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**The effects of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia**

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# Executive Summary

This final paper examines the effects of Latvian integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority. It contains four chapters which analyze the integration policies and their influence on the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. The first chapter describes the status of the Russian-speaking minority and the history of their arrival to Latvia. The Soviet occupation of Latvia was the reason for the mass migration of minorities in Latvia. After Latvia gained its independence, the status of the Russian-speaking minority changed and they experience a reintegration in to Latvian society.

The second chapter summarizes the developments of Latvian integration policies which affected the Russian-speaking minority. After Latvia gained its independence, new policies for integrating Russian-speakers were established. On an international level, Latvia was accused of violating minority rights by implementing preliminary integration policies. These policies excluded the Russian-speaking minority from obtaining a Latvian citizenship and instead, this minority group gained a non-citizen status. This report also elaborates on the role of the European Union and other institutions during the EU accession, which assisted Latvia in developing its integration policies. Latvia’s EU accession helped to simplify naturalization but could not influence the non-citizens status because the Union Law does not apply to them. Currently, the Latvians have established constructive developments and guidelines that are set to further integrate the Latvian society. The third chapter is an overview of the current integration policies in education, language, citizenship and the naturalization process of these policies.

The last chapter of this research reveals examples of Latvian integration policies affecting the Russian-speaking minority. The consequences of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority are requiring language proficiency in employment, deficit in quality of education and violation of privacy. In addition, the citizenship law excludes the minority group from political participation. The conclusion summarizes results from the four chapters to provide an answer to the research question: What are the effects of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia? Consequently, there is a set of recommendations for the Latvian government which could help improve the situation of the Russian-speaking minority. These recommendations are based on citizenship and naturalization, political participation, education and language policies.

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# Introduction

Many issues concerning minority rights, evolved from the large migration of the Russian-speaking minority to Latvia during the Soviet occupation. Latvians considered this period as a cultural genocide from the Soviet Union because of the rapid Sovietisation of Latvia. During the Soviet occupation, Latvia had been under the influence of a Socialist regime and therefore Latvians could not maintain their cultural identity. The number of Soviet migrants was half of Latvia’s population. The first integration policies for Russian-speaking minority were implemented after Latvia gained its independence from the Soviet Union. Latvia and Estonia were the only ex-Soviet countries which did not deliver passports to ethnic minorities.

During Latvia’s independence, it was important for ethnic Latvian’s to regain their cultural identity and reconstruct a democratic state. At that time, nationalism has grown very fast in an attempt to exclude the Russian-speaking minority from social, political and economical participation. Latvians feared that the Russian-speaking minority would take power over their government. As a consequence, the Russian-speaking minority have been delivered a non-citizen passport. A person with a non-citizen status is restricted from many social, political and economical rights. Afterwards, Latvia joined international organizations, such as OSCE, Council of Europe and the European Union. One of the most important conditions for Latvia to join these organizations was to improve its integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority. Latvia has been accused for discriminating minorities in integration policies such as the citizenship law, the education law, the linguistic law and naturalization process.

Many changes were made to simplify the integration policies for Russian-speaking minority. Currently, many laws and integration procedures make it difficult for the Russian-speaking minority to benefit from Latvia’s society. The integration policies still affect Russian-speaking minority in education, employment, political participation and in private life. The Russian speakers have been living among Latvians for many decades and since Latvia’s independence they have been treated as migrants. This situation marginalized the Russian-speaking minority.

This final paper is written to discover how the integration policies have affected the Russian-speaking minority. Consequently, the main research question is formulated as following: **What are the effects of the integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia?**

Sub-questions:

Who are the Russian-speaking minority in Russian?

What are the developments of the integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority?

What are the main integration policies in Latvia?

How integration policies affect the Russian-speaking minority?

Definition of concepts:

The following concepts are defined to have a better understanding of this final paper.

Russian-speaking minority: A minority comprised of Slavic origin that migrated from the Soviet Union (Russians, Jewish, Poles, Belorussians and Ukrainians).

Russophones: The term Russophones are used to describe temporary or permanent citizens who live in Latvia and whose primary language is Russian.

Integration policies: The main policies that are applied for this research are citizenship, education, language and naturalization laws.

Non-citizens: People who do not have a citizenship in the country they are residing or of any other state. They have an alien passport and they are restricted from having the same rights as citizens.

# Methodology

The goal of writing this final paper is to reveal how integration policies affect the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. The research is conducted using literature review, data and studying cases from desk research. The cases reveal how integration policies influence the Russian-speaking minority. For supporting these cases, a collection of data of Latvian integration policies was utilized for the reader to gain background knowledge on the policies to understand these cases. The literature review of this paper is an overview of the migration of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia and the development of the Latvian integration policies. The literature review supports the data and the cases to give a clear observation on how historical events led to the current status of the Russian-speaking minority. One of the challenges in conducting this research was the scarcity of academic literature on recent events about the Latvian integration policies. In addition, it was also challenging to find unbiased information in cases, due to the complexity of issues of the Russian-speaking minority. Furthermore, this topic is very sensitive for Latvians because it dates back to the Soviet occupation of Latvia. Articles which were too politicized, some from Latvia’s opposition party and from some Russian sources, were not used in this research.

In writing this final paper, academic journals, theses, articles and books were used for an extensive desk research for writing the literature review. For collecting data and finding cases, sources were used from Latvian governmental websites, news articles, reports and documents from international institutions, such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and Latvian Human Rights Committee.

**Literature review**

The literature review is designed to explain the history of the Russian-speaking minority status and the development of Latvian integration policies. Academic journals were used from Eastern European studies with focus on minority and ethnic issues. In addition, there were several useful theses which specialize on the Russian-speaking minority and the EU accession of Latvia. For writing the development of integration policies during the EU accession, it was necessary to use documents from the European Commission and combine it with a working paper from the European Center on Minority Issues, which analyzes these documents. When about the current developments on integrating the Russian-speakers in to Latvian society, all the information was taken from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia website, because it provided the most recent projects on integration.

**Data**

The collections of data in the third chapter are integration policies which are specifically targeted at the non-citizens of the Russian-speaking minority. The data of integration policies are classified as citizenship, education, and language and naturalization process. Each policy area has been collected from several sources from Latvian governmental websites which specialize on different integration policies. The data was retrieved from the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, the Latvian Language Agency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. These sources provided all the policies needed for making this research.

**Case study**

To find out about the consequences of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia it was necessary to find cases. This last chapter researches cases from different international institutions which monitor the minority issues in Latvia. Such institutions are the Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Human Rights Report on Latvia from US Department of State, Legal Information Center for Minority rights, Latvian Human Rights Committee, “For Human Rights in United Latvia” party, European Center for Minority Issues and the European Parliament. In addition, news reports from the BBC News and Radio Free Europe were used to find the most recent information. These sources gave the most up-to-date reports on issues concerning the Russian-speaking minority.

# Chapter 1: The Russian-speaking minority in Latvia

To answer the main question of this final paper it is important to understand status of the Russian-speaking minority. The Russian-speaking minority is the largest minority group in Latvia. This minority group is from Slavic origins which are ethnic Russians (27.3%), Jewish (0.43%), Poles (2.29%), Byelorussians (3.51%) and Ukrainians (2.45%). In total, there are 59.5% of Latvian citizens (See Table 2 in the Appendix) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012). In addition, most Russophones settled to Latvia’s largest cities, which are Daugvalis, Riga and Rezekne and the proportion of the Russophones living in those cities is slightly more than 40% of the Latvian population (Volkovs, 1999). In Latvia there are about four out of five people who speak Russian, which is spoken almost as much as Latvian. Russian language is the dominant language within the families of these ethnic groups. The reason for this is that many Russian-speaking families are ethnically mixed, as an example, many families are mixed between Russians with Byelorussians or Ukrainians. However, the minorities who are not ethnic Russian choose to preserve their ethnic language and retain their knowledge in ethnic schools. Moreover, these minorities are polyglots; they speak their ethnic language, they are fluent in Russian and many of them also speak Latvian (Mežs, 2010).

This large minority group has been living in Latvia since the Soviet occupation in 1945. Nowadays, after a long period of settlement in Latvia, the Russophones have a sense of belonging and they accept their future to be in Latvia. They do not wish to return to their historical homeland because they have adopted many Latvian characteristics and they would not feel at home if they would return permanently to their country (Mežs, 2010). As an example, ethnic Russians living in Latvia show calmer behavior and formal politeness in different situations, whereas a different sort of behavior would be expected in Russia. Even if they do not speak Latvian and do not have a Latvian citizenship they would still be regarded as foreigners in their original homeland. Furthermore, Russians who visit Latvia recognize that the local ethnic Russians borrowed many characteristics from the Latvians (Volkovs, 1999).

The Latvian government considers that the Russophones have integrated quite well into the Latvian society and this will be analyzed more in the second chapter of this research. However, the Russian-speaking minority have certain ethnic issues which have been heavily politicized, specifically concerning non-citizenship and accepting Latvian as the official state language. This situation has marginalized the Russian-speaking minority. There are many ethnic Russians who identify themselves with Russia and do not accept the Latvian language as the official state language (Mežs, 2010). In addition, there are 319,267 people who have a non-citizens status which makes 14.4% of the Latvian population (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008). Most of the non-citizens are the Russian-speaking minority (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

## 1.1 Migration of Russian-speakers to the Soviet Latvian Republic

After 1945, a large number of Russian-speakers migrated to Latvia, due to the Soviet migration policy. In the post-war there was a large deficit in the Latvian economy and it was necessary to expand the labor force. The purpose for this migration was to bring force labor to reconstruct transportation, industries and mass-scale constructions in Latvia. In addition, more migrants arrived such as intellectuals and civil servants from Communist administration for Sovietisation of Latvia (Hughes, 2005, Björklund, 2006). The Russian-speakers preferred to migrate to Latvia because it had a positive socio-economic condition and it was perceived to be the most European state in the Eastern bloc (Hughes, 2005). The ethnic Russians were the most influential figures in Latvia because of the ideological influence and they covered a large number of the Latvian population. The ethnic Russians dominated the non-Latvian population and they formulated a new Russian-speaking group which comprised of Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Jews and Germans. The Russophones differed from Latvians in professional and social characteristics. The Latvians engaged more in art, culture and agriculture and the Russophones took more positions in industry and administration (Volkovs, 1999). There were about twice as much ethnic Russians as Latvians working for the administration. About 47% of Russians came to Latvia in the period of 1959-1979 and after this period of time, approximately 78% of non-Russians living in Latvia considered that Russian was their mother tongue (Volkovs, 1999). One of the main reasons why Russian language was so dominating was because of the education system. The Soviet Latvian education system was bipolar, where subjects were taught in Latvian and Russian. The rest of the minority schools, such as Byelorussian, German, Jewish, and Livonian were cancelled (Mežs, 2010). Classes for Latvian language were compulsory in schools but the level was very low. All the other classes were taught according to the Soviet curriculum and in Russian. The Russian-speaking migrants did not learn Latvian very well because of the dominating Russian language. The whole infrastructure of Latvia was based on Russian language, such as social life, mass media, science, education and the state-party control of the economy (Volkovs, 1999).

By the end of 1980s a democratic process caused a disintegration of the Soviet Union and brought a national awakening of the Latvian people. This democratic tendency created equal chances for Latvians and Russians to revive their national identity. Russians supported two parties which were established in 1989. The Popular Front of Latvia (PFL) was supported by many Russian writers who were editors of the PFL newspaper called “Atmoda” (which means awakening of Latvian). This newspaper was popular among the Russians in Latvia and also among the democratic public in the Soviet Union. This party became the basis of Russian Culture Society of Latvia (RCSL) whose aim was: “to develop to the utmost the Russian national culture, to intensify traditional Russian-Latvian relations, cooperate with the representatives of all nationalities of the Republic” (Volkovs, 1999). On the other hand, there were many Russians who were against the revival of Latvian independence. These people established a party called “the Interfront”, International Front of the Working People of Latvia. This group was supporting Russians who did not integrate into the society, did not possess Latvian language and who did not gain any Latvian national characteristics (Volkovs, 1999). In 1989 there was a national opinion poll for Latvian independence and it showed that 49% of the non-Latvian population voted against the independence and as for ethnic Latvians about 93% voted for it. (Volkovs, 1999). This opinion poll shows that there were clearly two sides to the Russian-speaking population, those who were willing to support the Latvian independence and their democratic revival and those who felt comfortable living isolated from the Latvian population in the Russian-speaking community.

By 1989, slightly more that one-third of the population was comprised of the Russian-speaking minority (Housden and Smith, 2011 and McGuinness, 2010). Approximately 42.5% were Russophones and 34% of them were ethnic Russians (See Table 3 in Appendix). This large number of Russian-speakers was seen as a threat to the restoration of the Latvian independence. The Russians’ opinions about Latvians’ approach towards independence had stimulated a growth of ethnic nationalism in the Latvian society (Pavlenko, 2008). Another reason for this ethnic nationalism was because of the imbalance of hegemony which was between the ethnic minorities and the titular state. Many Russians required keeping the Latvian state the way it has been since the Soviet occupation, however, the Latvians wanted to regain their national identity. There were approximately 22.7% of the Russian-speaking population who were proficient in Latvian language (Elsuwege, 2004). The Latvian state did not wish to support the Russians because the Latvians feared of ‘imminent extinction’ of the Latvian nation. This factor contributed to the citizenship laws and the adoption of restricting Russian language (Elsuwege, 2004). Most importantly, the Russians wanted to be part of Latvia’s governance after its independence, but Latvians did not want to give any kind of power to them. By the fall of the Soviet Latvian Republic, about 37% of the Russians living in Latvia felt stateless and homeless (Degirmen, 2008).

## 1.2 The Russian-speaking minority after Latvia’s independence in 1990

In the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union, Latvia, has been rebuilding its national political and economical system, as well as its cultural identity. Since Latvia’s independence in 1990, there was a rapid growth of nationalist elites. The rise of nationalism in Latvia resulted in suppressing the Russian-speaking minority, as a consequence of the former Soviet repression. Despite the fact that many Russian-speakers had left Latvia, the Russian-speaking minority still comprised almost half of the Latvian population (Housden and Smith, 2011). Since then, the remaining Russian-speakers have been confronted with discrimination and cultural displacement in society. New citizenship laws were altered in such a way that the Russian-speaking minority would be denied a citizenship. While many Russophones would receive a non-citizens status they were then restricted from speaking Russian language in certain public areas. The only way to obtain a citizenship was through a naturalization procedure. These constraints changed their socio-economic status that would affect education, employment and participation in the elections (Degirmen, 2008).

### 1.2.1 A regime of discrimination

At the end of the Soviet era, there was a regime of discrimination of the Russian-speaking minority. The reason for this was the memory of a half a century lasting repression from the Stalinist regime in Latvia (Housden and Smith, 2011). Housden and Smith state that after Latvia’s independence, Latvia’s approach towards nation building was to restore justice for the Latvian ethnic majority. In addition, there was a growing movement of Latvian cultural identity (Housden and Smith, 2011). As a result, the Russophones in Latvia were perceived as “illegal immigrants” and even “colonists” and this meant that they had no claim on automatic membership in the political community (Housden and Smith, 2011). There was also fear of the large number of Russian-speakers, if they were given the right to vote, then they could influence Latvia’s path towards nation building (Pavlenko, 2008). Nationalist parties stimulated ethnic minorities to leave Latvia and with this they won a lot of support from the ethnic majority voters (Degirmen, 2008). The goal was to increase the proportion of Latvians in the Latvian society.

The regime of discrimination began with creating a number of restrictions for the Russian-speaking minority. This resulted in a remigration of the Russian-speaking minority which increased up to 47.2 thousand people in 1992 (Volkovs, 1999). Those who were serving the Soviet army and their family were automatically deported from Latvia (Elsuwege, 2004). The Latvians also denied citizenship to the Russian-speaking minority. Looking back at the time when USSR republics gained their independence, 13 out of 15 of those states gave residents a ‘zero option’, which means that as soon as a person registered for residency, this person automatically receives a citizenship. The only two countries which did not obtain the ‘zero option’ were Latvia and Estonia (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008). Since the Russian-speaking minority was not granted citizenship automatically, they were entitled to obtain citizenship after a naturalization process. The purpose for the naturalization process was to better preserve the cultural identity of Latvians because almost half of the population of Latvia was comprised of Russian-speaking minority (Degirmen, 2008). All the minorities who resided permanently in the Soviet Republic between 1940 and 1991 were marked as foreigners (Degirmen, 2008).

The language law also changed the lives of the Russian-speaking minority. The Russophones did not have any voting rights and therefore they could not influence the formulation of the language legislation. The language law required language proficiency in employment. Latvian language was mandatory in many public spheres such as administration, media, and government, secondary and higher schools (Elsuwege, 2004). These affected the socio-economic status of the Russophones in a negative way, especially regarding employment and education (Pavlenko, 2008 and Hughes, 2005).

### 1.3 The Russian-speaking minority after EU accession

After the EU accession in 2004, the Russian-speaking minority remained the non-citizens status and did not gain more rights than before the accession. They did not gain the same rights as a regular EU citizen either. They were not allowed to vote in local elections like EU citizens and they could not travel in Europe without a visa. The only right that the Russophones had while travelling abroad was that they were obliged to receive protection from the Latvian state. The Russophones had many complications while applying for a visa or travelling within Europe (Morris, 2003). Some countries would not even recognize the non-citizenship passport and they would not permit the non-citizens to enter the country which they were travelling to. Many European states did not perceive non-citizen passport to be the same as a European passport, rather a citizenship that was equivalent to a third-world country (Cheskin, 2012 and Kehris, 2007).

In 2006, the only Russian-speaking MEP, Tatjana Zhdanok achieved to implement a policy which allows non-citizen to travel within some countries in EU without a visa. In addition, it was easier to travel to Russia with a non-citizens passport than with an EU passport. This is contradictory, because the accession to the EU was an encouraging factor for non-citizens to apply for naturalization, because it would give them an easier access to move abroad or to travel within the European Union (Cheskin, 2012 and Kehris, 2007). Nowadays, there is still not much freedom for non-citizens to travel, since they are allowed to travel to 31 countries without a visa, whereas a Latvian citizen can travel to 82 foreign countries (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008).

The EU accession has simplified the naturalization process for the Russian-speaking minority but on the other hand, many non-citizens did not wish to be naturalized. Russia played an important role in decreasing motivation for non-citizens to apply for a citizenship in Latvia. Since most non-citizens are ethnic Russians and have relatives in Russia who they want to visit, they are permitted to travel to Russia without a visa. This is a high discouragement for the Russian minority to integrate into Latvian society because they are in a comfort zone to travel to their ‘motherland’ (Klomegah, 2011). The language issues still remained with the Russian-speaking minority as an obstacle for the naturalization process. Approximately 42% of the Latvian population remained Russian as their first language (Klomegah, 2011).

The education system was also not inviting for the minority because in Russian secondary schools, all classes were set to be taught in Latvian. This resulted in large demonstrations and a petition of 100.000 signatures was passed to the government. Shortly before the deadline of this new education policy, the government changed the policy that 40% of the classes shall be taught in the minority language (Pavlenko, 2008 and Severin, 2006). In addition, even when the minorities would graduate from a Russian speaking school, they would not be able to receive a citizenship, be given a job or enter a higher education. As a result, the government cannot ensure that the minorities would have equal opportunities in competing with citizens in areas of education and labor while preserving their cultural and linguistic identity (Morris, 2003). The next chapter will describe how the integration policies have emerged in Latvian democratic society and how they changed in the last twelve years. It will also pay attention on Latvia’s commitment with the international communities, with the focus on the EU accession.

# Chapter 2: The developments of integration process for Russian-speaking minority

## 2.1 Introduction of integration policies for Russian-speaking minority

### 2.1.1 Rejecting citizenship for the Russian-speaking minority

The 1980s and early 1990s were the years of promises for the Russian-speaking minority to receive a local citizenship. There was a movement of Latvia’s independence and the leaders of this movement promised the permanent residents a citizenship. Minorities which were permanent residents of Soviet republic of Latvia voted for Latvia’s democratic independency in a referendum in 1991 (McGuinness, 2010). However, shortly after, tens of thousands of Russian-speakers were automatically rejected a citizenship and had to go through difficult linguistic, bureaucratic, legal and financial procedures in order to receive a citizenship. After Latvia was recognized by most of the UN member states and the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Latvia signed 1975 Helsinki Act, the Supreme Council had adopted a resolution called “On the Renewal of the Republic of Latvia Citizens” and “Rights and Fundamental Principles of Naturalization”. With this resolution only the residents who lived in Latvia before June 17, 1940 were granted a Latvian citizenship and the others had a choice to go through a naturalization process (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008).

At the time, many Russians felt cheated because they voted for Latvia’s independence and as a result, they did not obtain a citizenship and lost their political rights (McGuinness, 2010 and Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008). The lack of citizenship law and no real legal status for non-citizens affected Latvia’s early accession to the Council of Europe in 1991 (Morris, 2003). After a year, a new law was enacted by the Supreme Council: “On Entry into and Residence in the Republic of Latvia of Aliens and Stateless Persons” with this law, more regulations were set for obtaining residents permits. Persons who were subjected to this law were “On the Status of Former USSR Citizens, Who are not Citizens of Latvia or Any Other State” and were issued a non-citizen’s or so called ‘alien’s passports’ (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008). These passports were issued to approximately 30% of the population and all of them were Russian-speaking minorities (Pavlenko, 2008). In 1994 a new citizenship law was introduced for becoming a citizen and the requirement was to have ten years of residency starting from 1994 (Degirmen, 2008). In addition, the naturalization process in this citizenship law was changed which included a quota system called a naturalization window. With this quota system there was a limit of 2000 people per year who could be naturalized. Later the European Union was criticizing the Latvian regime about this naturalization window that it was restricting the Russian-speaking minority from gaining a citizenship. Eventually a referendum was made in 1998 and the quota system was abolished. (Degirmen, 2008).

### 2.1.2 Language Law

After Latvia gained its independence, it declared that the state language would be its titular language and no other. Therefore, the most important factor for the Russian-speaking minorities was to learn the state language in order to obtain a citizenship. This step was crucial for Latvia in order to preserve their cultural identity and the aim was to distance the Russian influence. In addition, those who have contact with general public, such as employees from organization, state institutions and businesses must use the titular language (Pavlenko, 2008). A law was passed in 1992, which defined Russian language as an interethnic communication language and from a legal point of view, it became equivalent to the status of Arabic and Chinese in Latvia. Within this law, a language police system was created which was composed of Language Commission, State Language Center and an Inspection Board. By 1999 a new law on language was introduced stating that all languages are foreign, except for Latvian and Livonian (Degirmen, 2008). Consequently, the rise of nationalism among the ethnic majority in Latvia, resulting in these language policies, had given the Russian-speaking minority many difficulties in gaining a citizenship.

### 2.2 Latvia’s commitment with the International Community

The following text is focused on explaining how Latvia’s accession to the European Union and Council of Europe affected the domestic policy, especially the integration of the Russian-speaking minority. Latvia had made an important decision to join the European Union, along with its Baltic neighbors, in hope to adopt democratic governance and become part of the international political community. During the time that Latvia gained its independence, Latvia still had a lot to learn about protecting minorities and respecting human rights. Latvia joined the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1995, to receive guidance on minority issues. It was the last country from the Baltic States that joined the CoE, since Latvia did not ratify the citizenship law on time (Galbreath, 2006). It is important to note, that in the same year as Latvia’s accession, the CoE accepted the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCNM),which included a compilation of recommendations suggesting in speeding up the naturalization process, adjusting fees for Latvian language courses, guaranteeing equal treatment of minorities and non-citizen. This framework was signed by Latvia in 1995 and it has not been ratified until 2006, which was after Latvia joined the European Union. It is also important to mention, that in this framework, the Latvians did not include the Russian minority as a national minority. This became conflicting since the European Institutions treated the Russian minority as national minority; however Latvia sees them as pure migrants (Galbreath, 2006). The European Commission was not satisfied with Latvia’s social, political and economical exclusions of Russian-speaking minority during the EU accession process.

### 2.2.1 Reasons for joining the EU

Since the independence, Latvia’s aim was to take part in international political processes and to integrate European economic, cultural and political structures (Morris, 2003). Latvians were aware that joining the European Union was very essential for their survival and it would help develop their well-being in the country and guarantee national sovereignty. In addition, Latvia had little experience in dealing with human rights issues during the Soviet occupation, and therefore it was searching for guidance from international institutions (Galbreath, 2006). One of their main reasons for entering the EU was that they wanted to lean towards the EU orbit of power rather than dwell with Russia in the East (Morris, 2003). Significant problems with Russia began to occur when there were demonstrations from Russian minorities in Latvia. This led to Russia imposing threats on Latvia with economic sanctions (Güngör, 2007). In addition to that, Russia was in a long process of demonstrating the minority issues in Latvia by using media and human rights institutions such as the Council of Europe, OSCE and United Nations General Assembly. However, Russia did not receive the attention that it expected to get, because Russia was lacking in coherence with its own human rights issues, e.g. with Chechnya. Therefore, from the beginning of the pre-accession talks it was crucial for the EU to analyze the relation between Latvia and Russia, as well as the status of Russian-speaking minority in Latvia (Morris, 2003).

### 2.2.2 Requirements for joining the EU

It was agreed by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, which Latvia signed that year that the Central and Eastern European countries were allowed to apply for EU accession as soon as they create stability in their governmental institution and adopt human rights, rule of law, guaranteeing democracy, and protection of and respect for minorities. As mentioned before, Latvia could not have accession to the Council of Europe and begin with pre-accession talks with EU, unless it fulfills certain requirements for improving their democratic governance. The key requirement for Latvia to integrate into the European community was to integrate other nationalities, especially the Russian-speaking minority in to Latvian society (Güngör, 2007).Pressure from the European Union and Russia made Latvian politicians create new citizenship laws for the Russian-speaking minority. During the pre-accession talks, EU reports show that the measure of compliance towards the Russian-speaking minority, such as naturalization procedures, electoral laws, language rights and legislation on citizenship and government policies on integration did not show full success in its implementation. The statistics for these measures displayed that the government was lacking in commitment in integration by examining the rate of naturalization processes (Hughes, 2005).

### 2.2.3 Recommendations from the European Commission

The European Commission created a pre-accession strategy paper called *Agenda 2000* stating the impact of the enlargement and the policies of the Union (Elsuwege, 2004). The *Agenda 2000* includes the Commission Opinion about the ten applicant countries which were part of the EU accession in 2004. The Commission has reported that in Latvia “non-citizens continue to be affected by various types of discrimination” (Elsuwege, 2004). The Commission added that it was discriminatory that the Russian-speaking minority was restricted from certain occupations, which were not only civil service posts, but also fire-fighters, private detectives, airline crews, lawyers and pharmacists. In addition, the non-citizens had no rights in political participation, direct acquirement of property ownership and there was a poor protection of fundamental rights for the non-citizens. As an example, the non-citizens were excluded from the 1995 Amnesty Law (Agenda 2000 - Commission Opinion on Latvia’s Application for Membership of the European Union, 1997). Furthermore, it was mentioned that the naturalization process was at a slow rate and that the non-citizens should be better integrated. In addition, the Commission suggested that the rate of non-citizens was so high compared to local citizens that the Latvian authorities must decrease the division of the statuses between citizen and non-citizen (Morris, 2003). The language tests for naturalization were too difficult, enrolment fees were too high and non-possession of the citizenship might occur as an advantage for the minorities, as to travel back to Russia (Elsuwege, 2004).

### 2.2.4 Improvement of the integration policies

An institution which forges inter-parties to improve citizenship laws, namely Cooperation Council, came into frame to assist Latvia with its citizenship law. (Güngör, 2007). What the institution proposed was abolish the naturalization window, simplify the language test specifically to special groups and grant citizenship to all children born after august 1991, even if the children are from non-citizen parents (Güngör, 2007). Another issue was raised because of the high fee for examination for the naturalization process. The Latvian Ministry of Justice created a draft for *Regulations on Fee for Examination of* *Naturalization Applications* in 1997, which improved the payment fees for specific groups of people applying for naturalization. For certain groups, such as the orphans, the examination fee was fully abolished (Morris, 2003). These recommendations made by the Cooperation Council were approved by the EU. The only amendments which were made into legislation were the abolition of naturalization window and granting citizenship to children who were born after 1991 (Morris, 2003). The Latvian government abolished restrictions for non-citizens from working in certain employment such as airline crew, pharmacists and firefighters (Elsuwege, 2004). Furthermore, the non-citizens could also receive unemployment benefits from the government without having to show language proficiency. As a result, about 7,156 people received a citizenship, according to Commission Report on Latvia, 2002 (Güngör, 2007). Latvia decided to approve these amendments after being rejected by their first pre-accession talks with the EU in 1997 and being criticized for deteriorating with Russian relations. The EU was stressing that these legislations should not be delayed and should be implemented to receive positive results on the rate of naturalization.

In 1999 the EU also took into consideration about Latvia’s draft on Language Bill which was criticized for moving towards the ‘old ways’, and that it was introducing a new language law that would hold back its progress for EU membership. There have been several political elites who wanted to introduce incentives to make the Russian-minority learn Latvian language, however international organizations considered that the language courses were enough to ensure survival of Latvian language. The draft language bill was eventually modified taking into account the recommendations from the EU and OSCE (Güngör, 2007). However, the OSCE recommended implementing Russian language to be the second official language for better representation of the Russian-speaking minority in the Parliament and the city councils. The Commission failed to take this point into its recommendation for Latvia (Elsuwege, 2004).

### 2.2.5 Criticism on Latvia’s EU accession

The EU conditionality has brought pressure on Latvia’s citizenship, language policies and political participation of the Russophones. The status of minority integration still remains unclear, because after Latvia joined the EU, the Russian-speaking minorities still remain marginalized in economical, political and cultural areas. The European Commission reports have been criticized for making recommendations which indicate preference for assimilation of the Russian-speaking minority. It was stated in the EU reports that they were mainly supporting Latvia to further develop the linguistic integration. In addition, the Commission gave financial and technical assistance to Latvian language trainings and it was in favor for enhancing Latvian language in education systems (Elsuwege, 2004).

Latvia had to follow the Copenhagen criteria: ‘the respect for and protection of national minorities’ from the CoE. It is only a requirement for EU accession to accept the criteria and it did not apply as a condition for being in a membership of the EU (Morris, 2003). This means that the European Commission would not have the power to control the minority rights when Latvia entered the EU. Furthermore, many Community laws apply only for EU citizen, which means that the Commission does not have the authority to interfere with Latvian laws that are targeted specifically at non-citizens (Hammerstein, Dobolyi, Pleite, Harkin & Barrot, 2009). On the other hand, the European integration will further stimulate the enhancement and adjustment towards minority legislations and minority protection in a political, rather than legal obligation (Morris, 2003). Initially, if it was not for Latvia’s ambition to join the European Union, the radical nationalists would have excluded the naturalization process and the Russian-speaking minority would remain stateless. The European Union has a powerful force to persuade applicants to configure their legislation to meet the terms of a civic notion of citizenship (Morris, 2003).

While the international organizations were forging Latvia to improve their minority rights, in the end, many Latvians considered that their sovereignty was slightly threatened. The reason for this is because they agreed on these amendments due to the pressure coming from Russia (Güngör, 2007). Lastly, the enlargement was considered highly politicized. Some parts of the EU reports showed inconsistency in implementing integration policies. One of the reasons was that Latvia did not want to make any large reforms in their nationalizing projects and still managed to achieve major foreign policy goals for entering the EU (Hughes, 2005). On the other hand, while Latvia was once rejected from the pre-accession talks in 1997, the Latvian government realized the pressure to modify discrimination coming from international organizations and Russia (Hughes, 2005). Their comments about the treatment of national minorities made Latvians realize that they ought to reform their policies on citizenship, language and education. In the following section, the current developments of the integration for Russian-speaking minority will be introduced as a result from Latvia’s incentive to improve social integration.

## 2.3 Current developments in the integration process for the Russian-speaking minorities

It has been apparent, that Latvia has been looking for protection and guidance from international institutions after its independence, but failed to implement many recommendations from CoE, OSCE and EU concerning stateless persons who are mainly ethnic Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians. Nowadays, according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the recommendations set by international institutions regarding citizenship law, have been very successful and the naturalization process has been stabilizing. The European Union has observed that the citizenship law and enforcement of naturalization process has been positive (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

### 2.3.1 Improving the naturalization process

In the recent years, however, according to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the naturalization process has been simplified and the fee was reduced or even exempted for certain people. Looking at the statistics, about 60% of the people applying for the naturalization process in 2010 enjoyed the reduced fees. In that year, there were about 265 applicants for naturalization per month. Latvian government also simplified the process for children from non-citizen or stateless parents to obtain a citizenship from a Registry Office in 2011. As soon as a parent registers their new-born child at the Registry Office, the child is obliged to receive a Latvian citizenship, which reduces certain administrative obstacles. Statistics show, that children born from August 21, 1991 until March 01, 2011 exactly 19,170 received a Latvian citizenship. At the moment, there are 85% of Latvian citizens living in Latvia. To provide a more extensive example of how successful the naturalization process has been, there have been 135,840 people who have been granted a citizenship between 1995 and 2011. This statistics concern all migrants groups living in Latvia. The Russian-speaking minority remains to be the top ethnicity group of the Latvian population, see Table 2 in the Appendix. It is calculated, that in 2011 about one-third of Russians, slightly more than half of the Ukrainians and Byelorussians still remain the status of a non-citizen. In addition, about 40% of the residents in Latvia speak Russian as their mother-tongue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012). From another point of view, The European Commission for Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) claim, that the rate of the naturalization process has not been increased to a large extent. The reduction of non-citizens, since 1995, has been caused by different demographic factors, such as emigration (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012).

### 2.3.2 Latvian Language Agency

Despite the high rate of Russian-speakers in Latvia, there has been a lot of improvement in creating projects that encourage minorities to learn the Latvian language. The Latvian government considers that their language program is the most successful project for integrating society. First introduced in 1995 and enhanced in 2009 by Latvian Language Agency (LLA), the Latvian Language Learning Program offers language courses which are free of charge to people who need Latvian to perform in their professional duties such as, teachers, policemen, medical personnel, employees from local governments and even parents from national minority students. They also provide teaching aid to children from 1st to 9th grades (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

### 2.3.3 Education reform

It is important to mention the education reform, which was performed between 1998 and ended in 2007, because of the large dissatisfaction coming from the Russian-speaking minority. The Education Law was reformed to increase the amount of Latvian spoken in schools. This transition was very gradual and lasted for about nine years and the total number of subjects taught in Latvian in secondary schools had to be 60% by 2007. This only concerns schools that are taught in the national minority language. In the study year of 2010 and 2011, statistics show that performances of students in schools that are taught fully in Latvian, compared to students studying in national minority schools, had similar achievements. In addition, students in 12th grade may choose the language they want to write their centralized exams. About 78% of the students chose to write in Latvian and 28% decided to write the exams in Russian (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

### 2.3.4 Defining the national minority

Another important development that happened after Latvia gained an EU membership was to define national minority. In 2005, the Latvian parliament (Saeima) signed the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* from the Council of Europe. In the Convention, they finally defined the national minority as Latvian citizens, who differ from ethnic Latvians because they want to preserve their language, religion and culture. They have also been living in Latvia for generations and consider belonging to the Latvian community and the state (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

### 2.3.5 Guidelines of National Identity and Society Integration

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia also set Guidelines for National Identity and Society Integration for 2012-2018. The key element of these guidelines as it is defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to further develop the Latvian nation into a strong democratic and national community and to preserve its unifying foundation, which are the national identity, Latvian language and culture. These guidelines are set in three directions: Civic Society and Integration, National Identity: Language and Cultural Space and United SocialMemory. The Civic Society and Integration further develops civic education by strengthening civic involvement, preventing discrimination and increasing the function of media for social integration. The National Identity guideline is to encourage the use of Latvian language in public sphere and improve proficiency among Latvians living abroad, national minorities, ethnic minorities and new immigrants and enhance Latvian identity as foundation for unity of society. The United Social Memory is to provide more awareness on Latvia’s and European history from the occupation on Nazi and the Soviet Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

The latter developments on integration of minorities and guidelines set for the next six years show that the Latvia government is very progressive in regards to social integration. The education policy is helping to increase the amount of Latvian speakers and the Latvian Language Learning Program is receiving funds and grants from Latvian Government and international institutions to make it easier for migrants to take Latvian language courses. The citizenship law has also improved by simplifying the naturalization procedure and since more migrants are learning Latvian language they have more chances in obtaining Latvian citizenship. Latvia is building its nation state as it planned since its independence and with the guidance of international organization, it has taken human rights and minority rights into consideration. However, there is still room for improvements, as it will be analyzed in the last chapter of this thesis. The next chapter is a collection of data about the integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority.

# Chapter 3: Integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia

## 3.1 Citizenship Law

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia, the Citizenship Law was first adopted in 1994. Latvia’s involvement with international organizations took their recommendations into account, in order to enhance its citizenship legislation. After changing several amendments of the Citizenship Law, the international organizations such as OSCE, Council of Europe and United Nations have acknowledged the law to correspond with human rights and democracy. The latest amendment further liberalized the law, after a referendum held in 1998. The Citizenship Law was created on the basic principles of restoring Latvia’s independence and preserving legal continuity. For those citizens and their descendants who were holders of Latvian Citizenship until 1940 earned the Latvian citizenship. For those who arrived in Latvia under the policy of Soviet Union are they determined through a naturalization process, to obtain a Latvian citizenship and fully participate in a national public life (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

The following points are conditions for people who may register for a Latvian citizenship:

1. Persons and their descendants who have had a Latvian citizenship prior to 1940 and were registered at Residents’ Register Office. Those persons who changed their citizenship to another state after Latvia’s independence in May 4, 1990 are not allowed to apply for the citizenship.
2. **Persons who have a permanent residency in Latvia and have been registered at a Population Register, accomplished a full education course in general schools**[[1]](#footnote-1) **in Latvian language. If these persons do not have a citizenship of another state. Their children who are up to fifteen of age and reside permanently in Latvia may also apply for a citizenship at the same time.**
3. **For women and their descendants who no longer possess a Latvian nationality and their permanent residency is in Latvia and persons were registered at the Residents’ Register Office (**Registration of Citizenship, 2011)**.**
4. The Citizenship Law also recognizes children born after August 21, 1991 in Latvia, from non-citizen or stateless parents to become Latvian citizens. The only requirements that the child must meet is that he/she has to have a permanent residency in Latvia, has not been imprisoned for more than five years and he/she has had a status of a non-citizen or stateless the entire time. The person applying for a Latvian citizenship should be signed in the Population Register and should have had a permanent residency for at least five years (Citizenship of children, 2011).

## 3.2 Naturalization process

The naturalization process has been an important procedure for the Russian-speaking minority, for those who are willing to integrate into Latvian society. Since the reformation of the citizenship law in 1998 the amount of non-citizens who applied for the naturalization process was approximately a fourfold. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia claims that after an applicant passes the required exams, he or she will receive a Latvian citizenship within three to four months. It is essential to underline, that from all the applicants who applied for naturalization, 68% of all Russians and almost 60% of them received a Latvian citizenship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

The following text is a description of persons who are allowed to be granted a Latvian citizenship through naturalization process:

Persons who can be granted a Latvian citizenship through naturalization has to be registered in the Population Register, they have to be older than 15, have a permanent residence for at least five years as of May 4, 1990 or five year as of the date since registration for a permanent residence. Persons applying shall know Latvian in writing and speaking, history of Latvia, the basic principles of Latvian Constitution and text from the national anthem. These persons shall also have a legal basis of income. Children who are permanent residents of Latvia and are younger than 15, may naturalize simultaneously with their parents (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012).

## 3.3 Education policy

The first introduction to Education Law for national minority began in the school year of 1995/1996. This education reform was meant for students to integrate into Latvia society, learn the Latvian language, as well as preserve their cultural identity. The first step for national minority primary schools was to make students learn at least two subjects in Latvian language. Later in 1999, four program models were introduced and every school had to choose one model. These programs determined the amount of subjects which would be taught in Latvian, as well as in the national minority language. The implementation of these program models was very gradual and was carried out until 2002 for 1st to 9th grades (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia, 2012).

The secondary school had an educational reform in national minority school which lasted from 1995 until it was completed in 2007. When the education reform began in 1995, at least three subjects were taught in Latvian. In 2004/2005 school year for 10th grade, the ratio of Latvian language taught in classes had to be 60% and the rest could be taught in the language of national minority. This education reform was gradually introduced, as of a year later, this ratio affected 10th and 11th grades and the year after, in 2006/2007 it was applied to grade 12. The education policy allows subjects to be taught bilingually or either in the minority language or in Latvian. Since 2007, the national minority schools receive materials in Latvian for state examination and the students may choose to write their state exam in Russian or in Latvian (Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Latvia, 2012).

## 3.4 Linguistic policy

The official Language Law has been in force since September 1st, 2000, and it states that the official state language is Latvian and all other languages are recognized as foreign languages. According to the first article of this law, the purpose for its establishment is to protect, preserve and develop Latvian language and protect Latvia’s historical and cultural heritage. In addition, it allows everyone to use Latvian language in its territory and increase the influence of Latvian language in Latvia’s cultural environment to promote a faster integration of the society. It also mentions integration of national minorities to Latvian society and to respect their right to utilize their mother tongue or other languages (The State Language Policy, 2010).

It is now important to underline the articles which specifically concern the Russian-speaking minority. The most significant are Articles 2, 6, 7 and 19 of the Language Law which focus on regulating languages in public and private institutions:

In article 2, it states that the Language Law shall regulate the protection and the use of state language in the government and municipal institutions, judicial system, organizations, companies, education and other areas. Concerning private institutions, enterprises and organizations and self-employed persons shall use Latvian language when their activities concern public interests such as health, health care, morals, public safety, protection of consumer rights, workplace safety, labor rights and public administrative supervision. To ensure legitimate public interests, this regulation shall be balanced with the interests and rights of enterprises, organizations and private institutions. There shall be no regulation concerning unofficial communication among Latvian residents and ethnic and national groups, during religious activities (The State Language Policy, 2010).

Article 6, elaborates on the usage of language in the public and private spheres. Employees of governmental and municipal institutions, along with those belonging to judicial system, as well as governmental enterprises and companies of which the state holds a large share of capital must utilize the state language to perform extensively in their professional duties (The State Language Policy, 2010).

In article 7, this Law also regulates the language used for formal meetings, such as business meetings which are held by municipal institution or government, the judicial system or a company in which the state holds a large share of the capital. If another language is used during the meeting, then the organizers of this meeting are obliged to provide translation in the State language (The State Language Policy, 2010).

These articles stress to assure presence of State language in the public and private sectors and official meetings. Naturally it is allowed to use other languages during unofficial communications (The State Language Policy, 2010).

Article 19 has been a major influence on minorities’ privacy, which allows persons names and surnames written in Latvian identity documents to be changed to Latvian orthography (The State Language Policy, 2010).

# Chapter 4: Consequences of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia

This chapter describes consequences of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority. The integration policies affect their general status in Latvian society. The Latvians restrict them from political participation, the quality of education suffers, there is disturbance of privacy and the language affects employment.

## 4.1 Effects of Citizenship Law of Russian-speaking minority

### 4.1.1 Specific status of Non-citizens

The Latvian authorities are convinced that the rate of the naturalization process has been high since the EU accession according to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On the other hand, one of the reasons for a decreasing amount of non-citizens in Latvia is caused by demographic factors such as emigration. Another factor is that many non-citizens simply refuse to apply for naturalization because they feel humiliated and they see this procedure as unfair. The ECRI has reported that some non-citizens feel that they are treated as “second-class citizens” because of the fact that they have been residing in Latvia for most of their lives and still remain stateless. The Russian-speaking minority feels deceived for voting for the Latvian independence and that Latvian authorities did not grant them an automatic citizenship (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012). As mentioned earlier, many non-citizens do not see the benefits for having a Latvian citizenship. With a non-citizens passport, the Russian-speaking minority may travel back to their homeland. The Latvian authorities have given the non-citizens fundamental economic and social rights, which include the right to exit and enter Latvia, as well as the right for family reunification. Since Latvia does not recognize a dual citizenship, many non-citizens decide to keep their alien passports to maintain these benefits (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012).

The differences between Latvian citizens and non-citizens still remain very high concerning civil service, political and social rights. Non-citizens do not have access to 60 professions which is in civil service and some are in the private sector (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008). Another difference shows in property ownership, such as restriction to acquire land, with an exception when it comes to inheritance (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012). The largest difference between a citizen and a non-citizen is in political participation, because non-citizens are not entitled the right to vote. The non-citizens cannot understand why they are not granted these rights since the independence in 1991. They have been living in Latvia for many years and paying taxes to the government. In addition, the Latvian membership of the European Union also gave them hope to obtain more rights. But since then, the non-citizens are still restrained from many rights; there is a list of differences in rights between a citizen and a non-citizen in the Appendix Table 4. Zdanoka claims that these difference have not changed much in the past 12 years and if some restrictions on rights are abolished, then new restrictions appear (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008).

### 4.1.2 Political participation

The Latvian government has made it clear, that non-citizens are not allowed to vote and if they wish to do so, then they should apply for a citizenship through the naturalization process. Non-citizens have no electoral rights, not even at local elections, whereas EU citizens are allowed to vote at local elections after six months of permanent residence in Latvia. This seems to be part of Latvia’s integration to society process. If the Russian-speaking community wishes to live outside of the civic order by refusing to integrate, then they do not have a civic obligation (Severin, 2006). This is a kind of discrimination and violates the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, since Latvian authorities are mobilizing the non-citizens, who have been born in Latvia and may not participate in the elections. The Latvian government can avoid this legal problem, by giving the Russian-speaking minority the chance to naturalize and then they have all the rights to vote (Human Rights Report: Latvia, 2010). Non-citizens can only join a political party, as their only right for political participation (Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008).

The OSCE came to see presidential elections in 2007 and found that 321,000 non-citizen were not allowed to vote. They suggested that Latvia should strengthen its laws to comply with OSCE commitments, which are to let minorities vote at local elections (Human Rights Report: Latvia, 2010). “The fact that a significant percentage of the adult population of Latvia does not enjoy voting rights represents a continuing democratic deficit” (OSCE, 2008). There have been numerous recommendations from the UN, EU, Council of Europe and NGOs which advise Latvia to give the non-citizens the right to vote in local elections. On the other hand, the European Commission states, that the EU cannot interfere in their status because the non-citizens are not members of the European Union, “The participation in elections of people who are not nationals of an EU country, and are therefore not EU citizens, is not an issue covered by Community law” (Hammerstein, Dobolyi, Pleite, Harkin & Barrot, 2009). Furthermore, the Latvians do not want to give this right to the non-citizens because they predict that the next step would be to implement Russian as the second official language (Hammerstein, Dobolyi, Pleite, Harkin & Barrot, 2009).

The Latvian authority also prohibits non-citizens to organize political parties. This prohibition has an exception. There should be an equal amount of citizens in that party. The election law does not allow people to vote, who were in the former Soviet State Security (KGB), active in a Communist Party or any other Soviet organizations which remained after the independence (Human Rights Report: Latvia, 2010).

## 4.2 Education for the Russian-speaking minority

The Education reform, which lasted from 1998 until 2007, changed the future of many Russian-speaking minority pupils due to their insufficient knowledge of Latvian language. Even if they learned enough Latvian to have basic communication, it was still difficult for these pupils to study general subjects in a language other than their own. In addition, many parents from these students have been worried about the quality of education, because the Russian-speaking teachers also had to change Russian into Latvian language for instruction. These teachers learned Latvian like every other Russian-speaker but not the Latvian language that is necessary for their instruction. Another danger for the national minority pupils are constant debates among politicians about closing down Russian language schools, which would force students to assimilate in to the Latvian society.

### 4.2.1 Education progress

The education reform that lasted for ten years was compulsory only for minority schools. They needed to have a bilingual system of education, where 60% of the language had to be in Latvian language and 40% could be in a national minority language. It is however interesting to observe, that there is a growing number of students learning Russian in Latvian schools. Approximately 50-60% of Latvians were learning Russian language and for them English appears to be the third language. (Severin, 2006). On the other hand, the knowledge of Latvian language in Russian-speaking minority schools is much poorer because pupils find Latvian very difficult. The motivation of these students also sinks because it is not useful to use it outside of Latvia.

There were studies made on the education progress during the education reform between 2001 and 2004, by comparing state exams of students in Latvian schools to students from Russian-speaking minority schools. In those years, the statistics showed that the progress in general subjects of students in bilingual schools did not differ from students in Latvian schools. In fact, the Russian-speaking minority students performed even better in some subjects than in Latvian schools (Severin, 2006). However, the Russian-speaking minority students performed better only in subjects that were taught in Russian, which are biology, chemistry, physics and mathematics. Subjects such as business and economics were taught in Latvian and students scored 20% worse than average (Poleshchuk, 2009). The Russian-speaking students, between 2004 and 2007, have been performing worse every year in almost all the subjects, except for English and Russian (Poleshchuk, 2009). Looking at the latter results, it can be stated, that within the years of the education reform, the results on state exams might have worsened because of the implementation of Latvian language in 60% of the subjects. The first Russian-speaking students who wrote state exams in 2001 had the background information from the classes which were conducted in Russian. The students in the years later, did not have this chance to obtain the knowledge in Russian, instead they had to be educated in Latvian. This shows that the education reform has worsened the quality of education. The students were busy with translating rather than learning the subject. This resulted in large demonstrations by the Russian-speaking minority in 2004 against the education reform. Today, students are still occasionally fighting against the 60% rule and even encouraged opposition parties to campaign for a language referendum which took place on February 18, 2012. There will be more information about the referendum later in this chapter (Poleshchuk, 2009).

### 4.2.2 Quality of education in national minority schools

It is necessary to point, that mostly parents from the Russian-speaking pupils have been complaining about the quality of education in Russian-minority schools. Some NGOs regretted that the decision for implementing this education reform was made without consulting the parents. The quality of education in national minority schools has degraded, because the Latvian administration did not prepare most of the teachers for the education reform, and even schools which were prepared had a low level of readiness for school directors, teachers and parents (Poleshchuk, 2009). The ministry of education had set a procedure for Russian teachers who have been teaching subjects solely in Russian. Since the education reform that they have to pass a Latvian language exam. After this exam, it is mandatory for the teacher to give lessons in Latvian language. Therefore, the quality in education suffers. The education deteriorates because the teachers are not teaching in their mother tongue. There were many students dropping from school because they could not master complicated subjects that were instructed in Latvian language. (Severin, 2006).

### 4.2.3 Fighting for Russian language state schools

There have been debates about Russian language state schools for Russian-speaking minority students, which question whether these schools should be banned or not. There are approximately 14% of Russian language high schools. The Latvian nationalist party *For Fatherland and Freedom party* launched a campaign for a referendum to ban these schools (McGuinness, 2010). The Russian minority views this as a discrimination against minority rights, especially because the Latvian state allows minorities to preserve their cultural identity, as stated in the Education Law. This movement has already occurred in the beginning of the education reform. Certain Latvian schools, where the majority of the pupils were Russian-speaking minority, were eventually closed. There were municipalities which opened private schools where they taught in the national minority languages, but they were very expensive and exceeded an average salary (Severin, 2006). However, another reason that why the Russian speaking schools were closing, was because of the demographics; many Russian-speakers emigrated from Latvia due to the EU accession in 2004.

To conclude, the education reform was initially created for Russian-speaking minority to learn Latvian language and integrate into society. On the other hand, the education reform created stagnation in education for the Russian-speaking minority students. The results of the state exams showed worse results every year because of the decreasing quality of education. An inferior situation would be if the state allows banning all of Russian language state schools, which would discriminate ethnic minority rights and would force the minority to assimilate into the Latvian society.

## 4.3 Effects of Latvian language

### 4.3.1 Problems in communicating with the authorities

The Russian-speaking minority has been residing with language issues with social rights since the implementation of Latvian language law in September 2000. As it was mentioned earlier, the language of communication with the Latvian authorities is only in Latvian language. Permanent residents residing in Latvia who wish to communicate with the authorities on social matters have to be consulted in a written form (Severin, 2006). Any complaints to authorities which concern everyday issues such as welfare benefits, pensions, communal services, etc. have to be written in Latvian language. If it is written in another language, then it either has to have a certified translation in Latvian or the submission will be rejected. This became a large issue for the Russian-speaking minority, because this restriction is mainly targeted at poor and elderly people who do not master Latvian and do not possess enough money to pay for the certified translation. In the end, the rights that are guaranteed by law are denied because they cannot submit a complaint or an official letter to authorities (Severin, 2006).

### 4.3.2 Language law interferes with privacy of Russian-speaking minority

Another example, where language law affects the social life of the Russian-speaking minority, is article 19, which allows state institutions to change a person’s name to Latvian. This law has been judged by international law. There has been a case from the Human Rights Committee based on Article 19 from the Language Law, which allows the administration to change the names and surnames to Latvian orthography in Latvian documents. In a case, Raihman vs. Latvia (2007) the applicant has won the case based on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the right to protect privacy, Article 17 (ICCPR). The applicant is a member of the Russian-speaking and Jewish minority and he recently became a Latvian citizen. His full name is Leonid Raihman and he has been using this name until he received his non-citizen passport in 1998. In his non-citizen passport, his name was written as Leonīds Raihmans (Raihman vs. Latvia, 2007). In 2004, Mr. Raihman applied for State Language Center for naturalization and he asked the administration to write his name as Leonid Raihman. The State Language Center refused him to maintain in his original name. Subsequently, he went to Latvia’s regional and supreme courts, which rejected his case based on the Language Law, Article 19. Mr. Raihman went to the Human Right Committee with the complaints that his new name does not appear like a Russian or a Jewish name. It reflects his interactions with his Jewish and Russian speaking community. In addition, he has difficulties in daily endeavors such as delays in controls in airports, failing to make banking transactions and many other inconveniences in his daily life. As mentioned earlier, changing his name interferes with his privacy. He won this case based on his right to use his original name (Raihman vs. Latvia, 2007). The Latvian government took this into consideration in 2012, and responded that it is not necessary to amend this regulation to writing personal names in Latvian documents. However they will take the opinion of Human Rights Committee into consideration and will have further discussions on this issue on a national level (Raihman vs. Latvia, 2007).

### 4.3.3 Impact of language proficiency in employment

Many people in the Russian-speaking minority have been challenged with economic changes and unemployment since Latvia gained its independence. During the Soviet Union, the Soviets had sent many technical professionals to work at industrial enterprises in Latvia which were regulated directly from Moscow. After 1991, these enterprises suffered economically during the transition period and many Russian-speakers became unemployed and could not find an occupation because of the language and citizenship barriers. Subsequently, the Russian-speaking minority became very insecure about the labor market (Muižnieks, 2006). In 2002, based on the World Bank, the unemployment rate among national minorities was 15% which was 50% higher than the average countrywide (Poleshchuk, 2009). Nowadays, when comparing consumption and income levels between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking minority, it turns out that the Russian-speakers are slightly disadvantaged. This difference can be concluded from the language requirements in certain work areas. The language proficiency has six categories and the highest categories of proficiency are required for schools directors, psychologists, secretary, director of public institution, etc. (Poleshchuk, 2009).

This language proficiency is a large obstacle for national minorities. From a recent report on Latvia by the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance, it states that 33% of professions in private field will require C1 and C2 language proficiency. In 2008, the Ministry of Justice proposed an amendment for Labor Law to require language proficiency in all employment contracts. If this would enter the law, then many employees from the Russian-speaking minority would become unemployed. In 2010, there have been 425 fines for not mastering the language enough for their profession (ECRI Report on Latvia, 2012). These employees are being caught by Language Inspectors. They see if the employee’s language proficiency is not suitable for the profession; the Language Inspector will give a fine and assign the employee to language courses (which the employee has to pay). On the other hand, there are a handful of Russian-speakers who moved to Latvia’s large cities and became successful by continuing making trade links with Russia. Business and enterprise has been working quite well for the Russian-speakers. However, there is a large segregation in the public sphere between the titular nation and the Russian-speaking minority because only Latvian citizens are allowed to get high positions from public administration (Muižnieks, 2006). About 90% of the staff of judges and Latvian ministries, etc. are ethnic Latvians (Poleshchuk, 2009). The main reason for this outcome is the effects from the language proficiency.

### 4.3.4 Language referendum in 2012

The Russian-speaking minority has come a long way in expressing their rights to utilize the Russian language in social and political areas. A language referendum, which took place in February 18 in 2012, was given citizens to vote in favor or against Russian language as the second official state language. This referendum has been an indicator, that the Russian-speaking minority was frustrated with the Latvian language requirements. Even ethnic Latvians showed their support for the Russian-speaking minority by voting for the Russian language. Those who were the most interested in this referendum, the non-citizens who comprise of 300,000 of Latvia’s population, were banned from voting (Latvia rejects making Russian an official language, 2012). Only Latvian citizens were allowed to vote and the result was 68% voted against Russian language as the second official language. The Latvian authorities expected more people to vote against the referendum. The reason for this outcome is that many Russian-speakers have naturalized and gained a Latvian citizenship. In addition, there are many ethnic Latvians who support this minority because they have been living side by side for six decades (Latvia rejects making Russian an official language, 2012).

Some people have claimed that several Latvian citizens were blackmailed for voting for this referendum. They would get instantly fired if the employers would see a stamp in their passports from voting. On the other hand, there are also many ethnic Russians who support Latvian language, because only 1.2 million people speak it compared to 120 million people who speak Russian worldwide. If the Russian language was chosen to be a second official language, then there would be a large segregation of Latvian and Russian groups (Latvia holds referendum on Russian language, 2012). The separation of language is the most basic problem between ethnic Latvians and non-Latvians. It has been evident, that 58% of non-Russian minorities consider Russian as their native language and 82% speak Russian at home (Muižnieks, 2006). These statistics are very high, since many have been influenced by the occupation of the Soviet Union. Education has also helped many people to preserve Russian. As mentioned before, Russian is a popular language to learn, among Latvian students.

# Conclusion

The Russian-speaking minority has been living in Latvia since the occupation of the Soviet Union and ever since they had a sense of belonging in Latvian society. During the Soviet period, the Russian-speakers preserved their cultural identity, they had good quality profession and they had equal rights such as the Soviet Latvian citizens. However, there was a large turnover for the Russophones since the independence of Latvia. The Latvian state decided to reintegrate the Russian-speaking minority in Latvian democratic society. This minority group lost their citizenship, was rejected from political participation and was not allowed to speak Russian in many public areas. These were the first effects of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority and they still remain as an issue for many Russian-speakers today. Since Latvian independence 1991, the ethnic majority has had major discussions on ways to restore Latvian ethnic identity and downgrade the Russian influence on Latvia from the Soviet Union. The Latvian authorities implemented integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority which did not harmonize with international minority right standards.

The EU-accession process for Latvia was an important time period for the Russian-speaking minority because the international institutions influenced the integration policies according to international standards. The pre-conditions for Latvia to join the EU were based on recommendations from CoE, OSCE and EU, regarding the integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority. During the EU accession, Latvia improved certain policies, such as abolishing the naturalization window, simplifying the naturalization process and giving citizenship to people who were born after 1991. However, other important recommendations were ignored, which were the right to vote in local elections, access to property ownership, the rate of applicants for naturalization and the allowance of Russian to be the second official state language. The European Commission could not influence the status of the non-citizens in Latvia because the Union Law applies only to EU-citizens.

However, the Latvians want to act according to international standards and improve the status of the Russian-speaking minorities. To integrate them better into the society, the Latvian authorities have set goals to further develop the naturalization process. They established a Latvian Language Agency and an education reform to help Russian-speakers to learn Latvian. There are also a set of guidelines with projects for integrating the society.

The main integration policies that affect the living standards of the Russian-speaking minority are the education policy, linguistic policy, citizenship law and the naturalization process. These policies are very closely connected and emphasize on the knowledge of Latvian language. The education policy states that in all national minority schools 60% of the classes in Latvian. The naturalization process tests knowledge of basic Latvian constitution, Latvian national anthem and Latvian language. The language policy sets certain restrictions for the Russian-speaking minority, specifically for those who have a non-citizen status, regarding employment in public and private spheres. In addition, there is a section in the language law which states that a person’s name in Latvian documents must be written in Latvian orthography.

The consequences of integration policies for the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia can be seen in political participation education, language and employment. The citizenship law does not allow persons with a non-citizen status to vote at national or local elections. Some NGOs have found this quite discriminatory because EU citizens, who have Latvian permanent residency, are allowed to vote in local elections of Latvia, whereas it is prohibited for Latvian non-citizens. The Russian-speaking minority has many barriers in social areas while residing in Latvia, but the international community does not acknowledge the barriers as discriminatory, because the Russophones have mostly integrated in Latvian society and they are willing to contribute in developing the Latvian society.

The introduction of educational reform in national minority schools has decreased the quality of education and, as a consequence the performance of students in Russian-speaking schools has decreased compared to students in Latvian schools. There are also politicians who suggest that Russian-speaking schools should be banned, while the Russian-speaking minority sees this as a discrimination of minority rights because the Latvian law allows minorities to preserve their cultural identity.

The language law gives limitation to elderly Russophones who do not have the sources and ability to communicate with authorities. Article 19 from the language law, allows state institutions to change the name of a minority to Latvian orthography and interferes with the privacy of the minority. This law has been discussed by the Human Rights Committee in Latvia in the case of Raihman vs. Latvia in 2007. Raiham won the case according to Article 17 ICCPR, the right to protect privacy. However, the Latvian authorities are not ready to change this law but it will be later discussed on a national level. In addition, the language proficiency regulation has shown major effects on Russophones’ employment. The language law has resulted in a language referendum which took place in February 2012. The Russian-speaking minority proposed to change the language law and make Russian the second official language in Latvia. Unfortunately, the Russian-speaking minority, specifically those who have a non-citizen status, did not have the right to vote in the referendum. The referendum voted against. The Latvian government should try to further integrate the Russian-speaking minority without any discrimination. The following section is a set of recommendations for the Latvian authorities which could help improve the living standards of the Russian-speaking minority.

# Recommendations

The following recommendations regarding the integration policies are set for the Latvian government to improve the status of the Russian-speaking minority who are currently living in Latvia.

Citizenship and naturalization

The Latvian state should further encourage the non-citizens to apply for naturalization in order for them to enjoy equal rights. Since the non-citizens have a benefit to travel to Russia without a visa with an alien passport, this remains as one of the obstacles for them to apply for a Latvian citizenship. Therefore, the Latvian authorities should implement a dual citizenship to increase the rate of naturalization process for the non-citizens. The number of non-citizens still remains large and therefore, the state should revise the reasons for a low number of naturalization applications. The Latvian authorities should attract the non-citizen to the naturalization process with positive measures, especially among the young people and the workforce. During a naturalization process, language courses should be given without charge because a large number of non-citizens do not have the financial means.

Political participation

To avoid discrimination on electoral rights of the Russian-speaking minority, the Latvian state should allow non-citizens to vote in local elections because it is a fundamental human right to have political participation.

Education

Teachers in national minority schools should have a bilingual teaching degree to improve the quality of their teaching. The Latvian authorities should ensure a competitive and equal chance for non-citizens, who have graduated from secondary school, to have access to the higher education and labour market.

Language

Language courses should be free of charge for employees who were fined by the Language Inspector for not having the required language proficiency. These employees receive a fine for working in another language and therefore, if they are obliged to finance their own courses, it could make damages to their career. In addition, Article 19 of the Language Law should be abolished. This law interferes with personal privacy because people should be able to choose how their names should be written in Latvian official documents. Furthermore, the Latvian government should consider amending legislation for employing Russian-speakers in the public service and be able to work with Russian-speakers in their language. The Russian-speaking minority would then have easier communication with the administrative minorities because the number of Russian-speaking minority is very high. Since many poor and elderly Russophones cannot afford to take language courses or pay for official translations, they cannot communicate with the authorities. It is a fundamental right of a person to have the opportunity to communicate with the government in a democratic state.

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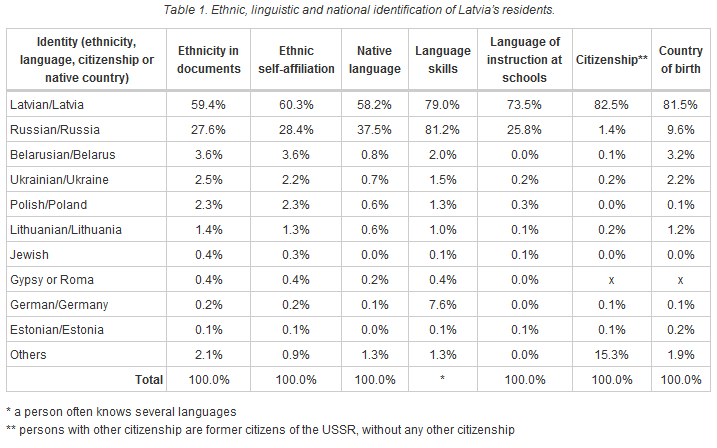
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# Appendices

Table 1



Source: Ethinic Minorities in Latvia, Mežs, 2010

Table 2

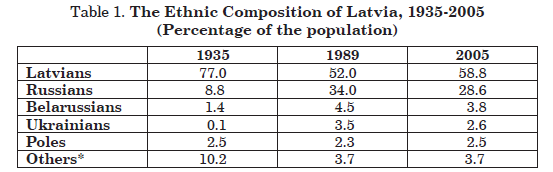
**Latvian population by citizenship and ethnicity**

**(According to Population Register of the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs 01.07.2011.)**

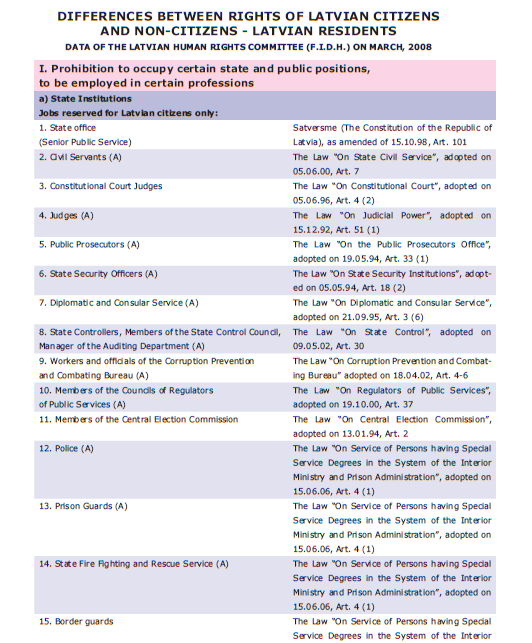
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Population | % | Citizens | % | Non-citizens | % |
| Latvians | 1323713 | 59.5 | 1321437 | 99.83 | 1198 | 0.09 |
| Russians | 606,972 | 27.3 | 364,529 | 60.06 | 209934 | 34.6 |
| Belarusians | 78,052 | 3.51 | 30,991 | 39.71 | 43172 | 55.3 |
| Ukrainians | 54,398 | 2.45 | 18,383 | 33.79 | 30625 | 56.3 |
| Poles | 50,960 | 2.29 | 38916 | 76.37 | 10845 | 21.3 |
| Lithuanians | 29174 | 1.31 | 18328 | 62.82 | 8412 | 28.8 |
| Jews | 9474 | 0.43 | 6236 | 65.82 | 2764 | 29.2 |
| Roma | 8517 | 0.38 | 7999 | 93.92 | 468 | 5.49 |
| Germans | 4562 | 0.21 | 2225 | 48.77 | 1227 | 26.9 |
| Tatars | 2689 | 0.12 | 835 | 31.05 | 1471 | 54.7 |
| Armenians | 2660 | 0.12 | 1147 | 43.12 | 1068 | 40.2 |
| Estonians | 2336 | 0.11 | 1423 | 60.92 | 473 | 20.2 |
| Others | 50,723 | 2.28 | 38,929 | 76.75 | 10986 | 21.7 |
| Total | 2,224,230 | 100 | 1847618 | 83.07 | 319,267 | 14.4 |

**Source:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2012

Table 3

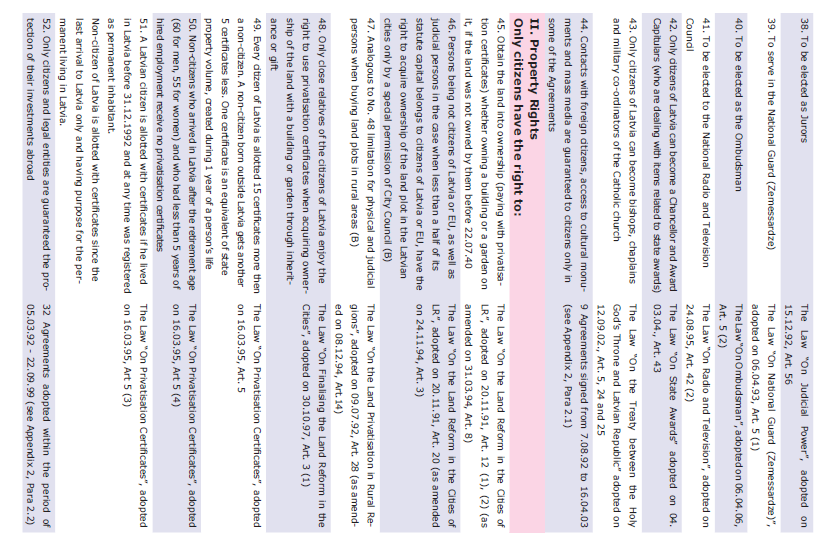


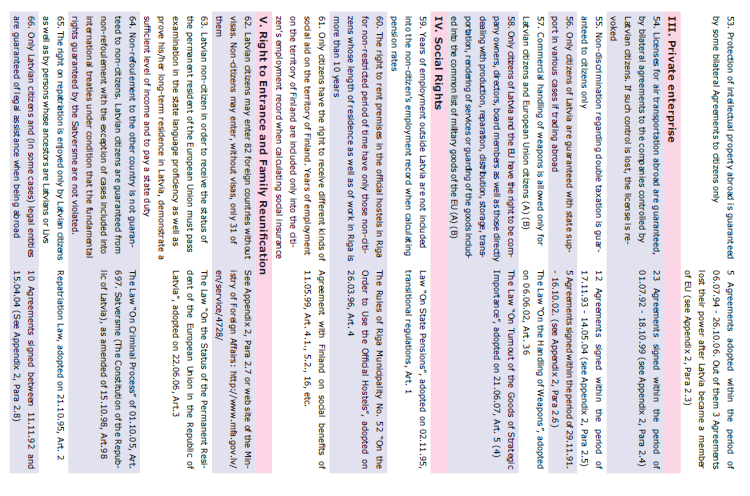
Source: Muižnieks, 2006

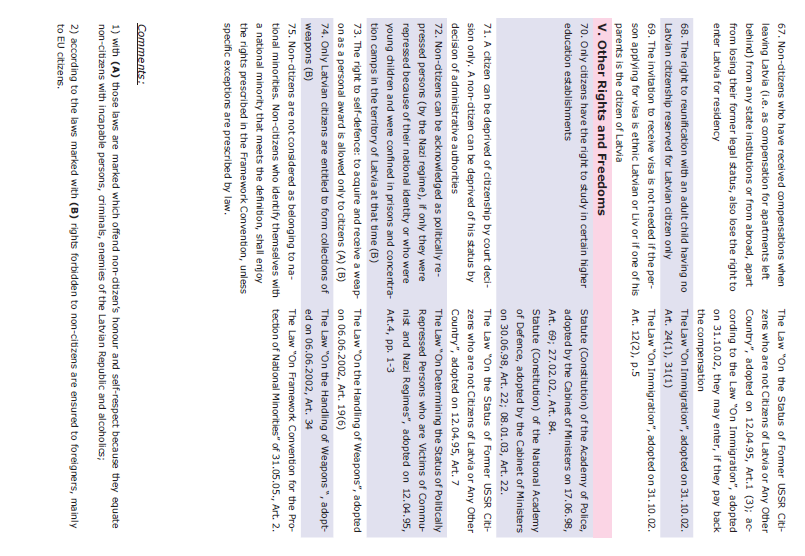
Table 4

Source:(Zdanoka, Buzajevs, Dimitrovs, 2008).

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1. General schools are primary and secondary schools [↑](#footnote-ref-1)