opportunity to master part of the educational material bilingually in the languages of ethnic minorities and

the languages of the EU" (Attīstībai / Par! ... 2021). The presence of certain provisions on preserving the identity of ethnic minorities in the programme documents of the two government parties can be considered as a step forward compared to the situation before the election to the current 13th Seimas (2018), in which all government parties did not mention the presence of ethnic minorities in the country in their programmes. These innovations are associated with the increased criticism of the Latvian ethno-policy towards ethnic minorities by the Committee of Ministers and other EU structures (Resolution ... 2021).

The party "Harmony", which has had the largest faction in the Saeima for more than a decade, but has never been represented in the government, proceeds from the idea of the need to provide ethnic minorities with a worthier place in nation-building than it is happening now. This party also emphasizes the group ethno-cultural values of this part of the population, for the full application of the norms of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the withdrawal of reservations (declarations) made when the Convention was ratified by the Saeima (Программа Социал-демократической ... 2021). In addition to "Harmony", the "Russian Union of Latvia" party also focuses on the interests of ethnic minorities. This party proclaims the need to achieve an official status for the Russian language, state guarantees for Russian schools and schools of ethnic minorities in general (Программа партии Русский союз ... 2017). But the "Russian Union" has not been represented in the Saeima since 2010.

4. Continuous social memory as one of the sources of the collective ethno-cultural identity of Latvian Russians

The restoration of state independence in Latvia in 1991 was prepared in the political consciousness of ethnic Latvians by the historical memory of the Republic of Latvia in 1918–1940. Since the period of liberalization of the Soviet regime and the beginning of the Third Atmoda (*Latvian Awakening*) (the end of the 1980s), it was necessary to make a value choice for the Russian population. At this time for the overwhelming majority of the Russian population, their historical consciousness was part of the consciousness of the Russian nation as a whole. During the Soviet period, the idea that the culture of Latvia is ethnically diverse was not particularly emphasized in the public consciousness. For example, in the school textbook "History of the Latvian SSR, not a word is said about the presence of entire layers of Baltic-German, Russian, and Polish cultures during the modernization of the 19th century. Culture in Latvia was presented precisely as ethnic Latvian folk and professional culture (Anisimova, Kanāle, Strods 1974, pp. 31–33, 82–87, 99–119). In the Latvian Soviet encyclopaedia (1985), the term "nation" was applied only to ethnic Latvians, as the "main population" in the republic (Звидриный, Каспаровица, Стродс 1985, p. 115).

In the socio-political space of Latvia, immediately before the restoration of independence, there were no popular leaders and significant public structures that would be associated with Russian ethno-cultural values. Many representatives of the Russian public, who are still well-known today, were included in Latvian socio-political projects. Tatiana Zhdanok, a member of the European Parliament since 2004, joined the People's Front of Latvia in 1988 (Татьяна Жданок 2021). Boris Tsilevich, a member of the Latvian Saeima, since the mid-1990s, one of the founders of the People's Consent Party, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, was an activist of the People's Front of Latvia (Борис Цилевич 2021). A well-known journalist and political activist, one of the organizers of the referendum on the draft law "Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia", which provided for the assignment of the status of the second state language to Russian in Latvia (2012), Vladimir Linderman edited the newspaper of the People's Front of Latvia "Atmoda" in Russian in the late 1980s (Владимир Линдерман 2021). Journalist Alexander Kazakov, one of the leaders of the movement for the protection of education in Latvia in Russian in 2003–2004, was also actively published in "Atmoda" in the late 1980s (Автобиография Александра Казакова 2021).

Russians need to synthesize all the historical stages of the Russians' stay in Latvia as an ethno-cultural and even political value in the construction of their social memory. At the end of 2017, the author of the article analysed the topics of publications on the portal "Russians of Latvia" (editor Dr. hist. Tatiana Feigmane), which is by far the largest information resource about the history and culture of the Russian population in Latvia (Русские Латвии 2021). Russian authors (490 [53.3%]) were mostly devoted to Russian culture and history, and personalities of the Russian population in Latvia. Together with publications on Russian culture and history in general, the history and public life in Latvia as part of Russian history, the number of articles reached 630, or 68.2%, which significantly exceeds the share of publications on current political problems of integration in Latvian society (167, or 18.1%) (Table 1).

The formation of the social memory of the Russian population takes place outside of active communication and public discussions with the Latvian public. Therefore, there are obstacles to the inclusion of the social memory of Russians in the context of general Latvian memory and, as a result, the integration of their collective ethno-cultural identity into the Latvian national identity. In 2010, the author of this article conducted a study on the attitude of Latvians and Russians in Daugavpils, the second largest city in Latvia, to public discussions in relation to problematic aspects of their joint history.¹⁾ The data obtained indicate that the majority of respondents tend

1) The study "Antagonisms and Reconciliation in Multicultural Areas" (N = 578; the project manager was professor Jacek Kurczewski [University of Warsaw]).

Table 1. The topics of articles on the portal "Russians of Latvia" at the end of 2017

Main topics of articles	Number	
	Russian authors	Latvian authors
Russian culture and the population of Latvia in the history of modern times; the creators of Russian social life and culture in Latvia; Russians born in Latvia	490 (53.0%)	2 (6.7%)
Problems of integration in Latvian society; interaction of Latvians and ethnic minorities in history and modernity; the status of the Russian language and schools in Latvia; the problem of ethnic equality	167 (18.1%)	11 (36.6%)
Russian culture and history in general; the history and social life in Latvia as part of Russian (Soviet) history (1703–1918, 1940–1991)	140 (15.2%)	0 (0%)
Russian and Latvian people and culture interaction	53 (5.7%)	13 (43.3%)
Total	850 (100.0%)	26 (100.0%)

to avoid open discussions on these issues. The greatest desire to refuse to publicly discuss issues of historical memory was observed just among the Russian residents in Daugavpils (answers "It is better to forget what happened, it is important to maintain good-neighbourly relations" and "It is impossible to forget the past, but it is also not worth discussing it publicly" 76.2–78.7%). But even Latvians do not at all seek to publicly discuss the history of Latvian-Russian relations (the indicator is 70.9 %) (Volkov, Kurczewski 2013, p. 67). These data suggest that for many respondents, open discussions on the historical memory of various ethnic groups can only damage the practiced interethnic relations in their places of permanent residence. On the other hand, it is impossible not to recognize the weakness of the public sphere of discussions in Latvia as an arena for the free exchange of opinions and search for socio-political compromises, including issues of interethnic relations and social memory.

Avoiding public discussions on topical issues of historical memory is also characteristic of some politicians who claim to represent the interests of the Russian population in Latvia. Thus, in the "Riga City Integration Program for 2012–2017" adopted by the Riga municipality in 2012, controlled at that time by the "Harmony" party, the very problem of historical memory was not even mentioned (Rīgas pilsētas ... 2012, pp. 4, 28, 29). This differs from the position of the Latvian parties, which constantly resort to the topic of historical memory in public discourse.

The Russian minority seeks to supplement the Latvian public space with elements of its social memory. Russians' activity in institutionalizing the peculiarities of their historical memory on the territory of Latvia is most clearly manifested in the activities of the Internet portals of public organizations, in which information about the history and culture of the Russian population, as well as their historical homeland, occupies one of the central places (for example: "Russians of Latvia", the Information Website of the Russian Society in Latvia, the IMHO Club portal, the cycle of humanitarian seminars and the almanac "Russian World and Latvia", the journal "Balti-

ysky Mir", many international scientific conferences and scientific publications dedicated to Orthodoxy, including the Old Believers in Latvia). Russian Orthodox Church, and the daily newspaper in Russian "Vesti Segodnya" also addresses the topic of the historical memory of Russians in Latvia (Hanovs, Volkov 2021, pp. 105–130). The idea of the continuity of the social memory of ethnic minorities at all stages of the history of Latvia is the most popular in these publications.

5. The need for education in the native language among Russian primary and secondary school students

The modern school education system in multi-ethnic countries forms a common national identity of young people and provides representatives of ethnic minorities with additional opportunities to preserve their ethno-cultural collective identity. As of September 1, 2019, 54.4 thousand children had Russian as the language of tuition in secondary schools in Latvia, which comprised 25.4% of the number of all schoolchildren in the country (Izglītājamo skaits ... 2021). Russian-speaking primary and secondary school students' share of Latvian students stabilized by the middle of the first decade of the 21st century (before that, since the early 1990s, there was a tendency to decrease the share of students in Russian), which undoubtedly indicates the stable need of the Russian population to preserve their ethno-cultural identity (Волков 2013, p. 191). At the same time, the "Law on Education" (1998) prescribes Latvian language as the language of "state, municipal educational institutions, and higher state educational institutions". Foreign language education in state higher educational institutions is possible if the programmes are implemented in the official languages of the European Union (Russian is not included in the list). The Law defines the procedure for the establishment and implementation of "education programmes for ethnic minorities". These programs additionally include educational material on "mastering the culture of an ethnic minority", as well as "integration of an ethnic minority into Latvian society" (Latvijas

Table 2. Influence of social identity and ethnicity to a person's life in Latvia (%)

Identities	All	Latvians			Russians		
	Positive and almost positive	Positive and almost positive	Neutral	Negative and almost negative	Positive and almost positive	Neutral	Negative and almost negative
Latvian	63.6	60.8	36.8	2.3	69.3	28.8	2.8
Russian	40.2	39.7	48.9	11.4	41.2	44.1	14.3
Belarusian	36.8	35.1	60.0	4.8	39.9	50.7	9.5
Polish	37.4	35.1	61.4	3.4	41.8	52.3	5.9
Lithuanian	41.1	38.9	59.2	1.8	45.4	51.3	3.3
Jewish	30.8	29.0	58.7	12.4	34.0	55.6	10.5
Roma	16.3	14.8	40.0	44.9	19.3	35.0	45.8

Republikas ... 2017). The adopted amendments to the Law (2003) made it possible for ethnic minority schools to conduct classes in the languages of ethnic minorities for 40% of academic subjects, which meant the implementation of bilingual (Latvian-Russian) education in schools with predominantly Russian students (Latvijas Republikas Satversmes ... 2017). The government has approved the transition of education for ethnic minorities mainly on the Latvian language by the 2021/2022 academic year. At the same time, bilingual education remains in pre-school educational institutions and some elements of bilingualism in basic school (grades 1–9); in secondary school (grades 10–12) the education should be provided only in Latvian (Правительство концептуально ... 2017).

But this government initiative faced criticism from political parties and public organizations that represent interests of the Russian population in Latvia. The resolution of the EU Committee of Ministers on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in relation to Latvia (2021) speaks of a “restrictive policy” set by the “political agenda ... especially in the education system, the media and with regard to the use of national minority languages in many areas of public life”. The Resolution expresses particular concern about the reduction in the volume of teaching of national minority languages and the lack of teaching in them outside of ethno-cultural subjects (Resolution ... 2021). In general, there has been no consensus between the state and the Russian population on the issue of the tuition language in schools since the restoration of independence. At the same time, there is a clear lack of socio-political discussions, scientific research on the multicultural nature of Latvian society, the level of recognition in the Latvian environment of the collective ethno-cultural identity of the Russian population and its consolidation and reproduction in the education system. On the official website of the Ministry of Education and Science, the materials of the last few scientific studies that study the problems of education of ethnic minorities are dated 2010 (Pētījumi 2021). Moreover, these studies emphasized the value of a bilingual form of education that combines teaching in the state lan-

guage and the language of ethnic minorities (Klava et al. 2010, pp. 10–13; Vidusskolēnu ... 2010, pp. 5–6). And there is no a single study that shows the value for ethnic minorities of transferring all their education into the state language. The author of this article has shown in his research the example of the situation in Daugavpils where ethnic groups (including Latvians) perceive ethnic minority schools primarily as institutions for “preserving the cultural and linguistic identity” of minorities, and do not add any negative connotation to it (i.e. as evidence of the weakness of the position of the Latvian language in society or as a channel for implementing the influence of foreign states) (Volkov, Kurczewski 2013, p. 53).

6. The level of recognition of the collective identity of Latvian Russians in their communication with ethnic Latvians

Institutionalization of the differences in the socio-political and cultural functions of the collective identities of Latvians and Russians as an ethnic minority of Latvia does not imply the building of value hierarchies of these identities in the public consciousness, and even more so the differences in the life chances of the holders of these identities. A sociological study (2016, N = 1003) conducted in all Latvian regions by the author of this article shows that respondents attribute different social values to the collective identity of Latvians and Russians in Latvia, as well as the different degree of influence of these identities on the life chances of their holders (Volkov 2018, pp. 10–21). Russians and Latvians both believe that it is better to be a holder of ethnic Latvian identity than Russian or any other minority ethnic identity to live in Latvia (Table 2).

At the same time, ethnic Latvians are more optimistic than Russians about the actual level of ethnic equality for career opportunities (Table 3).

7. Questions for discussion

Russian population in Latvia is one of the ethnic minorities in Latvia, whose connection with the national Latvian state is analysed within the framework of two intellectual traditions which are often opposed to each other. Firstly,

Table 3. Attitude towards the fact that Latvians and representatives of ethnic minorities with the same level of education and similar abilities have equal career opportunities in these areas of life in Latvia. Answers – “completely and almost agree” (%).

Social areas	All respondents	Latvians	Russians
Small business	86.1	89.4	78.8
Entertainment industry	85.3	87.9	79.4
Sport	84.1	86.8	78.1
Culture and art	82.1	86.2	72.5
Medium-sized business	81.7	85.2	73.5
Science and education	79.1	83.8	68.0
Journalism	78.8	84.0	66.7
Big business	74.2	78.9	63.4
Municipalities	66.2	69.6	58.5
Politics	64.7	68.6	55.9
Police	59.1	63.2	49.7
Legal system	58.3	62.2	49.3
Public administration	57.6	62.2	47.1

it is a tradition of studying ethno-cultural differences in society as one of the accompanying factors of studying the phenomenon of nation and nationalism. In this context, the identities of non-dominant ethno-cultural groups are considered on the basis of whether they contribute to the assertion of civil solidarity within the framework of the national state, regardless of the socio-class, ethno-cultural, religious differences of citizens (Armstrong 1982, pp. 127, 241–282; Berry 1997, pp. 6, 13; Breuilly 1982, pp. 3, 300–332). This tradition often emphasizes the idea that the identity of the ethno-national majority has an imperative force in relation to the identities of ethnic minorities (Calhoun 1993, pp. 214–219, 221–222) and leads to their marginalization and subordinated position in the system of ethno-cultural values in society (Wirth 1956, pp. 237–238). Secondly, it is a humanistic tradition of studying the social identity of an individual as an integral phenomenon, which emphasizes the value of the equality of people's rights to social choice, and thereby to cultural, including ethno-cultural ways of making this choice. Therefore, there can be no question of subordination of values which is imperatively imposed by society on the individual, by the majority on the minority (Hall 1996, pp. 596–611). The identities of ethnic minorities are not limited only to universal and national values, as representatives of liberalism and libertarianism preferred to believe (Barry 2005, pp. 205, 208, 213; Martinovic, Verkuyten 2014; Sam, Berry, 2010, pp. 472–481).

As the nature of the reproduction of the collective ethno-cultural identity of the Russian population since 1991 has shown, it does not contradict the basic principles of the Latvian national state, if it is considered as a pluralistic political structure that protects the right of Latvians to national statehood and human rights to preserve their ethno-cultural identity. However, the level of ethnopoliti-

cal discussions on issues related to the Russian population in Latvia is extremely fragmented, which does not contribute to the formation of a national consensus on the identity of the country's largest ethnic minority. The integration of the collective ethno-cultural identity of the Russian population into the Latvian identity would be facilitated by public debates on the problems of social memory, the nature of ethno-social stratification in Latvia, the opportunities for political participation of ethnic minorities, and mechanisms for preserving minority culture in the education system.

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