



UNRISD

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

IN DEFIANCE OF FATE

Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Latvia

**Artis Pabriks
2003**

Part of UNRISD Project on Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector.
All unauthorized citation, duplication or distribution prohibited without the approval of UNRISD
and the authors.

Introduction

This report discusses the issue of ethnic equality and governance in respect to socio-political stability in Latvia from the historic perspective. Latvia, just like the overwhelming majority of modern states is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country. Latvian history and geography is a relevant factor in order to understand the dynamics of ethnic relations and ethnopolitics. Geopolitically, Latvia is squeezed on the shores of the Baltic between larger powers, Russia, Germany, Poland, and Sweden. Time to time, each of these countries was eager to dominate the region and its population by political, economic, and cultural means thus influencing Latvia's ethnic composition as well as ethnic relations. During the two World Wars of the 20th century, country was twice turned into extensive war zone. It has experienced several occupations and dominance of totalitarian ideologies. Latvia was ruled by democratic, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes one after another. It has experienced market economy as well as centralized communist rule. Its population went through economically wealthy periods and faced hunger. People of Latvia have experienced respect and humanity in their mutual relations just like they have been facing terror, humiliation, deportations and death.

Most of political analysts would argue that these are not conditions favouring independent and democratic statehood. Indeed, the world, even Europe knows dozens of ethnic groups and nations much larger in size and in economic power which never have experienced their own statehood.

However, Latvia seems successfully avoiding established clichés. First, it has emerged like a salamander out of fire of the First World War. Afterwards, it emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Empire claiming its presence on the world map once more after 50 years forgetness.

Apart of peculiarities allowing Latvia to achieve its nationhood, country is particularly interesting case for ethnic studies. Before the Second World War, ethnic Latvians, comprised more than 70% of total population. Other ethnic groups were in size under 10% each. Therefore, because of this relative ethnic unipolarity with one large ethnic group and several small ones, it was relatively easily to create the newly established Latvia as nation-state. Along with this previous socio-political traditions as well as international environment facilitated the Latvian politicians to formulate minority policy granting minorities broad spectrum of collective rights for instance educational autonomy. However, the facilitation of ethnic differences and various ethnic and linguistic identities did not culminate into integrated political and cultural community. Relatively large number of minority representatives remained alienated from the state institutions also after a longer period of time. It served as one of the reasons for the authoritarian government of 1930s to rethink the project of the nation-state building. It resulted in decrease of liberal concessions and rights given to minority groups. An attempt was made to increase cultural and political homogeneity by curtailing collective rights and identities of minorities.

Ultimately largest impact to ethnic relations and ethnopolitics was made by the Soviet occupation lasting for more than two generations. It has left heavy inheritance making interwar minority-majority quarrels seem irrelevant compared to current day integration issues. Unprecedented migration amounts facilitated social and ethnic diversity along with ethnic tension during the years of Soviet occupation. On the eve of second republic, share of ethnic Latvians decreased to 52% in 1989 making this ethnic majority feeling threatened and questioning its chances for linguistic and cultural continuity.

Number of political scientists as well as politicians were arguing that country has become bipolar according to its actual dynamics. There were suggestions to institutionalize bipolarity by taking as an example case of Belgium or Switzerland. Most of these suggestions were made from the fear of possibility of ethnic violence where Latvians would insist on restoring the unipolar state while ethnic Slavonic immigrants would resist any attempts to decrease concessions given to their language and power during the Soviet era.

However, during the last decade restored Latvia has been firmly developing its institutions and society in the direction of multicultural as well as unipolar state. At the same time it successfully avoided ethnic violence scenarios which took place in similar multiethnic and post Soviet environments like Moldova or former Yugoslavia.

In fact it might be argued that promotion of ethnic unipolarity along with generally unquestioned support to democratic market reforms domestically and orientation towards Latvian integration in European and Transatlantic organisations internationally assisted to avoid and overcome threats of ethnic tension.

Moreover, from today's perspective it is possible to argue that another approach, namely institutionalization of bipolarity would obviously facilitate the ethnic tension. More than this, it would never let Latvia reach its goal of EU and NATO membership which by itself is an important guarantee of political stability, democracy and human rights in Latvia. Acceptance of bipolarity in the Latvian post-Soviet circumstances would eventually be based on automatic inclusion of Soviet era immigrants in the Latvian body politic. Their relative size and political orientation would keep *de jure* the Russian language as official tongue of the country as well as create a strong Russia orientated power elite eventually sceptical of market, EU, and NATO orientated reforms. This elite would be able to count on Russia's international support since the last would be interested in retaining its influence in its former Baltic territories. Such scenario would further radicalise large segments of ethnic Latvian population which would not find their rights and political ideals reflected in the re-established country.

By saying this it should be also stressed that it is wrong to suggest that Latvian society has completed its transition as far as ethnic integration. Many mistakes have been committed and despite of the ethnic stability, Latvian authorities did not yet succeed to integrate large segments of minority population. As latest data on EU referendum shows, "yes" vote was mainly gained due to ethnic Latvian support while percentage of

Eurosceptics among ethnic Russians is corresponding to Latviansceptics within this group.

Ethnic integration remains a goal to be reached. There still remain number of unanswered questions to be tested over a larger time frame. For instance, what is going to happen with the young generation of Soviet era immigrants? Will they increasingly chose Latvian identity or will struggle to return to their parent's identity and political views? What will be Russia's impact on ethnic integration processes in Latvia after country joins EU and NATO? Will Russian political elite accept unipolar tendencies or resist them?

Important aspect of unipolar Latvian perspective is cooperation between ethnic Latvian and Russian elites and politicians. Until present, there were no coalition government established which would include Russian orientated parties. Minority representatives were included only as individuals taking part in the parties supported by mainly ethnic Latvian voters. It must be noted that in the interwar Latvia parties were more clearly formed according to ethnic groups compared to the second republic, but at the same time minority parties were also frequent partners of coalition governments. At present, no serious party is willing to present itself as ethnically orientated party. However, party dynamics prove ethnicity to be important voting argument.

One of the reasons for minority exclusion from governance at the present stage is question of their political orientation. It is assumed that Russian orientated parties present the political model facilitating Latvia's orientation towards Russia and preservice of privileges given to Russian language during the Soviet era thus undermining the development of harmonious and integrated multicultural Latvian society.

Compared to interwar period, minority society has become larger, more monolithic, more sizable and therefore more self-sufficient. Compared to the interwar period, minority society is almost only Russian speaking and in majority consists of relatively late immigrated individuals what makes it more politically orientated towards former regime or in the best case towards emerging strong neighbour Russia.

On this basis, the hypothesis can be suggested that present day Latvia has a larger potential for the ethnic tension compared to the interwar republic while the degree of ethnic integration in both political systems is comparable.

It is the main argument of this research that in the long term, institutionalization and promotion of unipolarity within the framework of liberal democracy and international minority rights will facilitate the decrease of ethnic tension.

This research insists that unipolarity project is the only viable way to avoid ethnic tension in the future Latvia. It should be implemented while simultaneously granting a relative degree of public recognition to various minority identities with particular stress on previously discriminated small minorities who were denied any recognition under the Soviet rule and which continue to be marginal ethnic groups in the present day Latvia.

This research consists of three major parts in order to bolst the main argument. The first part deals with ethnic structures and governance in the first republic (1918-1940). Precisely, in this time the vision of peaceful coexistence of various ethnic groups in one

country was institutionalized. Coexistence was based on the idea of minority autonomy granting broad public recognition to minority communities in Latvia. Minorities enjoyed state financed educational and linguistic autonomy. Politically, they were mainly organized in ethnic parties while ethnic Latvians based their political participation on traditional left right cleavage. In general, the economic positions of minorities were disproportionately strong. On the eve of the Soviet occupation, however, the degree of minority integration in the mainstream society can be strongly discussed. According to this research there is obvious lack of proof that broad minority cultural autonomy of the interwar period *per se* facilitated the establishment of integrated and thus harmonious civil society.

Following this argument, first chapter will give insight in ethnic composition of the Latvian society at the beginning of 20th century. It will discuss ethnic representation in politics and economics, as well as linguistic and educational policy of the republic.

The second chapter will deal with Latvia under the Soviet rule. It is particularly important period since it irreversibly changed Latvian society, politics and economics. During the changes of regime, several minorities were lost while number of Slavic origin immigrants drastically increased with following consequences of linguistic Russification. Ironically, but it is possible to argue that despite or thanks to the Soviet ideology ethnocultural identification along community lines within the overall society continued to be stressed. Thus, on the one hand it helped to preserve some ethnic identities (Latvian) while on the other hand it hindered to overcome ethnic community limits and did not facilitate integration.

In order to describe and analyse the situation, migration patterns will be discussed. Ethnic representation in occupied Latvia's institutions presented. Major sources of ethno-political tension will be revealed.

The third chapter will discuss the current state of affairs in Latvia as far as ethnic equality and governance is concerned. Chapter will start with an overview of the issues that underpinned the national and democratic movement for independence. Political actors and parties involved in this process will be discussed and the major issues of public debate of majority-minority relations revealed.

Afterwards, there will be waste material on ethnic composition of state institutions and enterprises. Data on parliament, municipalities, power structures, as well as business and education sphere will be discussed. At the end will be presented statistics on changes in language skills and inter-ethnic attitudes among population.

On the basis of given analysis conclusions will be made about dilemma of bipolar versus unipolar policies as reflection of the current state of affairs or construction tools with an ultimate goal to ease the ethnic tension and bolster social cohesion.

As far as methodology is concerned, for the period of analysis covering about 100 years, not always comparable data can be presented. Statistical methods and points of interest of statistical institutions may differ in various historic periods. As far as Soviet period is discussed, not all data are trustable. In general, statistics on Latvia can be regarded as satisfactory for the research purposes.

This research is based on available official statistics, archive materials, secondary sources and quantitative surveys. Part of data, especially on the current state of things is compiled during two last years interviewing various persons in state institutions and academic circles. Part of data on ethnic representation was collected during another research done by author in 2001. The research was dealing with occupational representation and ethnic discrimination Latvia. Part of materials was collected via posted questionnaire.¹

1. Part

Ethnic Equality, Governance and Political Stability in the Interwar Latvia (1918-1940)

Regardless of the existence or absence of independent nationhood, Latvia has never been a monoethnic society. At least for several centuries, along with Latvians there were living a number of ethnic minorities having various share of power. Coexistence of various ethnic groups on the same territory and under the same political regime frequently rises the question about the integrity of this population. Do these groups live together or they just live along each other? Do values and loyalties overcome the ethnic boundaries within the overall society? What influence structure and principles of ethnic relations have on power distribution and political stability? These are some of the questions this chapter will try to answer in order to give a clearer overview of ethnic relations and ethnic policy in interwar Latvia. The historical discourse is highly relevant in order to understand how and why contemporary Latvian ethnic policy was constructed in one and not in another way. First, this chapter will briefly introduce to origins of ethnic diversity in Latvia. Afterwards, description and analysis of interwar ethnic situation in various socio-political spheres will be given.

A Brief History of Ethnic Structure and Origins of the Ethnically Diverse Latvian Society

The Latvian nation formation process was influenced by several factors, such as:

- Invasion of the German led crusaders in 13th century ;
- Introduction of school system by the Swedish Crown in 17th century ;
- Contribution of the German romanticists and humanists to the Latvian ethnic awareness (17th-18th centuries) ;
- Abolishing of the serfdom in early 19th century.

¹The data derive from responses received to written requests sent in 2001 to state institutions, municipal governments, state enterprises and private companies to provide information about the ethnic origin of persons employed or elected. Data are available from 23 local governments and 7 of the largest cities, almost all government ministries, army, police, municipal police, the largest state enterprises (in terms of persons employed), 17 of 60 private companies addressed, and 19 institutions of higher learning. Private companies were asked to provide supplementary answers on attitudes of employers and employees towards ethnically mixed staff and on whether ethnicity influenced choice of employee or employed. Private companies were also asked about the ethnic origin of management. Private companies were guaranteed confidentiality. Subsequently, the results obtained from the information requests were analysed and discussed in interviews with minority employees in state institutions and in business and with other experts.

Finally, the Latvian ethnic nation has consolidated during the cultural awakening in the mid-19th century. According to Ernest Gellner's terminology, Latvians entered the 20th century as bride still waiting for its groom, the nation state (Gellner 1997: 50-59). Only in 1918-1920, the nation-state was established on the ruins of the Russian Empire and defended in the Independence War against German and Soviet troops.

Minorities

There is no assured data on the ethnic structure of the Latvian society before the nation-state. Data is complicated to get, because the first population census in the Baltic's was made only in 1887. Additionally, the contemporary Latvian territory was not united in one administrative unit until the establishment of the nation state in 1918. Also the principles of census were not always identical. Ethnicity was determinate either by religion or native language.

According to some researchers in 1887, in the later territory of Latvia, ethnic Latvians constituted about 68 per cent of all inhabitants. The rest of the population were made up of four largest minorities, Jews, Germans, Russians, and Poles (Skujenieks 1930).

After the establishment of Latvian state in 1918 as a consequence of war and migration process, the ethnic Latvian share increased to 76 per cent in 1920 and remained relatively intact until Soviet invasion in 1940 (See Table 1.1).

Table No.1.1 Ethnic Heterogeneity of the Latvian Population before and during the First republic

Ethnicity	1887		1920		1930		1935	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Latvians	1,318,112	68	1,154,849	76	1,394,957	73	1,472,612	75
Jews	142,315	7,4	78,777	5,2	94,388	4,9	93,479	4,8
Germans	120,191	6,2	57,921	3,8	69,855	3,6	62,144	3,2
Russians	232,204 ²	12	82,360	5,6	201,778	11	206,499	11
Poles	65,056	3,4	42,064	2,7	59,743	3,1	48,948	2,5

Sources: (Skujenieks 1930; Skujenieks 1937).

The Russians

The Russian minority was the largest and one of the oldest non-native ethnic groups in interwar Latvia. Despite the fact that there are references to ethnic Russian merchants even in the middle age Baltic towns, their numeric presence remained marginal until the very 19th century when Baltic territory and Finland were included in the Russian Empire. For instance, in the early 19th century in two (Kurzeme, Zemgale) out of three Latvian provinces lived only about 800 ethnic Russians (Volkovs 1996:7). However, in 1881, they were already

² According to researcher Vladislav Volkov, this number was only 171,000, since there should not be included other ethnic slavs, for example, Belorussians (Author).

about 20,000 ethnic Russians in the same two provinces (Volkovs 1996:7). At the end of 19th century, Russians become the largest minority in Latvia. At the same time, the largest minority can be regarded as youngest minority since its size increased relatively lately.

Theoretically, the influx of Russians into Latvia may be divided into three immigration waves. The first considerable groups of Russian settlers appeared as early as in the 16th and the 17th centuries. They were the first Russian political refugees and religious dissidents seeking protection from the repressions of the Russian Tsar. They were called the "Old Believers" because they refused to accept liturgical reforms and growing interference by Russian Tsars into church affairs. The majority of them settled in the Eastern part of Latvia. In 1935, there were 107,000 "Old Believers", who constituted almost half of Latvia's Russian population (Šilde 1976: 462). At the end of the 19th century, the second great wave of Russian immigration reached Latvia. During the administrative russification and industrial revolution, a large number of state and army officials and workers moved in. The biggest social source of Russian newcomers was Russian peasants fleeing from Russia to autonomous Baltic province because of the widespread religious and social oppression (Volkovs 1996: 121). Mainly, Russian newcomers were settled in the eastern part of Latvia and in the cities. However, during World War I, the consequent evacuation of factories and their work force led to a considerable reduction in size of these Russians in Latvia. In 1918, at the beginning of the First republic, the Russian population was only half of their pre-war number (Volkovs 1996: 124).

Later, the heterogeneity as well as number of the Russian population in Latvia increased with the arrival of asylum seeking refugees from Soviet Russia, including former Russian army officers, intellectuals, and representatives of many other social groups (Lieven 1993: 182). In 1930, there were 202,000 Russians, who constituted 10.6 per cent of Latvia's population (see Table 1.1). During the 1920s and 1930s, the vast majority of ethnic Russians lived in the countryside, mostly in Latgale (Ceichners 1930). Almost all of the rest (14 per

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/reportId=5_21403

