

Overcoming the Legacy of History for Ethnic Integration in Latvia

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The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, (1940-1941)

Former Eastern Bloc countries have had notable struggles with ethnic relations. In Latvia, as in its neighboring Baltic state, Estonia, the native people have almost become a minority as a result of the Soviet regime.¹ Tension between the native population and the post-war immigrants, who are mostly Russian, has consequently developed into a major issue on the political agenda, though – in contrast with the Balkans – this ethnic tension has not turned into violent conflict.

Since they regained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the two parts of Latvian society – ethnic Latvians and ‘Russian-speakers’² – have hardly communicated, carrying wounded feelings and a sense of distrust towards one another. During the years of the occupation (Soviet 1940–1941, Nazi 1941–1945, and again Soviet 1945–1991), ethnic Latvians almost became a minority, while the Russian-speaking population enjoyed a privileged status. For example, newly arrived, Russian-speaking immigrants could find apartments to rent more easily than the Latvians could. The Russian language was also made compulsory for the natives, whereas the Russian immigrants were never forced to learn Latvian.

After 1991, this situation reversed. Ethnic Latvians took over the political control of the nation, and denied the greater part of the Russian-speaking population the opportunity to obtain Latvian citizenship. Only those residents who were citizens of the Latvian Republic in June, 1940 and their descendants could gain citizenship, excluding the majority of the Russian-speaking population, which arrived in Latvia after World War II.

In 1994, the government adopted the Citizenship Law, which provided limited naturalization prospects for “non-citizens,” those who did not meet the citizenship requirements, yet constituted 25% of the population. Tension and opportunities for political manipulation arose as a result. Politicians, including Latvian national radicals, have since been debating over ethnic relations in the framework of a discussion concerning the integration of society, as they understand that the non-citizens are not going to leave Latvia. It then follows that the government should provide incentives for non-citizens to become “stakeholders” in Latvia’s future.

In 2001 the National Integration Program was adopted. The Program began with a declaration that “evaluation of the historical context is a precondition of integration,”³ but

¹ In Latvia in 1988 Latvians constituted 52% of the population, compared to 75% before World War II.

² Under the Soviet rule, bipolar development occurred in Latvia. New immigrants (among them Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Jews) mainly joined the Russian community. They often are associated with and identify themselves with Russians. In this paper, I use the term ‘Russian-speaking’ that often has been rejected, but I agree with Latvian ethnopolitics expert Ilga Apine who contends that “this term has a genuine basis in the post-Soviet reality” (Ilga Apine, *Politoloģija: Ievads etnopsiholoģijā* [Political Science: Introduction Into Ethnopsychology], Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 2001, p. 58.).

³ *Valsts programma: Sabiedrības integrācija Latvijā* [The National Program: Integration of Society in Latvia], Rīga: Naturalizācijas pārvalde, 2001, p. 11.

this statement has never been seriously elaborated in the Program itself. Others have cited history as a major impediment to integration,⁴ but there is no detailed analysis of the historical influences on the integration process. Understanding history is a crucial component in the process of integration, and those who are advocating integration should work on coming to grips with its legacy.

Two parts of Latvian society share divergent historical experiences, memories of the past, and judgments about history. To study the relationship between this legacy of history and ethnic integration, the following questions arise:

- Which historical issues divide society?
- What has been done to overcome the legacy of history?
- What future activities could be suggested in the field of history to encourage the integration process?

To answer the project questions stated above, the following activities were conducted:

- Group discussion with Russian-speaking history teachers
- Analysis of essays written by Russian-speaking history teachers
- Interviews with history teachers and non-historians, both Latvians and Russian speakers
- Analysis of projects aiming to overcome the legacy of history
- Analysis of related academic studies
- Analysis of history textbooks
- Observations in teacher training seminars and history lessons at the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga.

Although this paper is based on all of these resources, I would like to describe the first three activities here. Examples of other sources are built into the main part of the paper and are self-explanatory.

Group Discussion

In November, 2001, eighteen Russian-speaking history teachers gathered in Riga to discuss the process of ethnic integration in Latvia. They were from differing districts of Latvia, and comprised of both citizens and non-citizens. The role of history was not especially stressed, so that the participants could freely express their concerns and thoughts. The discussion was passionate, and all teachers were eager to express their considerations. All the participants were in agreement that problems of integration are only due to legal factors, namely the Citizenship Law and the Language Law, which are perceived by minorities as discriminatory. Surprisingly, the teachers decided that no historical issues impede ethnic integration. This conclusion may result from the fact that the discussion participants are active and interested teachers. I knew most of them personally from in-service training courses at the Museum, at the Latvian History Teachers' Association, or the Riga School Board. In all likelihood these particular teachers have come to terms with history, and its repercussions are not hindering their integration into Latvian society.

⁴ For example, Artis Pabriks, Elmārs Vēbers, and Raitis Âboltiðð, *Atsveð inâtîbas pârvarçð ana: Sabiedrîbas integrâcija* [Overcoming Estrangement: Integration of Society], Rîga: N.I.M.S., 2001, p. 13; J. Broks, A. Tabuns, and A. Tabuna, "History and Images of the Past," in *National, State and Regime Identity in Latvia*, ed. Aivars Tabuns, Riga: Baltic Study Center, 2001, p. 79.

Essays

The Russian-speaking history teachers were asked to provide their personal reflections on the Soviet occupation. The majority of teachers wrote about their family histories and individual experiences that often included judgments on Soviet rule. In contrast to the essays written by the Latvian teachers, who tended to evaluate the Soviet period negatively, the viewpoints of Russian-speakers could be divided into two groups: the supporters and believers in the Soviet system, and those who find the accounts of Soviet atrocities exaggerated.

Valentina Prokofjeva's response exemplifies the supporters and believers' point of view:

Soviet power gave a lot to my parents and me. [...] I am simply happy that I have lived during this period, the era of developed socialism, when there were no borders dividing people, and when all people were citizens of one large country – USSR.

The last point, recalling the Soviet Republics as a unified nation, is mentioned as a significant benefit of the Soviet period by almost all other teachers (Irina Rindina, Larisa Osipova, Galina Blazevica, Jadviga Fursa, Svetlana Sividova).

Osipova shows the other major stance by writing, "It all was not that dark and bad." Representatives of this group offered a more nuanced interpretation of the Soviet regime and attempted to include positive aspects of it.

Both camps, however, agree that Soviet rule is largely seen as "a black period of history" in Latvia. And virtually all Russian-speakers express their disagreement with this opinion, showing that the Russian-speaking teachers have not noticed that a more complex historical interpretation of Latvia's past has emerged since the mid-1990s.

The essays illustrate the self-identification of Russian-speakers. The highest level of insulted feelings is found in the essay of Yuri Suvorov, who, next to his name, ironically wrote the following: "An occupant since the age of one and half years." Other teachers have outlined their links to Latvia in detail, an argument that comes across as an apology or self-justification, and also shows the Russian-speakers' general uneasiness in grappling with their ethnic identity. At the same time some Russian-speaking teachers demonstrate their "Latvianness." Even post-war immigrants without historical roots in Latvia, to whom the terms "newcomers" or "immigrants" could be applied, state that they feel Latvian. For example, Valentina Antipova wrote: "In my mind, I have become Latvian," and Osipova explains: "I consider myself a citizen of Latvia despite the fact that formally I am not a citizen."

Some of the writers are citizens of Latvia themselves, but still share the insulted feelings of Russian-speakers. As Blazevica states: "Today, I, myself, am a citizen of Latvia, but still I feel the bitterness of my parents, people who have received a suggestion to leave this country to which they have become attracted."

The Russian-speaking teachers also emphasize their identification with the land in their responses. All have expressed devotion to and concern for Latvia. As Irina Zaiceva states:

“Latvia is my second homeland.” And Rindina writes: “I love my Latvia; it is my Homeland. But I wish that Latvia would not be a stepmother, but a real mother for all of us.”

1991 marks a clear watershed of history for Russian-speakers, with Latvia’s renewed independence and the Soviet Union’s collapse. In many essays, the teachers succinctly state that “everything changed in 1991.” It was exactly at that point that attitudes of Russian-speakers and their relationship with Latvians and towards the reborn state changed. Even their relationships with their families outside of Latvia changed, because it was a shock now to have family members “abroad” – in some other newly independent country (Fursa).

In her essay, “How I Became a Stranger in My Homeland,” Jevgenija Golubeva (a Latvian citizen whose family has lived in Latvia for centuries) describes the period of perestroika in detail:

Perestroika started. [...] I remember how passionately I was reading newspapers and magazines where all articles seemed sensational. I remember how I could not leave the TV when the Congress of Creative Unions [writers, journalists, etc. The Congress was held in June 1988, and it was the first time when Latvia was publicly declared an occupied country]. With my entire soul I was supporting it all. When the Popular Front was established, I was on its side of the barricades and hated the Interfront [an anti-independence organization, uniting the pro-Soviet opposition] who was hanging on to all the old and was a throwback. Two or three years passed, Latvia became an independent country, and I became citizen of Latvia. And suddenly at a teacher-training seminar, my colleagues – Latvians – clearly made me understand that I am a stranger in their group because I am a Russian-speaker. It means, in their opinion, that I am one of “occupants.” [...] It was horribly insulting, painful and... incurable. They suddenly took away my homeland, it turned out that I am not needed for Latvia, that I can harm somebody here...

Svetlana Goncarova writes a similar response:

And later – not at once – it became clear that the Soviet Union, and together with it, we too were moving towards something unknown. [...] I was euphoric listening to speeches of Secretary General Gorbachev, talks in congresses of the Popular Front. There was a common understanding that it is not possible to live as before anymore. And afterwards followed the barricades of 1991 dividing us into Communists and those who were proud of not being members of the [Communist] party; Russians and Latvians, the Soviet Latvians and the real Latvians, citizens and non-citizens.

Most teachers discuss or use the word “occupant” in their essays. For example, Blazevetica writes: “[During years of Soviet rule] I never dreamt that I am a daughter of an occupant as I have been called more than once.” This remark is an illustration of how much attention Russian-speakers pay to such terms as “occupation” and “occupant,” and the entire discourse about occupation.

Russian-speakers also mention their encounters with unofficial history during Soviet rule. Sividova, whose family has lived in Latvia for generations, wrote:

In our family the events of 1940 were recalled in different ways [because] grandmother was from a very rich family of farmers but grandfather – from a poor large family. [...] The only reminder of independent Latvia was a statement of my grandfather: “Look, granddaughter, around here is our land and forest and oak, and marsh, but now it all belongs to the kolkhoz [collective farm].

Other teachers, who do not have family roots in Latvia, express their surprise at learning a “different” history. For example, Goncarova remembers:

For the first time we saw pictures of young people in foreign uniforms and only later I started to understand, that it was the history of a family where somebody had been in the Legion⁵, a history we did not learn at school.

Post-war immigrant Antipova believes the consciousness of being occupied essential for Latvian identity, as she describes how this knowledge could even be seen on the faces of people during the Soviet period:

[Latvian] people always were serious, sometimes even gloomy, and they almost never smiled. Then I did not understand – why it was like that. Because nobody at school was talking of the “occupation” of Latvia. Now I can understand what was kept in silence and why people were not enjoying life.

From these essays, we can conclude that “occupation” means more than historical fact for Russian speakers. It is an emotional term on which they dwell, and an idea that creates uneasiness. For Russian-speakers, the most sensitive period of history is the era of perestroika and transition, because the term “occupation” was then introduced to describe the forcible incorporation of the independent Baltic states into the Soviet Union. Even Russian-speakers who have long family histories in Latvia and are legal citizens of Latvia associate themselves with the “occupants,” and carry insulted feelings from the period of perestroika, as Golubeva has expressed it. As a result, a single personal insult is often generalized to include all Latvians.

Interviews

In this project I conducted ten interviews: I interviewed two history teaching policy-makers, four history teachers (two Latvian and two Russian-speaking), and four non-historians (two Latvian and two Russian-speaking). I asked them the following questions:

- What interferes with the process of integration in Latvia?
- (For Russian-speaking) Do you think you are integrated in Latvian society? What has helped you in the integration process?
- Do you see any historical issues as an obstacle for integration?
- What could be done to promote integration?

⁵ German military formation during World War II in which Latvians served mainly as conscripts. The Latvian Legion as a controversial historical issue is discussed later in this paper.

Surprisingly, all of the interviewees understood the word “integration” to mean ethnic integration, a definition that differs from how the word is treated by the Integration Program. Not only did the Russian-speaking history teachers stress that they do not know what integration should involve, but other interviewees also expressed confusion regarding the essence of integration: “Does integration mean assimilation?” or “What will Latvian society really be like if the goal is reached?” Russian-speakers showed a fear of assimilation, seeing the process as a threat to their cultural and ethnic identity. Neither the Integration Program nor any serious political actors advocate the assimilation of Latvia’s minorities.

Latvians

The most influential Latvian professionals in the field of history teaching believe history one of the major factors postponing the integration of society. Valdis Klisans, the National History Advisor at the Ministry of Education, even designates history as the central problem hindering integration. By history, he means both the past (one’s personal experience and family history during the years of occupation) and its interpretation. Aija Klavina, the President of the History Teachers’ Association, believes almost every issue in the 20th century controversial and subject to separate interpretations by Latvian and Russian speakers, especially since the beginning of World War II.

Classroom history teachers, however, did not cite history as a central hindrance to integration. Dzintra Liepina mentioned language and psychological issues as well as the “not too friendly attitude” of Latvians as impediments instead. Liepina is also disappointed that the integration policy is organized from the top down, and enforced by a great deal of pressure. Another classroom teacher, Ligita Straube, suggested that Russian-speakers, themselves, are the main problem preventing integration, a typical Latvian perspective also reflected in the Integration Program and its implementation. “I am integrated and tolerant enough, THEY [Russian-speakers] should do something.”

Latvian non-historians talked of history and integration in more detail than professional historians. Personnel manager Eva Alberte thought of two major historical issues dividing society, namely the occupation and the regaining of independence, which both sides interpret in a contradictory manner: “What was victory for one ethnic group was loss for the other, and the other way around.” Medical doctor Laima Gobleja said that “History is important for every society, and it has divided the Latvian society not only by ethnicity.” She stressed that Latvians are also divided amongst themselves, since some suffered under the Nazis, and others, under the Soviets. As a result, they hardly have one perception or evaluation of history. Gobleja said:

I never discuss history issues with my Russian-speaking colleagues, and they avoid it because it is too controversial and painful for them. [...] Maybe the term ‘occupation’ is also overused. We concentrate too much on the black pages of our history. Russians might feel this term accuses them. At the same time I understand that the occupation was not an issue earlier, and now discussions and research on this new topic are needed.

Russian-speakers

Personal interviews with Russian-speaking history teachers took place after the group discussion in which participants claimed that there are no historical issues postponing the integration process. As a result, I did not concentrate so much on identifying sensitive and

controversial topics in these interviews, but focused on the approaches individuals have used to overcome the legacy of history. Jelena Scerbica, who has Ukrainian background, stated:

I do not see history as a problem in integration but my students [Russian-speakers] do. I have to struggle with their resisting attitudes in the first years of studying history. Only by being confronted with sources and developing their critical thinking skills can students change their attitude towards the Latvian state and integration.

Jelena Rjazanceva, who was born in Russia and has a Latvian background, said that “the entire period of the occupation is controversial and the term ‘occupation’ creates psychological problems for many Russian-speaking people.” Answers to the question, “What has helped you to integrate into Latvian society?” show that experiences of interviewees were different. Rjazanceva said:

My integration was easy because I have always been between the two ethnic groups: I have had a close relationship with my Latvian relatives, attended an ethnically mixed school, and have been active in the History Teachers’ Association. The last – my membership at the Association – has been one of the most significant factors because I have made many contacts and expanded my Latvian vocabulary.

Scerbica answered the question in a different way:

I am convinced that an educated person should not have any problems with integration. For example, if one Latvian person insults me, I would not generalize it to all Latvians. Old political mistakes (as the initial regulations of the Citizenship Law, which now have been improved) should not have been taken as an offense.

The Russian-speaking non-historians, who were interviewed for this project, did not share the Latvian non-historians’ concern for the historical issues’ influence on the integration process. A Russian free-lance artist, Andrejs Eglitis, made only one statement concerning history:

Both Latvians and Russian-speakers feel themselves to be victims of history, and it creates deep psychological difficulties for integration. Latvians perceive themselves as supreme sufferers during entire course of history, especially regarding the Soviet period and World War II. Latvians believe they proportionally have suffered the highest losses among all nations. Many Russians feel that they have ended up in Latvia by a trick of fate or even by force, and now they are blamed for all the sins and difficulties. And nobody cares about their sufferings.

However, Eglitis named ethnocentric and insulting public statements by journalists and politicians on both sides as the main problem postponing integration. He argued that media are creating misunderstandings and images of enemy.

Parliamentary deputy, Boriss Cilevics, not only represented Russian speakers, but provided an interview with an expert on ethnic conflict. He has been an activist for minority

rights over the last decade, has conducted several research projects on ethnic problems and human rights in Latvia, publishing numerous articles on his findings. Cilevics said that research has shown perceptions of history differing more by generation than by ethnicity. Still, he listed the following disputed historical issues: everything concerning citizenship, Russia, possible Latvian membership in NATO, World War II and the occupation of Latvia. Cilevics said: "History influences stereotypes indirectly, and actually all problems are connected with history, for example, problems in education or regarding language." Answering the question of what should be done to solve those problems involving history's hold on the integration process, Cilevics suggested:

There is no need for one official history (as some intellectuals suggest). That is contrary to democratic principles. I believe that Latvian history should be interpreted and taught not as the history of ethnic Latvians but as the history of the Latvian state, and different perspectives should be integrated, terms like 'guilt' and blaming of ethnic groups should be avoided. I do not like the expression 'overcoming the legacy of history'. I do not believe that it is possible. The goal should be to know the differences.

An analysis of current history textbooks revealed none of the above-mentioned dangers. Cilevics spoke of everyday perceptions and ethnocentric teaching introduced in the late 1980s, an approach that no longer has official support. I disagree with the last sentence of this quote, since acknowledging differences does not necessarily promote integration; in an integrated society differences should be appreciated.

To summarize the interviews, non-historians are more worried about historical issues in the process of integration than history teachers are. However, the interviewees generally cited occupation and the period of transition from an occupied to an independent country as the most significant historical issues still postponing Latvia's integration.

DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

In recent years, the term 'integration' has become one of the most frequently used catchwords in Latvia. It is used in reference to domestic affairs that mainly concern ethnic relations, but also includes the consolidation of society at large. The use of the word is also popular in foreign policy discussions, describing the process of joining the European Union or NATO, for instance.

In the Latvian language, the term 'integration' is a foreign word (*integrâcija*). Before the 1990s, the term did not exist at all. People knew similar words derived from mathematics, such as the verb 'to integrate' (*integrēt*), and the related 'integral' (*integrâlis*). It is difficult to trace when it was first used in a non-mathematical sense. It was possibly introduced as a result of communications with politicians or scientists from abroad. During a conference in 1994, where one of the first public discussions on ethnic relations in Latvia took place, some speakers used the term "integration," though it had not yet become a major concept. At present, its meaning remains unclear for many people, including policy makers.⁶ Indeed, four out of ten interviewees mentioned this ambiguity.

⁶ Iveta Silova, *From Symbols of Occupation to Symbols of Multiculturalism: Re-conceptualizing Minority Education in Post-Soviet Latvia* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation in Comparative and International Education), New York 2001, pp. 147, 170.

Considering that one half of the population must integrate with the other half, many doubt this process' feasibility. In public discourse and private conversations, "integration" is often associated with assimilation and the merging of ethnic groups. Assimilation, understood as the loss of one's ethnic identity to "Latvianization," is one possible effect of integration that the Russian-speaking people fear, while some Latvian national radicals aim to accomplish it.

The term "integration," according to the definition of the National Integration Program, means "mutual understanding and cooperation among individuals and groups in the framework of a common state."⁷ A booklet published by the Naturalization Board, "Ten Questions about the Integration of Society in Latvia," explains it in greater detail: "Integration is the development of the whole from components, mutually influencing and supplementing each other. Integration means the broadening of opportunities, mutual trust and enrichment."⁸ Political scientists Pabriks, Aboltins and Vebers define integration as "a process in which separate components are united in one whole; at the same time these components keep their basic identity."⁹ The last part of the quote is repeated and stressed often to convince the society that the integration does not mean assimilation.¹⁰ As antonyms of the term "integration," words such as "indifference," "intolerance" and "estrangement" are used.¹¹ Terms such as "social harmony," "consolidation of society," and "reconciliation" are sometimes used as synonyms for "integration," though the last term is mainly written in English publications.¹²

Integration is often understood as only characterizing ethnic relations. For example, in a research project, high-school students defined integration as "mutual understanding and cooperation among individuals and groups of different ethnicities in the framework of a common state."¹³ They have reshaped the Integration Program's own definition of the word to focus on its ethnic aspect. Indeed, all ten interviewees only used the word to refer to ethnic integration. This connotation may stem from the development of the Integration Program in response to fears of ethnic tensions in Latvia. However, during the development of the Program, the concept of "integration" was broadened to include the integration of society at large, including its social and regional levels.

This project mainly approaches the ethnic aspects of the integration.

⁷ *Valsts programma: Sabiedrības integrācija Latvijā* [The National Program: Integration of Society in Latvia], p. 8.

⁸ Elmārs Vēbers, *Desmit jautājumi par sabiedrības integrāciju Latvijā* [Ten Questions on Integration of Society in Latvia], Rīga: Izglītība, 2001, p. 1.

⁹ Artis Pabriks, Elmārs Vēbers, and Raitis Āboltiņš, *Atsveš inātības pārvarēšana: Sabiedrības integrācija* [Overcoming Estrangement: Integration of Society], p. 6.

¹⁰ For example, *Ievads politikā* [Introduction into Political Science], ed. Juris Goldmanis, Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1998, p. 207.

¹¹ Elmārs Vēbers, *Desmit jautājumi par sabiedrības integrāciju Latvijā* [Ten Questions on Integration of Society in Latvia], p. 11.; Artis Pabriks, Elmārs Vēbers, and Raitis Āboltiņš, *Atsveš inātības pārvarēšana: Sabiedrības integrācija* [Overcoming Estrangement: Integration of Society], 163 p.

¹² For example, Vello Pettai, "The Ethnopolitics of Integration in Estonia and Latvia," in: www.ut.ee/ABVKeskus/balti/ethnopolitics.htm (02.01.03)

¹³ D. Baltiņa and others, *Skolēnu projekts "Latvijas jaunieši i ceļā uz integrētu un multikulturālu sabiedrību"* [Student Project "Latvian Youth on the Way Towards an Integrated and Multicultural Society"], Rīga 2001, p. 6.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Latvia has historically been multicultural for centuries, since the Latvian people evolved from the native Baltic and Finno-Ugric tribes. During the 12th century, German rule was established in the territory that now constitutes Latvia, and a German upper-class minority emerged. In later centuries, different waves of migration (often groups escaping from persecution elsewhere – For example, the “Old-Believers,” a conservative Russian Orthodox group who opposed the religious reforms of the 17th century, as well as Jews from Ukraine and Byelorussia) have resulted in other significant ethnic minority groups – Russians, Poles, Jews, and Roma.

Until the 20th century Latvia was not a state, and the territory was ruled by varying powers. Since the 18th century, the present-day Latvian territory was a part of the Russian Empire. It was divided into three administrative units: Kurland was an entity on its own in the western part of Latvia’s current territory, while Livland merged with a part of present Estonia, and Latgalia overlapped with present-day Byelorussia. While Latvia was a political part of the Russian Empire, German landlords determined its social structure. The majority of Latvians were peasants with no political influence and very little chance to change their status. The development of this nation under such complicated conditions has left an impact on the Latvian ethnic character – Latvians frequently continue to consider themselves a minority, and do not feel like the rulers and masters of their land.¹⁴ Even today, ethnic Latvians have the “consciousness of a minority,” identifying with the role of the victim and sufferer.¹⁵

World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917 provided the opportunity for Latvians to form an independent state, which was proclaimed on November 18, 1918. After a period of struggle among different powers, Latvia’s statehood was recognized by Soviet Russia in 1920. Latvia then developed as a democratic republic until 1934, when Prime Minister Karlis Ulmanis staged a coup and became Latvia’s authoritarian leader. Until 1934, much had been done to achieve the various ethnic groups’ loyalty to the state. Minorities could develop in conditions of cultural autonomy, receiving education in state-funded minority schools, for example, and having representation in the Parliament. After the coup d’état of 1934, this ethnic policy changed because Ulmanis aimed for the development of “Latvia for Latvians”. and minorities lost some of their rights. For example, if one parent was Latvian, the child was obliged to attend a Latvian school. Also, the economic policy of partially nationalizing banks and industries was interpreted as discrimination against ethnic minorities because most commercial enterprises belonged to Jews and Germans.

A period of terror started in June, 1940 when Latvia was occupied and forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union. In June, 1941, war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union began, and the Nazis occupied Latvia until the summer of 1944 in the eastern part of Latvia, and until the end of World War II in its western region. The Soviets then took the

¹⁴ *Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], ed. Gunārs Cīrulis, Rīga 1994, p. 31. The Integration Program even states: “Latvians must shed their historical inferiority complexes and act with the conviction that they can control and positively influence the processes that occur in Latvia” (*A Framework Document: The Integration Program of Society in Latvia*, Riga: Naturalization Board, 2001, p. 7.).

¹⁵ The consciousness of a minority was reinforced during Latvia’s incorporation into the Soviet Union. Latvians still nowadays perceive themselves as minority (Iveta Silova, *From Symbols of Occupation to Symbols of Multiculturalism*, p. 158.). At the present, in five largest cities of Latvia ethnic Latvians are in fact a significant minority. Russians in Latvia are, in effect, numerically a minority but in their actions they sometimes express unwillingness to accept their minority status because they believe Russians always have represented the dominant people and culture.

Nazis' place, reoccupying Latvia until 1991, the Soviet Union's collapse. Both occupations bore heavy consequences that affected economics, demography, and culture.

The demographic changes have been the most obvious: The German minority left Latvia because of Hitler's call to return to the fatherland in 1939. Nearly all Jews and many Roma were then killed under the Nazi occupation, and Latvians, along with other groups, suffered losses due to military actions, Soviet deportations, and exile. This heavy toll created "free space" for housing and employment under the circumstances of forced industrialization after World War II. As a result, 500,000 immigrants arrived in Latvia "to build socialistic economics" during the first decade after the war. By the end of the Soviet occupation, ethnic Latvians were consequently approaching a minority status in their own country, constituting only 52% of the population.

Soviet history interpreted the occupation of Latvia in 1940 as a "socialistic revolution" and "manifestation of the will of Latvia's people." However, the majority of Latvians knew that their country had been incorporated into the Soviet Union by force, because unofficial historical interpretations were transferred from one generation to the next in family circles and among friends.¹⁶ Under the policies of perestroika and glasnost, the fact that Latvia had been occupied by the Soviet Union was openly declared in June 1988, becoming common knowledge. The term "occupation" gave justification to the national independence movement. It became a political weapon, clearly defining the movement's goal – to restore pre-war statehood. Extreme radicals developed this idea further and claimed that only the community of pre-war citizens has citizenship rights. Citizenship Committees emerged and started to register all pre-1940 citizens and their descendants. This unique campaign took place while Latvia was still occupied, and was considered radical. After independence was restored, however, it became a part of the official citizenship policy.

During the independence struggle of the late 1980s, the Latvian Popular Front was the main force uniting the majority of the population and participating in the first democratic elections in 1990. However, the Popular Front did not have a clear policy concerning ethnic problems. It aimed to make Latvian the official state language in order to curb large-scale immigration into Latvia, and to divide the Russian-speaking population into smaller minority groups in order that one "anti-front" against independence would not emerge.¹⁷ These goals were soon achieved.

The Declaration of Independence on May 4, 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Union were a shock for both Russian-speaking people and Latvians. During this period Latvians regained their native land and the power to decide on the fate of Latvia, while Russians lost their native land, the Soviet Union. The legal and political status of Russian-speakers then changed overnight from being the implicitly dominant group and omnipotent superpower to all of a sudden finding themselves strangers in a foreign country. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of "the Soviet people" dissolved, but most of the Russian-speaking people in Latvia identified themselves – and some still do today – as the Soviet people.¹⁸

¹⁶ This in fact created a schizophrenic situation whereby people lived in two different worlds which were contradictory and mutually exclusive.

¹⁷ From the presentation of Vladislavs Dozorcevs, in: *Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], p. 22.

¹⁸ In 2000, 5% of non-citizens said that their homeland is the Soviet Union (Aija Priedīte and others, *Pētījumu un rīcības programmas "Ceļā uz pilsonisku sabiedrību" atskaite* [Report of Research and Action Program "In the Way to a Civic Society"], Rīga: Baltijas Datu nams, 2001, p. 44.).

Many Latvians contemptuously called them “occupants” or “migrants,” a reference to their status as newcomers, though the term was perceived as an abusive word. The Soviet past had engendered a sense of insecurity among Latvians, as they worried about the survival of their identity, and developed negative attitudes not only towards the Russian-speaking people, but also towards other ethnic minorities in Latvia. During the process of the Citizenship Law discussion in the early 1990s, the Russo-phobic mood – a dislike of everything Russian – escalated.¹⁹ The Latvian press of the early 1990s provides illustrations of this animosity. At the same time, the Russian-language press in Latvia hurried and still hurries to reprint the most vulgar and offensive statements of and by Latvian national radicals, promoting the preservation of ethnic tension.

After 1991, the political influence of Latvian national radicals increased, and the political status of Russian-speaking people became unclear, as most of them were non-citizens without the right to participate in any elections. In 1994, this uncertainty during a period of dramatically rapid change had at least partially ended after the approval of the Citizenship Law. A period of stabilization then started in interethnic relations.²⁰

The new political parties, the government, and the parliament inherited the uncertainty of the Popular Front’s stance on ethnic policy. Before the elections of 1990, the Popular Front advocated a “zero alternative,” meaning that citizenship should be given to everybody who applies for it, as the solution of the citizenship problem.²¹ But the Citizenship Law, adopted in 1994, introduced a naturalization system that required proficiency in the Latvian language, history and legal system, as demonstrated on naturalization exams. In addition, the process of naturalization was limited by regulative “windows,” which meant that only specific age groups could apply for citizenship every year. Policy makers were afraid that ethnic Latvians would lose their influence on political decisions as newly naturalized Russian-speakers presumably would not vote for dominant political parties, which are prevailingly composed of ethnic Latvians. These “windows” were eliminated as a result of a referendum in 1998. Despite these changes, the main interethnic problem in Latvia endures, as the majority of non-Latvians are not citizens of Latvia; they remain atomized and alienated from the Latvian state.

The extensive discussions preceding the Citizenship Law and the adopted Law, itself, increased the separation between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking inhabitants, or more precisely – between citizens and non-citizens. As recent survey findings imply, non-citizens feel unsafe (64%), discriminated against in the labor market (63%), humiliated (45%) and insulted.²² In 1994, Cilevics, a Russian-speaker and non-citizen at the time, described this situation, reporting that the majority of Russian-speaking people were excluded from participation in democracy because they did not have citizenship and the right to participate in elections. “Others” were deciding on their fate:

What am I worried about the most? I was born in Latvia, and I have lived here 40 years. I really do not have any other native land. And then, suddenly arrives

¹⁹ Ilga Apine, *Politoloī ia: levads etnopsiholoī iā* [Political Science: Introduction into Ethnopsychology], pp.17-18.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 32, 42.

²¹ As later Andrejs Pantelejevs, a parliament deputy, dares to confess: “These were intentional lies to win without a confrontation” (*Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], p. 94).

²² Aija Priedīte and others, *Pētījumu un rīcības programmas “Ceīā uz pilsonisku sabiedrību” atskaite* [Report of Research and Action Program “In the Way to a Civic Society”], p. 17.

Mr. Karnups from Australia [an exile Latvian] and tells me: No, all your life you have been thinking wrongly, your native land is not here, it is somewhere else, I will show you where, and you have to go there.

Cilevics says that there are not interethnic conflicts in Latvia, but conflicts in the relationship between the state and one part of society: "I have no complaints against Latvians ... but I have very serious complaints against this state and its policy towards its non-citizens."²³

HISTORY OF THE INTEGRATION PROGRAM

Public discourse of and political decisions concerning social integration in Latvia started in 1997, when an integration policy in neighboring Estonia was initiated. The Integration Program in Estonia was based on serious research in ethnopolitics. This program worked as an example and catalyst for the development of the Integration Program in Latvia. In this respect, Estonia has often played the role of a daring pioneer, being the first of the two neighbors to adopt legislation concerning socially sensitive issues. Both programs were initiated by unsolved problems of ethnopolitics but deal, in effect, with the integration of society at large.

During the years after the adoption of the Citizenship Law (1994) in Latvia, it became clear that the rate of naturalization was too low – non-citizens constituted 23% of the present population of Latvia, "new citizens," people who have gained citizenship since naturalization was introduced, only 1.6%. Non-citizens were already used to living without citizenship and felt too estranged from the Latvian state to burden themselves with the naturalization process and its expenses. It was a serious problem in the eyes of some politicians nationally, but especially internationally. In 1997 President Guntis Ulmanis, supported by Max van der Stoel, High Commissioner for National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the head of the OSCE mission in Latvia, began to pressure the Parliament to liberalize the Citizenship Law. For example, in July 1997, the Report of the European Commission "Agenda 2000" recommended that Latvia should take more steps to speed up the process of naturalization.

In 1998, by request of the Prime Minister, working groups were formed in order to develop the framework and the first version of the Integration Program. In one year, the Integration Program project was ready for public discussion. Discussion of the project took place in fora organized by governmental, non-governmental and international organizations. These meetings resulted in a major impact on the Program – only a few paragraphs of the project were left untouched in its final version. Editing and approval of the Integration Program was time-consuming, and it was adopted only in February 2001. Its administration was allocated to the Ministry of Justice, and the Department of Integration of Society was established at the Ministry in order to coordinate the program. Implementation of the Program is shared by NGOs, the Naturalization Board, and the National Program for Latvian Language Training, which initially was funded almost solely by foreign donors. The main fields of integration policy implementation are language, citizenship and education. Since 2001, the Program has received governmental funding distributed by the Integration Foundation.

²³ *Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], pp. 72–73.

There are several weaknesses in the Integration Program and in its implementation. Development of the Program has been extremely slow, and there has long been indecision concerning its enactment and funding. The government and the Parliament have not given the impression that integration is their priority, and often have been passive observers of the process. Some parliamentary deputies have even made statements opposing the main ideas of the Program. For example, Dzintars Abikis from the People's Party said that "the highest level of integration is assimilation."²⁴ Some parliamentary deputies believe that the Program is only the recommendation of theoreticians, a theoretical ideal adopted by the government.²⁵ But, more importantly, the Integration Program mainly concerns "them" (non-citizens, non-Latvians), not "us" (citizens, ethnic Latvians). In other words, the main target group of the Program is non-Latvians, and ethnic Latvians have very little role in it. The Program is created by citizens for non-citizens, so non-citizens look at the Integration Program with a great deal of distrust and interpret it as a measure imposed by the government on them. Some Russian, pro-Moscow parties also evaluate the Program as furthering the assimilation of Russian-speakers.

HISTORY AS AN ISSUE DIVIDING SOCIETY

Individuals operate in contexts shaped by history and by interpretations of history. As a result, the way these contexts are defined and redefined in society plays an essential role in determining the outcome of ethnopolitical struggle. [...] What is colonial occupation for one person or group might be simple historical migration and contingency of another. Groups who may be viewed as aggressive colonizers may also be seen as innocent economic migrants, while others who may be defensive indigenous groups might equally be defined as oppressive nationalists.

Vello Pettai

The Role of History in the Recent Past

History plays a significant role in every modern society. For people such as Estonians and Latvians who have experienced dramatic changes and violent shifts during the 20th century, history and historical consciousness has become the main element for orientation in reality.²⁶ It was one of the major battlefields in Latvia during the independence struggle of the late 1980s and the reestablishment of national statehood at the beginning of 1990s. It was used and misused by different actors and for different purposes. Historical reference to the pre-war status quo in Latvia was used in a range of political decisions (e.g., the Citizenship Law) legitimizing national statehood and building a new national identity. It was precisely this focus upon the past that provided the opportunity to find the necessary resources to develop a program of democratization.²⁷

Because Soviet era restrictions in research as well as censorship were banished and access to sources was eased, many new facts – so-called "blank spots of history" – were

²⁴ Iveta Silova, *From Symbols of Occupation to Symbols of Multiculturalism*, p. 155.

²⁵ Ilga Apine and others, *Etnopolitika Latvijā* [Ethnopolitics in Latvia], Rīga: Elpa, 2001, p. 46.

²⁶ Rein Rutso, "Vēsturiskā identitāte un valstiskās neatkarības atjaunošana" [Historical Identity and Restoration of National Independence], in: *Nacionālā politika Baltijas valstīs* [Ethnic Policy in Baltic Countries], ed. Elmārs Vēbers and Rasma Kārklīdā, Rīga: Zinātne, 1995, pp. 51, 54.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

opened to the public. Many new topics started to be discussed, for example, the pre-war history of Latvia, the Holocaust, and armed resistance to Soviet occupation after World War II. Many individuals began studying family history, especially when documentation was needed to prove pre-war citizenship and claim rights to pre-war properties. In other words, the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s witnessed a “history boom” because public interest in history reached its peak.

At the same time, society blamed history as a discipline as well as historians for the existence of the Soviet regime. With the assistance of manipulations of history, the Soviet system was legitimized and society was brainwashed. History was purely a tool or even a weapon of propaganda. In the last years of perestroika historians and history teachers were publicly called “liars,” “political prostitutes,” and “servants of the propaganda machine.” At the same time, some historians who were not co-opted by the Soviet regime, enjoyed public attention and sympathy. The situation changed after Latvia regained its independence: the study of history lost its leading role in society as other urgent problems had to be solved (e.g. economic and legal).

Nowadays, one of the most important issues on the political agenda is the integration of society in Latvia. Although many experts of ethnopolitics often mention the role of the historical dimension in this process, a detailed analysis of this area is lacking. This was a major reason for my project.

Interviews conducted within this project as well as other studies allow one to conclude that the most sensitive historical issues dividing Latvian society are as follows:

- I. Era of occupation of Latvia (1940–1991)
 - A. The occupation and incorporation of Latvia into the USSR in 1940
 - B. Occupation by Nazi Germany (1941–1945), the Holocaust and the Latvian SS Volunteer Legion
 - C. Collaboration with both occupying powers
 - D. Partisan movement after World War II
 - E. Regaining of independence and the period of transition (late 1980s and early 1990s)
- II. The authoritarian regime of Karlis Ulmanis (1934–1940)
- III. Role of Russia in Latvia’s history
- IV. The problem of collective guilt
- V. Marxist-Leninist heritage in historical thought as well as ethnocentric history-writing during the period of transition.

It is assumed that ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking people generally have opposing opinions about historical facts in Latvia’s past. Latvian sociologists have reviewed twenty-one history issues (among them twelve dealing with events before World War II) that are interpreted differently by the Latvian and Russian media at present.²⁸ The Latvian views are clearly ethnocentric, looking at the past mainly from the perspective of ethnic Latvians with a desire to fit it into the context of European history and stress its links with Western civilization. The Russian interpretation is more multicultural, or at least bi-cultural: It stresses friendship and cooperation between Latvians and Russians/Slavs, and tries to demonstrate similarities in the cultural and historical heritage of Latvians and Russians. This point of view

²⁸ J. Broks, A. Tabuns, and A. Tabuna, “History and Images of the Past,” pp. 42–91.

is reminiscent of the Soviet approach towards Latvian history, and is strongly disliked by Latvians. Indeed, many Soviet interpretations of history for Latvians seemed ridiculous, including one idea that in spite of the “bourgeois dictatorship,” the working class people determined their culture by following progressive Russian models during the inter-war period. Such absurd ideas drew responses that were and still are generally negative.

However, there are also different views on history among ethnic Latvians. For example, representatives of the older generation, who were eyewitnesses to Karlis Ulmanis’ pre-war regime (1934–1940), have a positive attitude towards the period, and often idealize it, despite its authoritarian character. This is understandable because it was the last period before the Soviet occupation in which there was no military action going on, and the economic situation was satisfactory for the majority. Representatives of the younger generation have a more critical attitude, while many Russian-speakers still believe in the overstated Soviet evaluation of Ulmanis’ regime, calling it “fascist.”

The period of the three consecutive occupations²⁹ is evaluated largely on the basis of family histories. Those families who have suffered as a result of the Soviet occupation, in many cases, are more positively oriented towards the Nazis, and vice versa. Most contradictions arise when families have been victims of post-war partisan actions. This is because the partisans are often portrayed as heroes and freedom fighters, while victims often cannot comprehend their brutality and feel that they have suffered at the hands of their own people. Russian-speakers in many cases still follow the Soviet interpretation of post-war partisans, evaluating them as criminal bandits.

Although ethnic Latvians generally have a negative attitude towards both Nazi and Soviet occupations, the majority would still argue that the Soviet regime was more tyrannical than the Nazi occupation. This evaluation derives from the fact that the Soviet regime lasted longer, more ethnic Latvians suffered from it, and that Nazi propaganda effectively demonized the Soviets, while Soviet propaganda was not effective enough to override the previous media campaign by the Nazis. Even if the cruelty of the Soviet repressions did not affect somebody personally, it has become an important part of Latvian social memory. Like the Holocaust for Jews, Stalin-era deportations of Latvians (about 100,000 people) have become the history with which Latvians identify themselves. The focus upon the Soviet deportations and the period of Soviet terror occludes memories of social and other problems during the years of independence, moving many to glorify pre-war Latvia.

At the same time, poverty and unemployment have provoked nostalgia towards the Soviet past that is growing among both the Latvian and Russian-speaking pensioners and unemployed.³⁰ Since the Soviets at least provided minimal social welfare services and guaranteed employment, some Latvians have positive associations regarding this period. Russian-speakers are more united in this regard and in general evaluate the Soviet period positively.³¹ At the Occupation Museum, some Russian-speaking visitors loudly and repeatedly express their opinion as mantra: “Then [under Soviet rule] we lived normally, we had jobs, free education and free medical care,” and they suggest that the Museum is “new propaganda” and an “insult to the good times.”

²⁹ Soviet – from summer 1940 to summer 1941, Nazi – from summer 1941 to summer 1944 (or May 1945 in the Western part), replaced by Soviet occupation until 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

³⁰ A recent survey in Ukraine states that 11% of population have nostalgia about Soviet period (Ilga Apine, *Politoloī ija: Ievads etnopsiholoī ijā* [Political Science: Introduction into Ethnopsychology], p. 48.).

³¹ For example, in the essays mentioned earlier in this paper.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust marks one of Europe's most controversial events, one from which Latvia was not removed, and from which the nation has yet to recover. Genocide occurred within the Latvian borders, and Latvia's inhabitants, including ethnic Latvians, helped to facilitate it – as persecutors, executioners, accomplices, beneficiaries, eyewitnesses and bystanders. During Soviet rule, however, the Holocaust – the term and the facts of the persecution and destruction of Jews as an ethnic group during World War II – was not mentioned. According to the Soviet historical interpretation, all victims of the Nazi regime were considered equal, and called “peaceful Soviet civilians” or even “Soviet patriots.” Such an interpretation could have raised the idea that Soviet historians were falsifying the number of Nazi victims because it is not possible that there could be so many “Soviet patriots.” As a consequence of this obvious distortion, the Nazi regime did not seem as evil as the official line was suggesting. Also, in neglecting to discuss the anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime, the Soviets never condemned it, allowing the anti-Semitic propaganda that was introduced by the Nazis to survive and continue to spread throughout Latvia.

Only in 1988 was the term ‘Holocaust’ introduced in Latvia, and the public started to learn the first facts about it. Still, at present, there is a great deal of resistance towards acknowledging the Holocaust because it raises feelings of guilt and uneasy questions of responsibility. As observed in teacher training sessions, Latvian history teachers often respond with anxiety upon hearing word “Holocaust.” They defend the nation's past by arguing that “...Latvians also have suffered, to a large extent under the Stalinist regime, especially in the GULAG camps.” Many people also point out that the Holocaust is an issue imposed by the international community because it is not conscious of the horrors of communism. In this way, the skeptical attitude of some ethnic Latvians towards the Holocaust is related to their evaluation of the Soviet regime as the greatest evil.

The Holocaust is a new historical issue for the Russian-speakers as well. However, the Russian-language media in Latvia has strongly sided with those who encourage acknowledging the Holocaust as an opposition towards the Latvians' generally resistant attitude. Still, the Latvian media also covers many issues regarding the Holocaust, though many teachers participating in the in-service training courses believe this treatment excessive. They argue that everyone already knows all the details about the Holocaust due to the exaggerated public discussion of the issue, and they say that there is too much attention paid to it.

The Latvian SS Legion

The wartime Latvian SS Legion is a historical issue that has received a high level of public attention and coverage in the media. It has also frequently been used for political manipulations by Latvian nationalists and Russian organizations, as well as on an international basis. The Russian media informs its audience that former SS-men are marching in the streets of Riga, and it equates members of the Legion with war criminals. In western countries the message is spread that the Legion was involved in the Holocaust,³² a perception of the Legion that is shared by many Russian-speakers.

Opinions among ethnic Latvians are divided as well. Some consider Legionnaires to be national heroes even though many have accepted the idea of their involvement in the

³² For example, see the website of the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews: www.fsummonitor.com/stories/latvia399.shtml (02.01.03)

Holocaust. Still, they claim that the Legionnaires were “good guys.” Another, less passionate and more academic opinion, represented in modern history textbooks, casts Legionnaires as victims of the war who were fooled and misused by Nazis and Latvian politicians of the time.

The latest research argues that the “Latvian SS Volunteer Legion” (about 100,000 people), despite its name, mainly consisted of conscripts, making only about fifteen percent of the men volunteers. Any link with the Holocaust has proven unfounded, as the Legion was established in early 1943, and the mass murders of Jews in Latvia took place in 1941. Although some war criminals later joined the Legion, their membership does not render it a criminal organization, as determined by a 1950 US Justice Department Finding regarding the eligibility of former Legion members to immigrate to the United States. In addition the Soviet regime investigated, persecuted and punished Legionnaires and members of other non-Soviet military and paramilitary organizations after World War II. Among the tried were both those who were guilty of war crimes as well as the innocent, because fighting on the opposite side was also deemed a crime against the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is hardly possible that “war criminals are walking freely on streets of Riga,” as the Russian media is saying.

The ex-Legionnaires themselves, along with other Latvians, believe that they were fighting for a free Latvia. The Legionnaires fought against the enemy of Latvian independence, against the Soviet army who occupied Latvia in 1940. They do not understand how they were contributing to the goals of the Nazis or how they were misused by them. They do not perceive themselves as victims of the war as many others do.

Collaboration

The phenomenon of collaboration is another new historical issue for Latvia, since the concept did not exist in Soviet history. Every case of collaboration with the Nazis was labeled as a betrayal of the Soviet state, and it was always stressed that only some representatives of “the scum of society agreed to cooperate.” This interpretation made collaboration a crime, and a feature of the few weak and déclassé. Sometimes, in extreme everyday language, Russians call Latvians “fascists,” the same pejorative used by the Soviets against the Nazis. This slander derived from the seeming similarity between the Latvian and Germanic languages, but also means that some Russians suppose Latvians to be “inborn” Nazis. The bad reputation of Latvians in the Western Soviet Union also stems from the brutality of the Latvian SD Auxiliary led by Viktors Arajs, a troop that was used by the Nazis in actions against civilians in Byelorussia and Russia.

The present attitude of Latvians towards collaboration is not as defined because the first research on this issue has been conducted abroad, and its results have been made known to the public in Latvia only during the last couple of years. Some people follow the Soviet pattern of examining history, but shift its frame towards ethnocentrism, labeling collaborators as betrayers of the Latvian nation. On the other hand, the collaboration issue calls up uneasy feelings of guilt and the question of responsibility discussed below. In sum, it seems that Latvians are avoiding this issue.

On the Russian side, the subject of collaboration remains untreated as well. This issue is not approached as it applies to Russians, but as it applies to Latvians instead. One example of vulgar anti-Latvian propaganda occurred on a Russian TV program called “Latvian Chronicles,” broadcast in 1998. It depicts Latvian collaborators and war criminals as typical, and even the best representatives of the nation. In some respect this exaggeration is a counter-

reaction to Latvian accusations claiming that Russians are responsible for all misdeeds of the Soviet regime.

Regaining independence

Latvia's regaining its independence in 1991 is the most recent historical issue with which all adults have personal experience and opinion. Although several serious books on this issue have been published over the last couple of years, this topic remains to be one of the most sensitive issues because it is the basis for insulted feelings and current ethnic tension, as was explained in the Russian-speaking history teachers' essays and the interview with Alberte earlier in this paper. Most post-war immigrants perceive the regaining of independence as separation from the Soviet Union and the end of "good times," while Latvians generally have a positive response to the overturn of power.

Role of Russia in Latvia's history

The role of Russia in Latvia's history is not an object of passionate public discussions. However, school textbooks provide a pertinent source for tracing the significance of this issue. Textbooks published in the first years after the independence evaluated the impact of Russia on Latvian history in an absolutely negative way. Nowadays, textbooks have become more balanced.

Problem of Collective Guilt

Besides the opposition of historical views, there is another resonant aspect of the public's approach to history, namely, the issue of responsibility and guilt. Everyday communication as well as statements by Latvian politicians in the media show that many Latvians hold all Russians collectively guilty of the crimes and misdeeds committed under the Soviet rule. This assumption is reinforced by the use of non-academic language in reference to the Soviet period, wherein the word "Russian" is used instead of the term "Soviet" (e.g. "the Russian occupation," "when we were under the Russians," "the Russian army"). Sometimes historians and history teachers even use these expressions.³³

The beginning of public linkage of Russians and the Soviet regime dates to the period of perestroika, when the first open discussions of the events of the 1940s started. The result was that both sides, Latvians and Russians, felt offended and perceived themselves as victims. Many Latvians identified themselves as collective victims of the Soviet regime, a sentiment that contributed to the development of a minority consciousness and to comparing themselves with the victims mentioned above. Latvians were blaming Russians for the crimes of the Soviet regime as well as for the occupation of Latvia and the existence of Communist rule. Stalinist deportations became the central part of the Latvian social memory, while the Russian-speaking population felt accused and guilty, and had to find a new identity. As Estonian sociologist Rein Ruutsoo stated, the collapse of the Soviet Union created a "mental homelessness" for Russians because communism was supposed to make them rulers of the world.³⁴

Latvia's pre-war Russian community mainly descended from exiles under religious persecution in the seventeenth century. It also included immigrants who escaped the Bolshevik revolution and held monarchist and sometimes even chauvinist as well as expansionist views. The "new" Russian-speaking population, which arrived in Latvia after

³³ For example, at a conference, Prof. Inesis Feldmanis giving a talk on minority history used the term "Soviet or Russian occupation" (*Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], p. 16.).

³⁴ Rein Rutso, "Vēsturiskā identitāte un valstiskās neatkarības atjaunošana" [Historical Identity and Restoration of National Independence], p. 50.

World War II had nothing to do with the social memory of ethnic Latvians, and did not share any ideas of the “old” Russian minority. The “old” Russian population also felt distant from the “newcomers.” A telling example of this detachment occurs in the essay of a Russian-speaking history teacher and Latvian citizen, Jevgenija Golubeva:

I remember that in my childhood my mother once told me of our neighbors: “They are Russians, they came from the old republics.” Then I did not understand anything, but later learned that the neighbors had arrived in Latvia in 1944. It means that my parents always considered us – native Russian-speakers – as separate from those Russians who “brought Soviet power” here.

Nowadays, the identity of the “old” and the “new” Russian-speakers in Latvia has consolidated as a result of the turbulent developments of the early 1990s. Still, the “new” Russian-speaking community has experienced the manipulation of history to conform to ideological goals and Soviet propaganda for more generations than the Latvians. They have consequently retained a stronger belief in official Soviet interpretations of history, while Latvians under the Soviet rule carry more skeptical attitudes towards the official ideology, as their unofficial family histories had a stronger impact on their historical consciousness.

Because Russians were sometimes called “occupants” during the perestroika period, many Russian-speakers presently believe that all Latvians view them with hostility, only seeing history from their own perspective. For example, a representative of the Russian Cultural Association, Yuri Abizov, dislikes the commemoration of the deportations: “Lately [national] flags with black crepe bands were hoisted to commemorate deportations organized by Russians.” He stresses that other ethnic groups also suffered in the deportations, though in Latvia, talk strictly concerns the ethnic Latvian victims.³⁵ In current history textbooks, media, museums and research, however, Latvia’s history is not depicted as strictly the history of ethnic Latvians. Abizov describes the typical perception of history, held by both Latvians and Russian-speakers: Latvians blame Russians for the Soviet deportations, whereas Russians think they are being unfairly labeled as the official scapegoats.

I have heard similar views expressed in the Occupation Museum. For example, a Latvian teacher working in a Russian-speaking school, who brought her students to the Museum, asked me to tell them “...what they have done to us,” meaning to tell these Russian students what Russians have done to Latvians. This mentality does not sufficiently account for the fact that ethnic Russians in Latvia also suffered under the Soviet regime (not to mention Russians in Russia and elsewhere in Soviet Union during the 1930s), or that ethnic Latvians were involved in the establishment of the Soviet system, or that there was significant collaboration by some of the Latvian citizens. In history textbooks, museums and the media, these aspects are mentioned, but obviously have a limited impact on the everyday attitudes of Latvians today.

Latvian national radicals would like historical issues (specifically the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940) to serve as the basis of Latvia’s international relations. They demand “historical justice,” and do not want to give in to “rights claimed by colonists and migrants who streamed in during the years of Soviet occupation.”³⁶ This stance raises a question

³⁵ *Latvija – dzimtene kam?* [Latvia – Native Land For Whom?], p. 34.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 86.

concerning apologies and forgiveness, an issue that appears at the political level, for example, in the Latvians' hope that Russia will recognize Soviet crimes.³⁷ At conferences, some Latvians have addressed demands for apologies and compensation towards local Russians, showing that they hold the local Russians responsible for the Soviet power's transgressions. This situation has proven challenging and unique because occupation and annexation began fifty years ago, and the perpetrator – the Soviet Union – no longer exists.

In accordance with the psychology of individuals, a person who has experienced traumatic events often tries to push away thoughts regarding this trauma. This reaction also applies to society at large, as several calls have been made to stop discussing history and to live for the future, especially by Russian-speakers.³⁸ Some ethnic Latvians also take this position, however, arguing that identifying with the roles of losers and victims becomes a burden within an independent country.³⁹ Young people in particular have started to tire of deportation commemorations, memories of sufferings, and the overuse of the term "occupation."

The Marxist Historical Tradition and Ethnocentric History Writing

Soviet historical interpretation was based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy, which explained every historical event, process, and the whole development of mankind as a struggle between classes. History was viewed in a bipolar way, dividing humans from all ages into two classes: a progressive class of exploited people and a class of exploiters. In addition, development as a whole was seen as advancing to progressively higher stages, eventually culminating with communism – a classless society.

During the perestroika period, the Marxist-Leninist approach was rejected. At first, one of the most popular approaches became a "nationalistic romantic" approach that only interpreted history from the ethnic Latvians' point of view, without any other major differences in comparison to Soviet history-writing. Such an ethnocentric approach marks a logical stage in the development of a new national state and its identity,⁴⁰ but it has left a serious impact on modern society in Latvia. Ethnocentric history-writing usually diametrically opposed the Marxist-Leninist approach in evaluating events; everything that had been positive became negative, and vice versa. Although they sought to reverse the Soviet outlook, history was still interpreted in "black-and-white," and the same political issues compose the main scope of history-writing. In addition, exaggerated poetic language was used. The most vivid examples of ethnocentric history-writing are the books of Odisejs Kostanda, a young history teacher and sometime politician, as well as the books written by Uldis Germanis, an expatriate historian. Kostanda's book was written as clearly as a textbook and is a product of its era, while Germanis' book was written much earlier and was not supposed to be a school textbook. He wrote it in exile, aiming to promote the Latvian identity. Although it was not written as a history book, it was republished and widely used as a school textbook in the early 1990s. For example, a chapter of his book devoted to Latvia's forced incorporation in the Soviet Union is named "In the Soviet Slave State," and contains the following descriptions:

³⁷ For example, [Latvian Foreign Minister] Valdis Birkavs, "Latvia Seeks to Reconcile the Past with a Multiethnic Future," in: *International Herald Tribune*, 1999, May 14.

³⁸ J. Broks, A. Tabuns, and A. Tabuna, "History and Images of the Past," p. 79.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 74.

⁴⁰ Rein Rutso, "Vçsturiskâ identitâte un valstiskâs neatkarîbas atjaunoðana" [Historical Identity and Restoration of National Independence], p. 52.

At the beginning Russians act quite carefully. [...] Step by step the killing of Latvians starts. [...] The order of the Soviet slave state is not known to Latvians yet.⁴¹

Kostanda talks mainly of “Latvians” in his book, rarely mentioning “Latvian citizens,” the “Latvian nation,” or “inhabitants of Latvia.”⁴² Yet Kostanda does not totally exclude other ethnic groups, but only mentions them at the end of a paragraph or section, giving them minor roles. For example, a paragraph devoted to the beginning of the Soviet–German War and the beginning of the Latvian armed resistance ends with the lines: “to free the native land from Stalinist hangmen and to reestablish an independent republic, together with Latvians were fighting also a few Russians, Jews, etc.”⁴³ In contrast to Germanis, Kostanda does not use the word “Russian” while discussing Soviet rule. Still, if the main scope of his account concerns Latvians, their logical antagonist is not a state or a regime, but a nation. As a result, Russian-speakers did not take any interest in history when there were no other textbooks available.

These ethnocentric books were a counter-argument against the Soviet interpretation of history and a political weapon in the fight against the Soviet occupation. They also helped to equate the Latvian nation with the roles of a victim, “orphan,” sufferer and loser. At the same time, both books attempt to sustain Latvian self-esteem by incorporating stories of never-ending fighting against aggressive Germans and Russians.

The more recent history textbooks, published during and after the mid-1990s, do not approach history from the point of view of ethnic Latvians. Instead, Latvian history is written in the context of general European history, and there are attempts to integrate multiple perspectives and multicultural elements. For example, a Latvian history textbook’s chapter on the crusades cites both Slavonic and German sources,⁴⁴ while ethnocentrists like Kostanda make only negative associations regarding contacts with Russians.

A strange mixture of nationalistic and Marxist-Leninist ideas is still evident, however, in the public’s understanding of history, history teaching, and in academic scholarship in Latvia. There is a textbook where class struggle is still used as the basis for interpreting history.⁴⁵ In some schools, the ethnocentric textbooks of Kostanda and Germanis are still in use, and some teachers – both Latvian and Russian – believe that this is the “correct line” for teaching history.

This notion of a “correct” history is another part of the heritage of the Marxist-Leninist past. Under Soviet rule, there was a historical orthodoxy. And though the system changed, the teaching staff largely did not, as some teachers are still looking for the “correct” history, and believe that it is the ethnocentric one. Teachers in teacher training seminars often ask, “What is the correct textbook?” or say, “This is an incorrect opinion.” Some teachers have told me that they have problems teaching the “official line” (assuming that the new “official line” is ethnocentric history), because it conflicts with their personal experiences. For example, some

⁴¹ Uldis Ķerņmanis, *Latvieši u tautas piedzīvojumi* [Adventures of Latvians], Rīga: Jāņa Sēta, 1990, pp. 355–356.

⁴² *Latvijas vēsture* [Latvian History], ed. Odisejs Kostanda, Rīga: Zvaigzne, 1992, 454 p.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 303.

⁴⁴ Gunārs Kurlovičs and Andris Tomažūns, *Latvijas vēsture vidusskolai: 1* [Latvian History for Secondary Schools: Part 1], Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1999, pp. 69–72.

⁴⁵ *Jauno laiku vēsture: 17. – 19. gadsimts* [Modern History: 17th–19th Centuries], ed. Alberts Varšlavāns, Rīga: Zvaigzne ABC, 1997

ethnic Latvian teachers' families suffered from the actions of post-war anti-Soviet partisans, so they cannot consider partisans 'heroes' as they were portrayed in the books of the early 1990s.

As long as democracy endures in Latvia, the notion of a single, "correct" history will remain obsolete. Still, many teachers have yet to grow accustomed to this outlook. The impact of these Soviet methods of interpreting and manipulating history to shape the views and behavior of society is one of the issues that has not been seriously evaluated in teacher-training. Similarly, ethnocentric history-writing of the late 1980s and early 1990s must also be taken into account.

INSTITUTIONS AIMING AT MASTERING THE LEGACY OF HISTORY

There are many institutions in Latvia working in the field of history – research institutes, archives, and museums. I chose to analyze a few of them, which aim not only at the research of the controversial historical issues mentioned above, but also at a broader outreach (history teaching in schools as well as the education of the general public). In this way these institutions have a greater impact on the historical consciousness of society, and may contribute to overcoming the legacy of history.

Latvia's History Commission

Latvia's history Commission is one of the most significant institutions in this respect. Former President Guntis Ulmanis founded it in 1998, based on a model of similar commissions in other Central and East European countries. Current President Vaira Vike-Freiberga has continued the Commission and even broadened its mandate. Its task is to promote research of crimes against humanity under the occupation regimes, to make the results of research known to Latvian and international audiences through conferences and publications, as well as to develop materials for schools.⁴⁶ The aim of the Commission is to induce Latvian society "to come to grips with the Nazi-instigated Holocaust," as well as to confront the international community (particularly the West) with the crimes against humanity that were committed by the Soviet regime. This Commission has a strong external function – to satisfy Western demand by acknowledging the Holocaust in Latvia, and to counter-balance this demand by confronting the West with the crimes of the Soviet regime.

The Commission has formed four sub-commissions, three of which are chronological and cover three consecutive periods of terror carried out by the occupying powers (1940–1941, 1941–1945, 1944–1956). The fourth one is devoted to the Holocaust.

The key term used by the Commission is "crime," making a phenomenon such as collaboration subordinate, though it is one of the main topics to be investigated by all sub-commissions except the one devoted to the Holocaust. At present, the Commission does not deal with the years after 1953, following the death of Stalin – i.e., the "period of normalization," which is the direct occupation experience of the generation born after World War II. This later, "milder" period of Soviet rule is slated to be one of the future subjects of the Commission's research. The focus of the research should then change from crimes against humanity to such issues as Soviet economic and cultural policies, resistance, and collaboration. The Commission has left the controversial period of the late 1980s and the early 1990s untouched.

⁴⁶ "The Progress Report of Latvia's History Commission: Crimes against Humanity Committed in the Territory of Latvia from 1940 to 1956 during the Occupations of the Soviet Union and the National Socialist Germany," in: www.am.gov.lv/file/e/HC-Progress-Report2001.pdf (02.04.02)

The Commission claims that it works to make the public and schools aware of its new findings, linking its publications, conferences and cooperation projects with the Latvian History Teachers' Association.⁴⁷ Much work still must be done in this field. For example, special projects might be developed to introduce the Commission's research results in schools.

Until the present, the work of the Commission has not been linked to the Integration Program. It is important that one of the aims of the Holocaust sub-commission is overcoming prejudices and disinformation spread by Soviet agencies internationally. Still, one of the Commission's tasks should also be targeting national prejudices – not only regarding the Holocaust, but also other historical issues.

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1940–1991)

The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga is one of the leading institutions working to overcome the legacy of history. The goal of the museum is to provide information about Latvia and its people under two occupying totalitarian regimes from 1940 to 1991, to remind the world of the wrongdoings committed by foreign powers against the state and people of Latvia, and to remember those who perished, who suffered, and who fled the terror of these occupying regimes.

Although the museum devotes its exhibits to fifty-one years of Soviet and Nazi occupation, the presentations are out of proportion. 77% of the space is devoted to the “hot” period of totalitarianism (73% of its content deals with the Soviet occupation until the death of Stalin, and 27% with the Nazi occupation). 85% of the displayed artifacts are devoted to the Soviet occupation under Stalin's rule. Among these objects 80% consist of evidence of deportations and imprisonment under the rule of Stalin. Only two objects (less than 1%) are part of the exhibit devoted to the Nazi occupation, and the remaining 14% deal with the life of Latvians in exile. Most temporary exhibits also focus on the Soviet occupation. Some visitors and even history teachers express their surprise that the museum even deals with the Nazi occupation, showing that the public's perception of the term ‘occupation’ is strongly associated with the Soviet era.

Through exhibits, research, publications, and educational activities, the museum contributes to the same goals as Latvia's History Commission. However, the difference between the two institutions is that the work of the museum is clearly directed at the public.

The museum tries to attract Russian-speaking students and teachers by providing student activities and teacher seminars in the Russian language. However, Russian-speaking students rarely visit the museum, and Russian-speaking teachers have expressed unpleasant feelings and negative attitude about the museum. They say that the very name of the museum makes them feel guilty, and they have a problem entering it. The museum does not accuse any particular ethnic groups, but rather regimes and ideologies. It also avoids ethnocentricity in showing the fate of various ethnic groups under Soviet and Nazi rule. Still, more perspectives might be introduced and elaborated. For example, the theme of collaboration should be developed. Some visitors have written their comments in the guest-book: “The exhibit concentrates on victims, not on perpetrators. We can only guess whom you are blaming for all the sufferings.” The exhibits of the museum should be changed to give

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

visitors the message that the scope of the museum covers misdeeds of totalitarian ideologies and their impact on Latvia today.

The Latvian History Teachers' Association

The Latvian History Teachers' Association was established in 1993 to unite history teachers and other professionals teaching history. Since 1998, the Association has conducted several projects aimed at integrating society.

In 1998, the Finnish government initiated a long-term project entitled "Teaching Controversial Issues." It was co-sponsored by the Soros Foundation Latvia. The goal of the project was to develop teaching materials for secondary grades on controversial historical issues and publish them in a teacher handbook, written in both Latvian and Russian. To make the content of the handbook more relevant to teaching, meetings of Russian-speaking and Latvian teachers and students were part of the project. The authors of the materials were history teachers and historians from history museums. Eight study units were developed – five of them on 20th century Latvian history, the other three on earlier historical periods. The methodological approach of the handbook was based on an independent survey of a variety of sources. The task team suggested that group-work allows for multiple perspectives, because students in groups have the opportunity to learn different views. Therefore, cooperative learning was chosen as the main educational strategy for the handbook.

The developed teaching materials were published as a bilingual book,⁴⁸ which was distributed free of charge to all Latvian schools by implementation seminars. Almost 600 teachers participated in 23 seminars delivered by four pairs of trainers. In the pairs, one trainer was an experienced Russian-speaking history teacher, the other – a Latvian-speaking history student. The language of instruction in the seminars was mainly Latvian, but participants received clarification in Russian if necessary. This training format worked smoothly and effectively, because the status of the Russian-speaking trainers was higher than that of the Latvian students due to their experience (if both trainers were teachers, the Russian-speaker would have a lower status due to the lack of language proficiency). After the publication, I have observed that the handbook is often used in classrooms. Russian-speaking teachers have especially expressed their appreciation because there are not many materials available in the Russian language.

Meetings of Russian-speaking and Latvian teachers and students in Riga were a forum for discussions and a catalyst of ideas in the handbook. To encourage communication, unofficial bilingualism was declared. The majority of participants (about seventy persons once or twice a year) evaluated these meetings as useful. It was an opportunity to meet the "other side." Lack of communication between Russian-speakers and Latvians is one of the reasons for misunderstandings and prejudice.

At the same time, the Association conducted an international two year project – "New Ways to the Past" – in partnership with Euroclio (European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations). Two working groups consisting of Latvian and Estonian history teachers along with experts from different European countries participated in the project. It was sponsored by MATRA, a program run by the Dutch Foreign Ministry. The outcome of

⁴⁸ *Pretrunîgâ vçsture: Skolotâja rokasgrâmata* [Controversial History: A Teacher's Handbook], ed. Ieva Gundare, Rîga: N.I.M.S., 2000, 146 p.

the project was a teachers' handbook⁴⁹ published in three different languages (Latvian, Estonian, and Russian), and it was distributed free of charge to every history teacher in Latvia and Estonia.

Although the promotion of integration was not among the goals of the project, it contributed to the process, because of the demands for diverse approaches, confronting students with a broad variety of sources.

In 2002 the Association in cooperation with Euroclio started a new project aimed at the promotion of ethnic integration. In the near future, it might then be expected that the Association will keep its leading role in the field of overcoming the legacy of history and in fostering ethnic integration.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study is a systematization of opinions on history carried out by different groups within Latvia's society. In this paper I have traced the differences in these opinions and analyzed the sources of their divides, drawing from a variety of material resources as well as from my own observations and experiences in working at the Museum of the Occupation. This study is the first attempt to explain the influence of the Soviet and Nazi propaganda through a historical lens.

Until the present, the impact of Nazi propaganda on Latvians has been underestimated. Although Nazi occupation took place long ago and lasted a comparatively short period of time (1941–1945), the Nazi propaganda left a significant residue. The losses, sufferings, desire for revenge, and fears for the Latvian population served as the basis for the Nazi propaganda. To the Latvian people, the Soviets were enemies who had occupied their country, and manipulation by public sentiment was therefore made easy. The demonized Soviet image was one of the main reasons for the high rate of escape to the West at the end of World War II. When Soviet occupation replaced Nazi occupation, it again meant the return of the enemy for many Latvians. Although World War II (particularly the war between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, referred to by the Soviets as the "Great Patriotic War") was one of the bases of Soviet propaganda, it did not influence Latvians as much as might have been expected. Soviet propaganda depicted Nazi Germany as the highest evil and the reason for all the present problems of the Soviet Union, only leading the Latvians to develop a skeptical and resistant attitude towards this message. On the other hand, the majority of the Russian-speaking population strongly believed in the anti-Nazi propaganda.

The Marxist-Leninist heritage in historical thought has also influenced the present perception of history. This means that history is still seen in categorical, black-and-white terms, as people look for the official, "correct" line of reasoning set by the government, as was customary under the Soviet rule. At the same time, some believe that this official line derives from the ethnocentric viewpoint of the early 1990s. The impact of both Marxist-Leninist and ethnocentric perspectives on the teaching of history and public memory should be analyzed in greater detail.

Possibly the heaviest effect on the historical consciousness of Latvian society is the Latvians' tendency to associate the Soviet regime with Russians. Although some Latvians do

⁴⁹ *Ceiã uz pagãtmes izpratni* [On the Way of Understanding the Past], ed. Juris Goldmanis, Rĩga: Zvaigzne ABC, 2000.

blame the crimes of the Soviet regime on Russians and depict themselves as exclusive victims, Russian speakers perceive all Latvians as doing so, and react with hostility.

History has been presented as one of the issues among many problems concerning ethnic integration in Latvia. This is the first study to analyze the historical dimension of ethnic integration, tracing the different ways in which Nazi propaganda, the Soviet version of historical interpretation, and ethnocentric history-writing have influenced the memories and shaped the historical consciousness of Latvians and Russian-speakers. The lack of discussion at present might be an indication of escapism because the past is too traumatic and history, too sensitive to confront.

While the public has lost its deep interest in history, which had peaked during the late 1980s, and the media has not helped in overcoming ethnic stereotypes, positive changes have taken place in the teaching of history. The curriculum is not as rigid as during the Soviet rule and during the first years following Latvia's renewal of its independence. There are many textbooks from which teachers can choose. Since the mid-1990s no ethnocentric textbooks have been published and recent textbooks have become more balanced, providing multiple perspectives and including examples from original historical sources. This new wealth of information gives students the opportunity to make their own judgments.

What could be suggested based on the findings of this study? The work of the History Commission should be coordinated with the implementation of the Integration Program and have a broader impact on history teaching. The History Commission and the History Teachers' Association could cooperatively develop teaching materials and in-service training where results of recent research could be applied. Both the History Commission and the Museum of the Occupation should approach a broader range of issues regarding the Soviet regime (beyond the limits of Stalinism and its crimes) as well as uneasy historical issues such as collaboration.

A deeper analysis of communism as well as a critical reevaluation of Latvia's regaining its independence is necessary to enrich the teaching of history. In teacher training diverse views as well as the enhancement of democratic values among teachers should be encouraged. Both of these topics are new for Latvia's teachers, not a matter-of-course, because they are antipodal to the Soviet approach. Another way to facilitate a balanced approach would be to encourage the Russians to develop a new textbook.

Latvia is a new independent country with a traumatic past and a heavy legacy of history created by propaganda and the manipulation of historical facts. Since 1991, much has been done to overcome these difficulties, and Latvia is on the right path toward a democratic and integrated society. Reckoning with history, however, is essential for continued progress.

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