

# The Case of the Russians in Latvia and the Need of the Comprehensive Research Approach in Contemporary International Relations

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## Abstract

This article refers to the problem of the Russians in Latvia and a catalogue of determinants that accompany the processes of naturalization and social integration in this country. The article claims that the legal analysis alone is not a sufficient attitude to understand the complex character of both processes. The full picture of the naturalization and social integration in Latvia would be impossible without a much deeper analysis of historical, social, (internal) political and international context of both problems, to include the question of the attitude of the Russian community living in Latvia towards the independent Latvian statehood. Finally, the case of the Russians in Latvia is the illustration of the thesis about a need of the comprehensive and multivariable research attitude to social and political processes in contemporary international relations, and especially in East-Central Europe.

**Keywords:** Latvia, Russia, naturalization, social integration, European Union

## 1. Introduction

Latvia regained its independence in 1991 a few months before the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet the legacy of the Soviet occupation period in the history of the Latvian lands lasts and is present in both social and political relations in the republic. One of the aims of the central Soviet politics towards the Latvian lands was intensive industrialization that facilitated the massive inflow of the workers from other parts of the USSR, mainly the Russians. As a consequence, the number of the Russians living in Latvia increased from about 10.5% in the

independent republic during the interwar period to 34% in 1989 in the Soviet Latvia (Plakans, 1995, p. 189; Jeffries, 2004, p. 179). The Latvian historians call this policy as colonization and their interpretations seem convincing (Strods, 2005, pp. 218-219).

Nevertheless, deep ethnic changes in Latvia during the Soviet period faced the reborn Latvian state with significant social and political challenges, to include the decision about the status of the Soviet period Russian immigrants. Despite some initial problems (and in fact a period of „abreaction” in the Latvian politics) Latvia has positively responded to these challenges. It has initiated the naturalization procedure and outlined a credible (although still difficult) way to solve the problem of the Russian immigrants. The Latvian membership in the European Union seems to confirm this thesis. The Russians are right if they contend that the final versions of the Latvian law crucial for their status in Latvia have usually been passed under the pressure of the international community (mainly the OSCE and the European Union). Yet also the Latvians are right if they indicate the reluctance of at least some segments of the Russian community in Latvia towards the independent Latvian state. Besides, the consequences of the Soviet period still reveal in the social and political life of the country. They affect the Latvians attitude towards the Russians but also the Russians nostalgia to the past privileges and the role they played in the Soviet Latvia. This is a problem of the social integration in the country – much broader and much more complicated than the naturalization alone.

The case of the Russians in Latvia is an interesting research problem not only because of the scale of the Russian presence in the republic but also the complex character of the social and political relations in the country. Indeed, it is not only the question of the citizen rights. The problem is much broader and refers to the deep historical context, the question of the Russian’s attitude towards the independent Latvian state as well as the mutual perception of the Russians and the Latvians. It is the problem of the Russian-Latvian relations and the role that Russia plays as a “defender” of the rights of the Russians in Latvia.

Thus, this article contends that the focus on legal aspects alone is not sufficient for a full analysis of the naturalization process and ethnic relations in Latvia. The case of the Russians in Latvia needs a more comprehensive research attitude that refers to much broader catalogue of determinants. The aim of this article is to indicate most of them, to include the demographic trends in Latvia, the social context of the naturalization as well as the internal political and international factors that determine and accompany the naturalization process. Besides, the case of the Russians in Latvia illustrates that the effective analysis of contemporary social and political processes, at least in East-Central Europe, would hardly be possible without a comprehensive and multivariable attitude.

## **2. The Russians in Latvia and the Question of the Citizenship – the Legal Context**

Regaining the independence Latvia did not decide to grant its citizenship to all inhabitants of the republic. According to the *Resolution On the Renewal of the Republic of Latvia Citizens’ Rights and Fundamental Principles of Naturalization*, passed on October 15, 1991 by the Supreme Council, only pre-war citizens of the Republic of Latvia and their descendants renewed their citizenship. As a result, about 715-730 thousand of the Latvian inhabitants

(about 29% of the republic's population) remained without any citizenship. According to the *Law on the Status of Former USSR Citizens Who are not Citizens of Latvia or any other State*, passed on April 12, 1995 they were granted a specific status of non-citizens. The non-citizens share the basic social and economic rights yet they do not have the voting rights in the general and municipal elections.

The Russians dominated the group of the non-citizens in Latvia (they constituted about 70% of the entire non-citizens' population). Following the Resolution of October 15, 1991 one third of the Russian community in Latvia (about 300 thousand inhabitants) renewed their Latvian citizenship. Yet most of them, about 600 thousand Russians, remained the non-citizens (Plakans, 1995, p. 190). In practice, the case of the status and future of the Russians in Latvia became the key and the most controversial question accompanying the ethnic relations in the republic after regaining its independence. Nevertheless, the Latvian political elites were afraid to grant the citizenship to all Russians and considered such decision as dangerous for the stability of Latvia and the course of its reforms.

The only way to acquire the Latvian citizenship has been the process of naturalization yet the Latvian political forces were not able to pass the law concerning the citizenship for almost three years. The legislation problems were accompanied by the radicalization of the Latvians attitude to the Russian community in Latvia. In response, the Russians, supported by the propaganda of the Russian Federation, presented the Latvian politics as nationalist and demanded the full citizen rights (Lieven, 1994, p. 303; Gruzina, 2011, pp. 410-412).

The naturalization was finally regulated by the *Law on Citizenship* passed on July 22, 1994. It stipulated that the naturalization procedure would be based on the language exam as well as the exams in the Latvian history and constitution. The final shape of the Law was influenced by the pressure of the Council of Europe and the OSCE aimed at the compliance of the regulation with the international standards on citizen and minority rights (Dorodnova, 2003, pp. 37-28; Morris, 2003, pp. 10-11). Yet the final version of the Law still kept some (mild) restrictions in the naturalization process called the "naturalization windows". The "windows" preferred the naturalization of the younger non-citizens (mainly those born in Latvia) and deferred the naturalization of the older applicants (mainly the Soviet period immigrants).

The naturalization started in 1995 yet it did not bring about any spectacular results. At the beginning of the process (1995-1998) the system of the "naturalization windows" (the specific age groups of the applicants allowed to apply every year) negatively influenced the progress of the process. Only 10% among 150 thousand non-citizens entitled to apply for the citizenship took advantage of this procedure (Regelmann, 2014, pp. 9-10; Dorodnova, 2003, p. 43). The situation changed together with the amendments introduced to the *Citizenship Law* in 1998. They cancelled "the naturalisation windows" and opened the naturalisation for all entitled non-citizens, irrespective of their age, at the moment chosen by applicant (Jeffries, 2004, pp.182-183). The amendments introduced to the *Law on Citizenship* in 1998 contributed to the first wave of interest in the naturalization and 15 183 applications submitted in 1999. It was a significant number of new citizenships received through the naturalization yet the new opportunity was taken mainly by the educated and motivated

non-citizens able to pass the language exam. Then, the pace of the process slowed down. The drop in the number of the applications after 1999 was a result of the problems with the knowledge of the Latvian language but also of a clear reluctance towards the Latvian citizenship among many of the Soviet period Russian immigrants living in Latvia (Pabriks, 2003, p. 101).

Indeed, the opening of the naturalization procedure revealed the serious reluctance of some segments of the Russian community in Latvia to the Latvian state. It was mainly the case of the older generation of the Russians emotionally tied to the legacy of the Soviet Union. The Latvian government reacted to this problem passing in 2001 the *National Program "The Integration of Society in Latvia"* and decided about the state's support for applicants in the naturalization procedure, to include the language courses (Vebers, 2001). Nonetheless, facing the negative attitude to the Latvian statehood among the Russians, the Naturalization Board estimated that only about 200-250 thousand of more than 500 thousand non-citizens living in Latvia at the beginning of the 2000s would be interested in the naturalization and the Latvian citizenship (Diena, 26.05.1999). The others, mainly the older generation of the Soviet period immigrants, would settle for the status of non-citizens.

The next wave of the interest in the naturalization was the period of 2004-2006. It was, as many observers indicate, a consequence of the Latvia's accession to the European Union and the possibilities of the free employment on the territory of the EU (Galbreath & Muižnieks, 2009, pp. 141-142). As a result, a record-breaking number of 21 297 applications were submitted in 2004 followed by 19 807 applications in 2005. Yet, again, the number of applications dropped in the next years as well as the problems with the knowledge of the Latvian language and the attitudes among the non-citizens manifested themselves (Kruma, 2013, pp. 16-17),

According to the Latvian statistics available in the middle of 2014 the number of the citizen rights received so far in the naturalization procedure reached 142 036 citizenships (Pilsonības Un Migrācijas Lietu Pārvalde, 2014 A). Having in mind the estimations of the Naturalization Board about the 200-250 thousand non-citizens potentially interested in the naturalization process this new 142 thousand citizenships seem considerable and important for the social and political stability of Latvia. Furthermore the drop of the overall number of the non-citizens in the republic has been deeper. It has fallen from about 715-730 thousand at the beginning of the 1990s to about 556 thousand in 2000 and 280 759 non-citizens (14.1% of the population of Latvia) in 2012 (Regelmann, 2014, p. 5). As a result, the number of the non-citizens in Latvia has been reduced by about 60% yet this radical decrease is only partially explained by the progress of the naturalization process. It is more a question of the negative demographic tendencies in Latvia during the last two decades. Indeed, any serious analysis of the naturalization in the Republic of Latvia must reach far beyond the statistics and the review of law. It must take into account the demographic processes as well as the social and political context of the problem.

### 3. The Case of the Russians in Latvia – Demographic Context

The case of the Russians in Latvia is strongly related with the demographic processes in the republic after regaining of its independence. According to the census conducted in the Soviet Union in 1989 the number of inhabitants of the Soviet Latvia amounted 2.66 million and the number of the Russians picked to 905 thousand (34% of the republic's population) (Plakans, 1995, p. 158). Yet the 2000 census indicated that the number of inhabitants of independent Latvia dropped to 2,375 million and the number of the Russians living in Latvia decreased to 672 thousand (according to the statistical data available at the end of 2003). Finally the census conducted in 2011 revealed that the population of the republic fell to 2.07 million inhabitants and the number of the Russians further decreased to 557 thousand (27% of the Latvia's population) (Latvijas, 2000, 2011).

The fall of the population of the republic by about 22% as well as the reduction of the number of the Russians in Latvia by about 40% confirm deep negative demographic processes in the country during the last two decades. One of them has been the negative population growth that reached minus 5.9‰ in the middle of the 1990s, followed by the aging of the population. The statistics confirm the process of aging of the Latvia's inhabitants and dynamic growth of the people over 65 (to about 25.3% of the population in 2000) (Zvidrins, 1998, pp. 16, 28-33).

The negative demographic tendencies touch the entire population of Latvia, to include the ethnic Latvians, the Russians as well as other national minorities living in the republic. In the case of the Russian population, however, they are even more tangible. The negative population growth among the Russians in Latvia exceeds the average for the country and reaches even minus 6.5‰ (Zvidrins, 1998, pp. 16). The processes of aging and natural mortality concern the Russian community in Latvia even deeper than the Latvians. Most of the Soviet period Russian immigrants came to Latvia between the 1950s and 1970s and only about 23% of the Russian non-citizens were born in Latvia (Idzelis, 1984, pp. 4-7). As a result, the growing natural mortality among the older generation of the Russian immigrants is inevitable in the next decade and it will contribute to further reduction of the number of the Russians living in Latvia.

Thus, the dynamic demographic changes strongly accompany the naturalization process in Latvia. In the context of the citizenship about 100 thousand of the Russian non-citizens have so far received their citizen rights through the naturalization. Having in mind the difficult political context of the process this number is considerable and important. Yet the negative demographic tendencies have reduced the group of the Russian non-citizens even more. The initial number of about 600 thousand of the Russian non-citizens living in Latvia at the beginning of the 1990s dropped significantly to 330 500 in 2003 and 185 741 in 2014. Today, the number of the Russian citizens of Latvia (about 359 thousand) fairly exceeds the number of the Russian non-citizens (Pilsonības Un Migrācijas Lietu Pārvalde, 2014; Malmlöf, 2006, pp. 23-27, 32-33). This is the decrease of the Russian non-citizens by about 70% during the last two decades.

Nevertheless, even the radical demographic changes in the independent Republic of Latvia

have not fully reversed the legacy of the communist past and the results of the Russian colonization of the Latvian lands during the Soviet period. The share of the Latvians in the total population of the country has increased from 52% at the beginning of the 1990s to 58.5% in 2003 and 62% in 2011 (Pilsonības Un Migrācijas Lietu Pārvalde, 2014). Yet it is still far away from 75% of the Latvians in Latvia before the Second World War. Besides, the naturalization and ethnic relations in the republic still face a deep social context that makes them difficult and must be considered in any comprehensive analysis of both processes.

#### **4. The Social Context of the Naturalization and Ethnic Relations in Latvia**

The naturalization becomes a part of a much broader and much more difficult process of social integration in Latvia. It enters into the complex phenomenon of social relations between the Latvians and the Russians. The Latvian authorities are aware that the naturalization is only a first (although very important) step to solve the ethnic and social problems inherited from the Soviet past. They developed the Social Integration Program passed in 2001 (Vebers, 2001). The program declares the respect for the rights of the national minorities and encourages them to actively participate in the social life of the country. Yet it emphasizes the Latvian (and not a two-nation) character of the state as well as the principle of the Latvian independence as a basis for any debates about the social integration in the country (Brands-Kehris & Landes, 2007, pp. 28-29).

Nevertheless, the respect among some Russians living in Latvia for the Latvian independence as a fundamental value is still problematic. The critics of the Latvian politics, to include the Russian Federation and its diplomacy, indicated the nationalist tendencies present in the Latvian administration at the beginning of the 1990s. In some cases they were right but the international pressure soon corrected the initial problems with the Latvian attitude to the national minorities. Yet the same critics miss that fact that the reluctance of at least a part of the Russians living in the republic towards the Latvian state may be a serious problem for the course and prospects of the social integration in the country. Any extreme opinions should be avoided here yet the thesis that all Russians living in Latvia accept the Latvian independence is a myth. Some of them still disregard the Latvian sovereignty and share Vladimir Putin's point of view that the collapse of the USSR was "a greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century".

The international lawyers are certainly right when they emphasize that the loyalty towards the state is not a precondition of the state's respect for human and minority rights. Nonetheless, the case of Latvia is specific in this regard. It is an example of the numerous minority (about 27% of the country's population) that in the Soviet period played the privileged and dominant role in the Soviet Latvia. Some of them have never come to terms with the lost of this position. Indeed, as Artis Pabriks indicates, 58% of the Russians living in Latvia believed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (it means two decades after the fall of the USSR) that the Soviet period in the history of the Latvian lands was the period of prosperity and development and 51% of the Russian non-citizens believed that the future of Latvia was not in the integration with the European Union but in the close ties with Russia and the CIS (Pabriks, 2003, p. 101). The social research on the motives accompanying the non-citizens'

decisions about the naturalization, conducted in the frame of the project *On the Way to Civic Society – 2000*, showed that about 40% of respondents declared little interest in Latvian citizenship and feeling of no serious ties with the Latvian state (Programme „On the Way to a Civic Society – 2000”, 2001, pp. 15, 18-19). Finally, Ieva Gruzina notes that 23% of the non-citizens in Latvia declared no plans to apply for the citizen rights at all (Gruzina, 2011, pp. 398-399).

Similarly, the processes of the naturalization and social integration in the Republic of Latvia still face some deeply rooted stereotypes. In the case of the Russian community in Latvia they are strengthened by the Russian language media functioning in this country as well as the propaganda of the neighbouring Russian Federation. The picture of Latvia present there is usually negative and the difference of opinions between the Russian and the Latvian media in the country is fundamental. In fact the existence of two different systems of information in Latvia contributes to contradictory group identities and does not necessarily facilitate the social integration (Zepa, 2008, p. 122; Šulmane, 2011, pp. 25-26). The problem evolves, especially after the Latvian accession to the European Union, yet it is still difficult to build a dialogue and compromise.

The social context of the naturalization and ethnic relations in Latvia refers at the same time to the language and education issues. During the Soviet period both the Russian language and the Russian schools were privileged and dominated in the public life of the Soviet Latvia (Brands-Kehris & Landes, 2007, pp. 4-7, 10; Poggeschi, 2004, pp. 1-2). The knowledge of Latvian among the Russian population of the republic was only about 21% on the eve of the fall of the Soviet Union (Plakans, 1995, p. 189). As a consequence, the Latvian language reforms, aimed at strengthening the role of Latvian as the official language of the reborn republic, have met serious resistance among the Russians living in Latvia. Similar protests of the Russian community have usually accompanied the education reforms aimed at increasing the presence of Latvian in the education system, introducing the bilingual teaching at the primary level of the minority education and teaching exclusively in Latvian at the secondary level.

One of the best illustrations of the problem was the Russian protests in 2003 against the transition to teaching in Latvian only at the secondary level of the education system (grades 10-12) (Pavlenko, p. 65). The international organizations, to include the OSCE and the European Union, recognized the right of Latvia to conduct this reform as long as the organizational problems were solved. The Russian community, however, organized the street manifestations and received the support of the official Russian propaganda. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation accused Latvia of the assimilation of the national minorities while the Russian Duma warned about the Russian economic sanctions in response to the Latvian educational policy (Jeffries, 2004, pp. 185-187, Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2003). Facing this pressure Latvia decided to change the initial assumptions of the reform. The parliament (the Saeima) decided to depart from the transition to teaching in Latvian only at the secondary level and introduced the model of teaching with 60% of subjects thought in Latvian and 40% of subjects thought in the languages of the minorities (Pavlenko, 2008, p. 65; Priedīte, 2005, p. 411).

Yet even this decision was criticized by the Russian community in Latvia and the final shape of the reform seemed secondary. In many cases the real aim of the protest was less a defence of the right of the Russian minority to learn in Russian and more the campaign to resist the role of Latvian as the official language of the republic. Thus, despite the two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union and the rights of the minorities guaranteed by the Latvian law some segments of the Russian community in Latvia still oppose any attempts to strengthen the role of the Latvian language and to build-up the Latvian national identity. It will certainly make the Russian-Latvian dialogue difficult.

Indeed, the reforms of the education system in Latvia formally increased the knowledge of the Latvian language among the inhabitants of the republic to 93% in 2008. Yet, as Vineta Poriņa indicates, this knowledge among the Russians is still limited to a relatively low level necessary to pass the language exam in the naturalization procedure. It is usually not the level high enough to support the active participation in the public life of the country (Poriņa, 2011, pp. 177-178, 183). The Latvian streets are still bilingual and the job market is divided along the ethnic lines (Pabriks, 2003, pp. 100-101, 130-131). The role of the Latvian language has increased yet the position of Russian is still important in the public life of the country outside the state administration.

## **5. The Case of the Russians in Latvia – Internal Political Context**

The presence of a deep internal political context of the naturalization and ethnic relations in Latvia has been obvious from the moment of the regaining of the republic's independence. Only a part of the Russians living in the Soviet Latvia supported the idea of the independence during the fall of the Soviet Union and most of them opposed the concept of the independent Latvia (Lieven, 1994, pp. 199-200). Nevertheless, the Russian community in reborn Latvia, supported by the diplomacy of the Russian Federation, demanded the full citizen rights for all inhabitants of the republic. The Latvian political elites rejected the idea of granting the citizenship to all inhabitants of Latvia (the so called zero option). They feared that the citizenship of all Russians living then in Latvia, to include those who voted against the Latvian independence, could dramatically change the political processes in the republic. The Russian speaking minority reached more than 40% of the country's population (to include the Belarusians and Ukrainians) and the Latvian politicians were afraid that this group, inspired and supported by Russia, could in fact reverse the pro-western direction of the Latvian reforms.

Initially, relatively small number of the Russian citizens of Latvia (about 33% of the Russian population in Latvia and about 300 thousand of the Latvia's inhabitants) did not considerably influence the internal political scene in the republic and the parties referring to the interests of the Russian community played minor role. They were, however, present in the Latvian political system from the beginning (to mention the "Equal Rights" party) (Jeffries, 2004, p. 187).

Nevertheless, the growing number of the Russian citizens, together with the progress of the naturalization process and deep demographic changes in the Russian community in Latvia, has gradually changed the shape of the Latvian political scene. The position and political



strength of the parties considered as “Russian” (it means those referring to the Russian electorate and the interests of the Russian community) has considerably increased. Besides, the growing number of the Russian citizens of Latvia has contributed to polarisation of the Latvian political scene along the ethnic lines. As Artis Pabriks indicates the ethnic factor still plays its crucial role in the analysis of the political divisions in Latvia. The Russians tend to support the parties referring to the interests of the Russian (Russian-speaking) minority while the Latvians vote for the “Latvian” parties. The ethnic lines of divisions dominate in the Latvian politics and the potential of coalition between the “Russian” and the “Latvian” parties remains weak (Pabriks, 2003, pp. 108-111). Furthermore, as Brigita Zepa notes, the ethnic divisions on the Latvian political scene contribute to the presence of almost completely different interpretations of political processes in the republic as well as the contradictory rhetoric between the “Russian” and the “Latvian” parties (Zepa, 2008, pp. 123-124, 126).

The practice of the Latvian politics confirms that the attempts to develop a political offer that could be attractive for both the Latvians and the Russians, as the example of Jānis Jurkāns and his National Harmony Party (TSP) illustrates, usually fail (Pabriks, 2003, pp. 109-111). The TSP example shows at the same time that any moderate or leftist party is unable to survive on the Latvian political scene without the voices of the Russian electorate. Furthermore, the support of the Russians, to include the new naturalized citizens, is going to play a growing role in the future political life of the country. The victory of the Harmony Centre in the 2011 elections as well as the victory of the Social Democratic Party "Harmony" in the elections of 2014 seem to contribute to this thesis. Both parties referred directly to the rights of the Russian minority and both gathered a considerable number of the Russian voices (Regelmann, 2014, pp. 10-12).

Indeed, the growing number of the Russian voters will not support the parties considered as “Latvian”, and especially those seen by the Russian community as nationalist (for example TB/LNNK). The Russians will most probably vote for parties considered as “Russian” and especially those declaring their respect for the interests of the Russian minority in Latvia. The examples of the elections in 2011 and in 2014 illustrate that the “Russian” party may be able to win the elections and gather about 25% of votes. Yet it will not form the government because the “Latvian” parties will isolate the winner and create the “Latvian” coalition to keep the political power in the country. Nevertheless, the future of the Latvian political scene is again the scenario of deep ethnic divisions and the ethnic polarisation is going to remain the key feature of the Latvian political system.

Another problem crucial for internal political context of the ethnic relations in Latvia is the case of municipal elections and more precisely the lack of non-citizens’ right to vote in municipal elections. This question has always been controversial yet considering it from the legal perspective the international organizations, to include the OSCE and the European Union, left the final decision about the municipal voting rights to the hands of the Latvian authorities. Different legal practices in the European countries and different interpretations of international law resulted in no formal recommendations for Latvia in this regard (despite some slight difference of opinions between the OSCE and the Council of Europe) (Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2002/2003). Thus, the Latvia parliament has not

decided to grant the rights to vote in municipal elections to non-citizens, to include the Russians without the Latvian citizenship.

Nevertheless, the legal analysis alone is going to miss some important aspects of this issue and the full picture of the problem will be impossible without a further focus on its political context. It seems that the explanation of the Latvian refusal lies in the ethnic composition of the Latvian cities and the legacy of the Soviet past. Indeed, the specific urban character of the Russian immigration to Latvia during the Soviet period resulted in the concentration of the immigrants in the Latvian cities and mainly in Riga (Misiunas & Taagepera, 1993, pp. 364-365). The ethnic composition of the cities has dynamically changed in favour of the Latvians yet the power of the Russians there is still considerable. Thus, granting the right to vote in municipal elections to all Russians in Latvia, irrespective of their citizen rights, would certainly result in a wave of victories of the “Russian” local parties. Having in mind the reluctance of at least a part of the Russian community in Latvia towards the Latvian state this could result in a celebration of the Soviet period holidays or setting up monuments in the memory of the Soviet heroes. This seems to be the scenario that the Latvian authorities would like to prevent. Besides, granting the voting rights to all Russians in Latvia would still be granting them to those inhabitants of the republic who ignore, disregard and deny the sense of its independence.

## **6. International Context of the Naturalization and Social Integration in Latvia**

The international context of the naturalization and social integration in Latvia revolves around the dialogue of the Latvian authorities with the international community as well as the complex issue of the Russian-Latvian relations. The problems of the citizenship and naturalization in Latvia, and especially the shape of the Latvian legislation in this regard, have been the subject of the international monitoring initiated at the beginning of the 1990s. The conditionality and pressure of the international organizations, initially the OSCE and the Council of Europe and then the European Union, contributed to the final compliance of the Latvian legislation concerning the citizenship and minority rights with the international standards (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The Latvian accession to the European Union has been a symbolic confirmation that the social and political situation in the country remains stable and Latvia respects human rights. Besides, the stability and development accompanying the accession to the European Union gives a chance for the progress of the social integration in the republic. Finally, the EU still retains some forms of pressure once the political forces in Latvia ignore their commitments to the international community.

The problems of the Latvian-Russian relations are much more complicated and the case of the Russian minority in Latvia has always been sensitive for both states. Russia plays the role of the defender of the Russians in Latvia and it has usually vigorously reacted to the situations the Kremlin considers as the violation of the minority rights (Pabriks, 2003, p. 80). No one should deny the right of the Russian Federation to raise the problems of the Russian minority in Latvia and to alarm the international community about a possible violation of the minority rights. The problem, however, is that the case of the Russian community in Latvia

has often served Russia as a political and propagandist instrument of the Russian policy towards the Baltic region and the West in general. It means that the official rhetoric and assessments made by the Russian Federation have usually not reflected the real progress of the naturalization and social integration in Latvia but depend on the Russian political interests and aims. This is the practice that makes the Russian-Latvian dialogue difficult.

Thus, seen from the legal perspective the Latvian legislation concerning the citizenship and minority rights is in compliance with the international standards yet politically the question of the Russian minority in Latvia will certainly remain sensitive in the Latvian-Russian relations. The Latvian membership in the European Union may facilitate the dialogue with Moscow yet if the Russian Federation decides to use the argument of the Russian minority in Latvia for its own political aims the real progress of the social integration in Latvia would be secondary for the Russian political elites.

Finally, a considerable part of the Russians living in Latvia still share the political aims and assessments of Russia. I disagree that the Russians there serve as an instrument in the hands of the Russian Federation. Yet I think that at least a part of the Russian community in Latvia, to focus on the older generation, remains susceptible to the Russian great power propaganda and especially the slogans about the heritage of the power of the Soviet Union. Besides, most of the Russians in Latvia remain sceptical towards foreign policy goals of the Republic of Latvia, to include the Latvian membership in NATO and (at least partially) the European Union. The Russians and the political parties considered as “Russian” usually favour the cooperation with Russia and remain reluctant to “breaking ties” with the Russian Federation (Pabriks, 2003, pp. 109-111).

One of the best examples in this regard was the referendum in 2003 accompanying the Latvian accession to the European Union. The result of the accession referendum was positive for citizens favouring the Latvian integration with the EU with 66.97% votes for the membership (Šupule, 2004, pp. 59-60). Yet the research among the Russians – citizens of Latvia entitled to participate in the referendum showed quite different picture. First, only about 20% of the Russian citizens voted for the Latvian membership in the European Union. 44% of them voted against and 36% of the Russians eligible to participate in the referendum did not take part in the voting. As Inese Šupule indicates some of the Russians supported the eurosceptical arguments present in the campaign. Others, however, voted against because they considered the Latvian membership in the EU as breaking their ties with Russia. Besides, accepting the membership of Latvia and rejecting most of the Russian complaints, the European Union was no longer recognized by the Russians in Latvia as the institution able to defend their interests (Šupule, 2004, pp. 59-60, 63-64).

Thus, from the perspective of the Russian community in Latvia, the only “credible” defender of its interests remains Russia. This attitude, however, becomes dangerous as it gives the Russian Federation a pretext for further comments and (usually one-sided) demands towards the Latvian politics, even after the Latvia’s accession to the European Union. No doubt that the question of the Russian minority in Latvia will remain politically sensitive in the relations between Russia and Latvia and between Russia and the European Union.

## 7. Conclusion

The progress of the naturalization process in Latvia has been evident and two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union the ethnic situation in the independent republic is much different. Despite some initial problems Latvia has made considerable efforts in regulating the status of national minorities in the country and especially the Russian community there. The country's membership in the European Union confirms that the Latvian legislation concerning the citizenship and minority rights is in compliance with international standards.

Nevertheless the naturalization is a part of much deeper process of social integration and the legal analysis alone will not reveal the full picture of the latter process. The catalogue of determinants that accompany the social integration in Latvia is much broader and the study of the case of the Russians in Latvia needs more comprehensive research approach. It is a question of the legacy of the communist past, to include the consequences of the massive inflow of the Russian workers on the Latvian lands as well as the privileged position of the Russian immigrants in the Soviet Latvia. It is necessary to analyse the social aspects of the naturalization process, to include the problems of the mutual perception between the Latvians and the Russians but also the attitude of the Russian community to the independent Latvia. It seems that two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union at least of part of the Russian community in Latvia still disregards the value of the Latvian independence.

Furthermore, the careful analysis will indicate possible consequences of the ethnic divisions on the Latvian political scene and the process of the ethnic polarisation of the Latvian party system. It will notice that most of the Russians in Latvia do not support the aims of the Latvian foreign politics, to include the country's membership in NATO and the European Union. Finally, the case of the Russians in Latvia still depends on the complex character of the Latvian-Russian relations as well as the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union. Any serious tensions in this regard will make the ethnic dialogue in Latvia even more difficult. The claim that the Russians in the Republic of Latvia serve the political interests of the Russian Federation would be exaggerated yet many segments of the Russian community in Latvia still believe in the propagandist slogans of Moscow and still remember the Soviet Union with nostalgia. Thus, only the comprehensive attitude, reaching beyond the legal aspects, will be able to properly analyse the ethnic situation in Latvia and the prospects of the naturalization and social integration in the country.

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