

SECTION III: MINORITY INTERGRATION

The “Russian Community” as a Means of Self-identification of Russians in Latvia

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1. Introduction

After Latvians, Russians are the largest ethnic group in Latvia: thus, in 2008 Latvians comprised 59.2% of the country's population (1.345 million out of 2.276 million), and Russians comprised 28.0% (0.638 million). (Latvia, 2009, 1). Russians as ethnic minority differ from other ethnic minorities in Latvia – the Byelorussians, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Poles, the Jews, etc. – in numbers as well as in qualitative characteristics when organizing their own socio-cultural infrastructure. The population of the Latvian Russians outnumbers more than twice the corresponding number of all the other ethnic minorities in Latvia taken together.

The proportion of the Russian population within the structure of the population of Latvia is the most important factor that influences formation of this ethnic minority's identity. Besides the ethno-demographic factor, the identity of Russians in Latvia is formed under the influence of their socio-cultural and public-political life as well as some forms of social communication.

Unlike other ethnic minorities, the Latvian Russians during the years of the restored Latvian Republic since 1991 have managed to create a socio-cultural infrastructure on the basis of their mother tongue. This socio-cultural infrastructure involves wide spread of the Russian language in the sphere of Latvian entrepreneurship, in the system of private education (including higher education), in the sphere of entertainment and mass media. One part of the professional culture in Latvia also functions in the Russian language (the oldest outside Russia, Riga's M. Chekhov Russian Drama Theatre, publications of scientific works, etc.) The Russian language acts as a means of assimilation for a significant number of representatives of

other ethnic minorities, which creates such a phenomenon as the “Russian-speaking population”. Preserving social functions of the Russian language in the public life in Latvia and even granting it official status is becoming the aim of some political associations (“The Harmony Centre” and “For Human Rights in the United Latvia”).

Creation and spread of the self-identifier “the Russian community of Latvia” among a large number of representatives of the Russian non-governmental organizations is connected with interpretation of the country’s ethnic and cultural variety.

Main features which determine Russians’ belonging to the population of Latvia are: the ethnic origin as well as the linguistic identity. According to the sociological research, the Russian language is, nevertheless, the main factor of the ethnic identity of this minority. Moreover, it is possible to state that the Russian minority is represented as a linguistic minority in Latvia (Apine & Volkov 2007, 110-143).

In reality, at present the Russian language performs a dual function in Latvia. It is the main means of spiritual communication for Russian people, and also it is a very important means of communication for the people of non-Russian ethnic origin who consider the Russian language their mother tongue. In 1990s the Russian language in Latvia in terms of its spread was the second language after the state language. Linguistic identity of the Russian minority is strengthened by the ethno demographic processes within this minority. For example, the share of endogenous marriages among Russians is the largest in the state. Thus, this rate in the Latvian environment is about 80%, in the Russian environment – 60%, but among the Latvian Lithuanians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians – less than 10%, among Poles – 13%, among Jews – 15-30%. That is why the most significant factor for the existence of the Russian linguistic identity is a family environment of the Russian minority (Latvijas Demografijas.1993, 180; Demografija 2006, 56-57).

The term “the Russian community of Latvia” occupies a special place in the complex of possible self-categorizations for its own collective identity. In legal documents and in scientific publications the term “national minority” (variation- “ethnic minority”) is mainly used. The use of this term indicates that the society recognizes the ethnic variety in its environment and

considers it an important cultural and civil value of this society (Ethnic Group 2005, 197). At the same time, the ethnic group endowed with a status of national (ethnic) minority is excluded from the rights for political self-determination which is in conflict with the state's law. Therefore, the content of the collective ethnic identity cannot exceed in volume the content of the common civil identity. The collective identity of minorities can serve as an addition to the common civil identity formed as a result of the free individual choice.

Representatives of the Russian liberal intelligentsia tried to elaborate a model of the Russian ethnic identity. The writer Jury Abizov expressed this idea in the following way: "We exist in specific circumstances among Latvian people because only the Latvian nation lives here in its ancient land, in its history, with its language, with its prospects – our culture is beyond the borders of this state, our Yasnaya Polyana, Dostoyevsky's grave are far away... We cannot transfer all of it here. How can we behave, rank ourselves in this specific situation? Let's not be arrogant, but, at the same time, let's not put ourselves low, having a clear understanding of what is what, let's form our behavior for the benefit of the two sides" (Abizov 2002, 45, 95, 212).

However, as evolution of the political consciousness of the Russian population shows, it is not an easy task to harmoniously combine the common civil values of the Latvian society and peculiarities of the ethnic minorities' identity. That is why the self-categorization "the Russian community of Latvia", which is so popular among the Russian population in Latvia, requires a liberal interpretation by its bearers. Apparently, such liberal interpretation of the identifier "the Russian community of Latvia" has to comply with interpretation of the scientific concept and the identifier "ethnic minority" which is accepted by the liberal, scientific and legal tradition.

2. Russian non-governmental organizations and political parties as factors determining the formation of the self-identifier "the Russian community of Latvia"

The Russian non-governmental organizations are the most important resources for formation of the self-identifier "the Russian community". The use of the self-identifier "the Russian community" can be motivated by

liberal as well as communitarian aims of the Russian non-governmental organizations, political parties, and associations. The specific character of the Russian non-governmental organizations is revealed most vividly by the combination of the four dominant aims of their activity.

Firstly, there are organizations which mainly pursue the cultural-educational aims. The Latvian Society of the Russian Culture, the Latvian Association of Teachers of the Russian Language and Literature, the Latvian Pushkin Society, the Alexander Men's Fund, and others belong to this type of non-governmental organization. As the aim of their activity these organizations suggest preservation, restoration, and popularization of the Latvian Russian cultural-historic inheritance.

Secondly, in Latvia the function of the Russian non-governmental organizations is to render the legal, informative help; for example, the Latvian Human Rights Committee, the Latvian Association of Independent Experts, the Union of Citizens and Non-citizens, and others. They try to develop and promote in the national minorities' environment the idea of the integration model which does not always coincide with the state concept of the social integration. A significant part of activities of organizations belonging to this group, first of all, the Latvian Human Rights Committee (the largest organization within this group) is connected with rendering legal help mainly concerning social security issues.

Thirdly, there is a Russian non-governmental organization functioning in Latvia which appeared as a result of the increased role of the Latvian language as the language of instruction at national minorities' schools, including those schools which, provided by the Law on Education, had had the Russian language as the language of instruction. This is the so called Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Russian Language of Instruction (LASSRLI).

Fourthly, a group of Russian non-governmental organizations united by a common aim – to support the social life of Russians, exists in Latvia. This group comprises the Russian Community of Latvia (RCL), the Russian Society of Latvia (RSL), the Liepaja Russian Community and others. Unlike the three groups mentioned above, this group includes the most Russian non-governmental organizations with branch structure (a system of departments and subsidiaries in different regions of Latvia, etc). The

activity of these organizations is of multifunctional character. They, much more than other Russian organizations, specify the social, demographic, professional, and regional structure of the Russian population. They are closely connected with political activities and collaborate with such political associations as “The Harmony Centre” and “For Human Rights in the United Latvia”.

Majority of Russian non-governmental organizations in Latvia have formed associations. The largest one is the Coordination Council of National Minorities’ Non-Governmental Organizations, which unites 34 societies and organizations. (There are also other East-Slavonic societies among its members – the Ukrainian Union of Latvia and the Byelorussian Society “Pramen”.) Another association of Russian non-governmental organizations is the Latvian Association of Russian Societies (LARO).

Such organizations as the Russian Community of Latvia and the Latvian Association of Russian Societies are characterized by co-operation with political parties and associations. The influence of the Russian parties of Latvia can be felt in the work of the Latvian Association of Russian Societies, but the party “For Human Rights in the United Latvia” greatly influences the work of the Russian Society of Latvia.

Notwithstanding the fact that these organizations have actively undertaken the tasks of preserving Russian ethnicity and the work on the development of Russian culture, in the issues of evaluating integration of Latvian society and interpretation of civil consciousness, they still depend on the positions of political parties.

Along with the work in the national cultural societies, Russians also take part in the state’s political life. In fact, political parties, which were previously focused on the Russian electorate, have placed the collective “community” interests of Russians in the centre of their political programs.

During the elections of the 5th Saeima in 1993 and the 6th Saeima in 1995, Russian people’s votes were divided among several political forces. One part of people supported Latvian parties (first of all “The Latvian Way”) as well as the non-national parties (People’s Harmony Party), the Socialist Party of Latvia, “Equal Rights”, etc. The People’s Harmony Party supported the idea of giving Latvian citizenship to all the non-Latvians who have lived

in Latvia for at least 10 years; they also fought for reducing the differences in the rights of Latvian citizens and the permanent residents. "Equal Rights" party was striving for the "zero variant" – granting Latvian citizenship to everybody and transforming Latvia into a bi-communal state. During the 6th Saeima elections the Socialist Party declared its intention to grant the Russian language the status of the second state language in the regions where at least one quarter of the population considered the Russian language to be their mother tongue. However, influence of the People's Harmony Party and the left-wing parties on the Russian electorate tended to decrease. In the 5th Saeima, after the People's Harmony Party had formed the association "Harmony for Latvia", it won 15 seats, "Equal Rights" – 7 seats, but in the 6th Saeima the People's Harmony Party and the Socialist Party of Latvia received only 6 seats each.

There were attempts to form a Russian party on the basis of national minorities. For example, before the 5th Saeima elections the Center of Democratic Initiatives and the Baltic Constitutional Party put forward the Russian National Democratic List. This political force claimed that they were acting on behalf of the "national group" of the Latvian Russians. However, the "Russian List" went beyond the frames of the national culture's autonomy promoting transformation of the existing Latvian national state into a multinational state. During the elections this list was supported only by 1.16% of voters. Before the 6th Saeima elections the "Russian Party" (leader – M. Gavrilov) appeared. It advanced the theory that only Russian politicians were to represent interests of the Russian population in governmental institutions (the "ethnic purity" principle). This party also won a small number of votes – 1.2%, and the "Russian List" did not receive any seats in the parliament.

Before the 7th Saeima elections (1998-2002) the People's Harmony Party, the Socialist Party of Latvia and the Movement for Social Justice and Equal Rights founded the block "For Human Rights in the United Latvia". The Russian Party also joined the block. "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" won 16 seats in the 7th Saeima. (the People's Harmony Party – 6, the Equal Rights – 5, the Socialist Party of Latvia – 4, the Russian Party – 1). In 2000 the Movement for Social Justice and Equal Rights was renamed "Equal Rights" (leaders – T. Zhdanok and V. Buzajev). The Russian Party left the association in 2001 before the municipal elections.

In the 8th Saeima (2002-2006) "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" had 25 mandates/seats (the People's Harmony Party – 12, the Socialist Party of Latvia – 5, the Equal Rights – 8). Notwithstanding the good results in the parliamentary elections, "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" remained in opposition, same as in the previous Saeima. In 2003 the People's Harmony Party and the Socialist Party of Latvia left the association. Some parliament members who had belonged to "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" joined the People's Harmony Party. As a result, there were only 6 members of "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" left as members of the parliament/deputies. During the 9th Saeima elections (2006-2010) Russian electors have voted mainly for the new political association – the Harmony Centre (the New Centre, leader – S. Dolgoplov; the People's Harmony Party, the Socialist Party of Latvia and the Daugavpils City Party, leader – A. Vidavsky). The Harmony Centre won 17 votes. Six members of the parliament/deputies were elected from "For Human Rights in the United Latvia". In the course of these parliamentary elections the revealed types of behavior of the Russian electorate showed their attitude towards self-identification of Russians as a specific ethnic community in Latvia:

1. There is an increasing tendency to decrease political claims of the Russian collective identity by integrating into national political parties: by electing a Russian member of parliament from the Green and Farmers' Union (Viktor Shcherbatih); by Russian parties joining the Latvian First Party and establishing the Russian Centre of the Latvian First Party in 2007; by co-operation of some Russian non-governmental organizations with national parties, etc. The People's Harmony Party in the elections of the 9th Saeima emphasized its orientation to liberal values – "freedom of all people and each individual". The political association "Harmony Center" negatively evaluated the idea of establishing a bi-communal state in Latvia, focusing on the state and society "model which reflects the historic approach, needs and possibilities of the state; and multicultural, which is the variety and mutual openness of culture, languages and traditions in the united community" (Politisko organizāciju, 2006).

This tendency will decrease the ethnic differences in the political life in Latvia and will positively influence functioning of an integrated civil society.

2. Within the Russian environment in Latvian the idea of maximal preservation of the expression of the Russian collective identity is still popular; first of all, is the wide functioning of the Russian language in the civil society (in the sphere of business, education, informal contacts, etc.),

and Russian voters/electors find it necessary to officially recognize by law the status of the Russian language as a minority language.

Both political associations - "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" and the "Harmony Centre" – are openly oriented to preserving the Russian minority's collective identity. This aim substantiates the idea expressed by "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" of Latvia as a multinational bi-community state and society. "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" think that "it is high time all recognized the fact that there are two communities in Latvia – the Latvian majority and the Russian-speaking minority. Existence of two communities in Latvia is neither a positive, nor a negative phenomenon, but just an objective reality". That is why "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" consider it necessary to grant "an official status to the Russian and Latgalian languages on the municipal level, as well as to other minorities' languages in the municipalities where at least 20% of population consider these languages their mother tongue; to ensure financing from the state budget for education in Russian at all levels, including higher education" (Программа ЗаПЧЕЛ 2006).

The party "Equal Rights" as the main body of "For Human Rights in the United Latvia" considers a political nation consisting of two communities and other minorities to be the aim of the social integration policy. This party in its program adopted in 2003, has openly stated being a party of the Russian community.

The political association "Harmony Center" also shares the idea of the need to preserve the Russian minority's collective identity. The Harmony Centre supports the idea of "representation of many languages and cultures in the Latvian society, recognized and expanded by the state. The Harmony Centre strives for establishing one state language and widespread use of national minorities' languages, strengthening the status of the Russian language by the law, official recognition of it as the language of the biggest minority". This political association demands to recognize multiculturalism as the basis for the Latvian education system. The Harmony Centre has stated their position for "consolidation and development of the national minorities' education system". This minorities' education system is connected with the increased role of students' parents in the process of choosing the language of instruction, and the "decision-making process in the sphere of children's education at all levels – school, municipality and national levels".

As one can see, there are numerous Russian minority non-governmental organizations and political parties in the Latvian society. They focus on reflecting interests of these minorities. To what extent can these societies and parties be considered an integral part of Latvia's civil society? Activities of many Russian minority non-governmental organizations and programs of political parties prove their support for liberal and democratic values. That is why it is impossible to exclude the Russian minority's social and political activities from the framework of Latvian civil society. However, the issue of ideological differences between Latvians and the liberal forces of the Russian minority is still sore. The Russian minority recognizes the multicultural democratic model which considers preservation of ethnic minorities' collective identity the best solution. Latvian liberals think that under the circumstances of the Latvian national state it is better to strengthen such liberal democracy that guarantees preserving ethnic minorities' identity as human individual rights.

But the Russian ethnic minority's fully-fledged entry into the life of the Latvian state and civil society depends not only on this minority's subjective readiness to adopt the values of the Latvian legal and democratic national state. It is crucial to observe democratic and liberal norms and values within the Latvian society, to promote the naturalization process, and to actively oppose ethnic discrimination in the labor market and xenophobia in the social consciousness.

3. Attitude to the identifier “the Russian Community” among the Russian non-governmental organizations of Latvia

Social identity is a multidimensional phenomenon. S.Stryker and P.J.Burke single out the following constituents in understanding of an identity. Firstly, the concept of identity is used as a synonym of the concept of culture. Secondly, the concept of identity is used to define the actor's identification with social categories and social collectivities. In this sense it is crucial to demonstrate how social activity and social movements help to form unity between people. (Ritzer 2007, 2224). Thirdly, identity is viewed as one of the “self” elements. (Stryker, Burke 2000, 284-97).

We support the idea of understanding of social identity as a social construction, the formation of which enables identification of social actors with social (for example, national) communities. Here E. Durkheim's, M. We-

ber's, and T. Parson's approach is of high importance. They recognized the significance of standard requirements dominating in a society for individual actors to be able to correct and establish their identity. In particular, in the modern sociology, this idea is expressed by Sheldon Stryker, who speaks about the influence of the established social structures of a society on the identity of individual and collective actors. Identity of social actors is formed as a salient identity (Stryker 1980). The important measurement of such understanding of identity is the idea of it as a phenomenon, which changes along with history, and also undergoes certain transformations in the process of permanent inter-ethnic communication on the foundation of morality (Habermas 1994, 122-128). Such inter-group (inter-ethnic) communication results in the formation of self-categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 38-43). In this sense self-categorization means distinguishing ethnic boundaries (Barth 1996, 78-81; Stone & Piya 2007, 1457). Ethnic identity serves as a basis for ethnic solidarity but it can be used for ethnic mobilization with the aim to achieve some collective aims attracting different types of resources – organizational, financial and ideological. In this case ethnic self-categorization leads to consolidation of nationalistic ideology (Olzak 2007, 1465). This meaning of the use of the category “identity” applied to large social groups – ethnic minorities – is important in order to emphasize the following key points in the status of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia:

- the Russian ethnic minority is creating its identity in the restored national democratic state the Republic of Latvia, which presupposes social integration on the basis of Latvian values including guarantees for ethnic minorities, on the basis of individual choices, to preserve and develop their identity;
- the Russian ethnic minority is in the process of forming an optimal model of its own ethnic identity, which, on the one hand, incarnates the values of Russian culture, but, on the other hand, serves as a means of inclusion into Latvian civil identity;
- the changing character of the identity of the Russian minority in Latvia under the influence of inter-ethnic communication (mainly with Latvians) and as a result of reconsideration of its own historic experience;
- two possible bases for forming a civil identity – communitarian and liberal can be pointed out in the social and political consciousness of the Russian minority in Latvia. Thus, the Russian minority's identity

is “reflexive from the inside”, which stimulates its constant construction/formation.

It is popular in the Russian environment of Latvia to search for concepts to adequately express self-identification of this ethnic group. The idea of the “Russian community” of Latvia is distinguished in the public consciousness as one of such identifiers. (By the way, this self-identifier can be found in the names of the oldest and largest Russian non-government organizations – “Russian Community of Latvia” and “Russian Community in Latvia”.)

Recently, especially after joining the European Union, political periodicals in Latvia have shown an increased interest in such identifiers of Russians as “ethnic (national) minority”, “Russian community”, “country-forming community”, etc. At the same time, the number of scientific works on Latvian ethno-sociology and ethno-politology which could competently investigate the problems of self-identification of the country’s largest non-Latvian ethnic group is insufficient at this moment.

In the given article the author attempts to demonstrate the significance of such self-identifier as “Russian community” for the Latvian Russians. This part of the article is based on the materials from the sociological research carried out by the author and his assistant K. Stadnik, a student of Riga Stradinsh University in February-March, 2007. The aim of this research was to find out what meaning the respondents attributed to the concept “Russian community” as a self-identifier for the Russian population of Latvia. Leaders and activists from 15 largest Russian non-governmental organizations in Latvia were chosen to be the objects of the research. The method of the research was profound interviews, each one 1.5-2 hours long.

The research identified a varied degree of articulation of the Russian collective identity. Concepts adopted to denote acceptable forms of the Russian collective identity serve as manifestation of this articulation. The following are the most frequently used concepts denoting collective identity of Russians in Latvia:

1. “Russian community of Latvia”;
2. “Russian Diaspora”;

These basic concepts which characterize collective self-identity of Russians are joined by the concepts which explain the context for identity of Russians in Latvia. These explanatory concepts are:

3. "Russian world of Latvia" and as a variation
4. "Russian culturological environment".

The research has singled out some differences in respondents' views on such an identifier as "Russian community". These views may be grouped into three positions:

- "Russian community" as the only possible identifier for the Russian population of Latvia;
- "Russian community" as one of the possible identifiers for the Russian population of Latvia;
- Negative attitude to such an identifier as "Russian community".

It should be pointed out at once that the interviewed leaders and activists of the Russian non-government organizations of Latvia, as a rule, positively assessed the importance of the concept "Russian community" as an identifier for the Russian population of Latvia. The motivation for the respondents' views on the identifier "Russian community" is presented in the tables.

Materials of the table No 1 demonstrate the wide spread of the identifier "Russian community" among the interviewed leaders and activists of the largest Russian non-governmental organizations of Latvia. Among the motives for choosing this identifier there are no indications of "natural" reasons – the percentage of Russians in Latvia and the length of living on the territory of Latvia. In general, motives connected with evaluation of the existing social status of the Russian ethnic minority in modern Latvia and with the desired status dominate there.

It should be pointed out that among one part of Russian population of Latvia and among some prominent leaders of non-governmental organizations and political parties the identifier "Russian community" bears a normative character. From the viewpoint of the adherents of this term, it is given significant ideological content closely associated with the most acceptable form of interaction between the Russian ethnic minority and the State of Latvia as well as the society.

Table No 1. “Russian community” as the only possible identifier for the Russian population of Latvia

Motivation	Number of mentions
Perception of Latvia as a conglomerate of ethnic communities	6
Necessity for the effective influence of the Latvian Russians on authority	6
Integration of all Russian organizations	6
Consolidation of the Russian Orthodox Church as a basis of Russian identity	5
Weakness of the civil community of Latvia in the influence on the state	5
Perception of the Latvian Republic political system as a political form of “Latvian community”	5
Preserving Russian linguistic identity for all the people who belong to the Russian culture irrespective of their ethnic origin	4
Necessity to implement specific “Russian” interests – legal assignment of the official status to the Russian language, a financial guarantee from the state budget of education in the Russian language, and “zero” variant of Latvian citizenship	4
Necessity to overcome the legal discrimination of the Russians	3
Necessity for the political integration of the Russian population	3
Autonomy of a Latvian Russian school in relation to the Russian Federation	1
Necessity to form in Latvia a democracy which stands above political parties	1
Type of a civil self-identity of the Russians in the Republic of Latvia	1

It can be said that active use of the identifier “Russian community” reflects a complex way of establishing the collective identity of the country’s Russian minority. It would be right to characterize this identifier also as a way of expected “policy of recognition” from Latvians. This term is being

used in numerous publications of the Russian-speaking press in Latvia (newspapers “Chas”, “Vesti Segodnya”, “Rakurs”, etc.) The meaning of the identifier “Russian community” has become a topic of many discussions within Russian non-governmental organizations themselves and at “round tables”, in which the representatives of Russian general public and Latvian journalists, politologists, sociologists, and historians take part.

Here are the most indicative statements of the interviewed leaders and activists of Russian non-government organizations, which can frequently be seen in the Russian-speaking press in Latvia. An opinion about the necessity of consolidating the Latvian Russians into a “Russian community”:

There is a specific situation in Latvia. The Republic of Latvia is the Latvian community, but the Russian community is opposed to the Republic of Latvia. But this model has a “cost-based” character for such a small country as Latvia”.

Or:

“A model of a bi-community state – is a forced step as a way of defense from the State of Latvia”. The most active supporters of the idea of consolidating the “Russian community” deem that this structure will allow protecting the specific interests of the Latvian Russians:

“It is necessary to legally secure the rights of the national minorities’ languages and the guarantees for education in the mother tongue. It is essential to have a common Latvian school, but with an included identity-preserving program in the Russian language. It is necessary to change the law. Now all schools are Latvian but some of them work on the basis of the national minorities’ programs, which depend entirely on the decision of the school authorities. And there are no legal guarantees for preserving the national minorities’ schools. There must be two state languages in Latvia. And the legal securing of the national minorities’ languages’ functions should be welcomed”.

The interviewed often express the idea of forming the “Russian community” as a forced step undertaken in the condition of the weakness of Latvian civil society when it is impossible to make the authority take into account the Russian minority’s interests:

“The civil society does not presuppose a bi-community state. The civil society is a positive mosaic of various social groups that are created on the basis of different criteria, on the ethnic ones as well. The modern political

situation is confrontation of ethnic groups, which impedes formation of the civil society”.

Or:

There is either no civil society in Latvia at all or it is very small because its influence on taking political decisions can hardly be felt. Not only is the Russian but also the Latvian part of the civil society weak”.

It should be noted that in our research we give the main block of motives connected with accepting the identifier “Russian community” which can be traced in the public consciousness of the Russian minority of modern Latvia. Shown in the table, the articulated motives for identification with the “Russian community”, in our opinion, are connected with feelings of alienation from the State of Latvia, the feeling of ethnic injustice, etc. widespread in the Russian environment of Latvia. All the most popular Russian non-governmental organizations or political associations whose aims are to defend interests of ethnic Russians share these feelings. Unfortunately, in the Russian environment of the Republic of Latvia, the competent, stable, liberal position which could comprehend the most acceptable interaction between the national constitutional state and the multicultural Latvian society with strong collective identity of Latvian Russians and need for individual cultural autonomy that would not presuppose tough dependence of a human being on the communal structures or ethnic collective identity has not yet been formed.

As can be seen from the content of table No 2, along with the identifier “Russian community” the interviewed often use other terms too, among which “Russian world of Latvia” is the most popular one.

As a rule, this term is frequently used as a synonym of the term “Russian community”. However, the identifier “Russian world of Latvia” is also accepted by those adherents of liberal views in the Russian environment who support a broad/full-scale dialogue with the State of Latvia and have a restrained attitude to centralization of Russian non-governmental organizations of the Republic of Latvia and politicization of their activity.

“Russian world of Latvia” is an identifier of the existing reality of diverse functions of the Russian ethnic minority in the social life of Latvia. “Russian community” also bears in itself a legislative potential which expresses aspiration for the legal securing of collective rights of Russian

(and in a wider sense – Russian-speaking) population, first of all, in the sphere of education, in the state language policy and the citizenship policy.

Table No 2. “Russian community” as one of the possible identifiers for the Russian population of Latvia

Motivation	Additional identifiers	Number of mentions
Necessity for awareness of the value of the civil society as a means of influence on the state	A positive mosaic of various social groups, “Russian world of Latvia”	3
Overcoming the threat of forming a bi-community state in Latvia	A positive mosaic of various social groups, “Russian world of Latvia”	3
Preserving Russian linguistic identity for all the people who belong to the Russian culture irrespective of their ethnic origin	“Russian world of Latvia”	3
It is necessary to legally secure the rights of the Russian language as the language of a national minority	“Russian world of Latvia”	3
The role of the Russian language in identity of the Russians should not be exaggerated, there are religion and traditions as well		1
It is necessary to overcome the separation of the Russian non-governmental organizations on the organizational or ideological level	“Russian culturological environment”	2
A wide communicative interaction of Russian Non-governmental organizations, their polyphony	“Russian community” as an “outline of inter-action” without legal securing	1
Necessity for a double identity: with Latvia as a state and with Russia as a historic motherland	Russian diaspora	1

It is possible to give as an example one of the common positions, in which, along with articulation of the collective interests of the Latvian Russians a doubt about legal establishing of the Russian community is expressed:

"I do not approve that a bi-community should be fixed somehow. The Russian community is culturological environment that includes the people for whom the most important values are the Russian language, Russian education, and Russian culture. But, within the frames of accepting these values personal positions can vary. For me, significant is the concept "Russian world of Latvia" which involves/covers both, the people of Russian origin and also others. In the education system for Russians the Russian language should dominate".

Or:

"The most acceptable/optimal model for the Russian national identity in Latvia is "Russian world of Latvia" which is not formally fixed".

Although, the search for an alternative identifier to "Russian community" occurs in the Russian environment of Latvia, it is of fragmentary character. Five respondents out of the fifteen interviewed leaders and activists of Russian non-governmental organizations have expressed these ideas (table No 3).

The necessity for developing "outside community" identifiers was uttered by only one respondent who holds an active and fairly expressed liberal position in the political life of Latvia:

"Interaction of non-governmental organizations does not mean community. There must be polyphony, interaction."

The evident supporter of structuring the identity of Russians in Latvia on the basis of Russian Orthodox religion, Russian ethnic origin, and Russian history is also opposed to such an identifier as "Russian community".

It is evident that the self-identifier "Russian community" occupies an important place in the collective identity of the Russian minority in modern Latvia. In the consciousness of representatives from Russian non-governmental organizations it possesses diverse cognitive content that realizes both, communitarian and liberal interpretations. In fact, strengthening of the liberal reflection of the self-identifier "Russian community" among its bearers depends on bringing together its content with the ideological meaning of the concept "ethnic minority" accepted in the western liberal tradition.

Table No 3. Negative attitude to such identifier for the Russian population of Latvia as “Russian community”.

Motivation	Acceptable identifiers	Number of mentions
It is necessary to strengthen the role of ethnicity, the Orthodox Church, and the feeling of a common historic fate in the identity of the Latvian Russians	Polyphony of the social ties	3
Necessity for predominant/primary development of a political nation in Latvia	“Russian world of Latvia”, diaspora	2
In Latvia there is no strong opposition between the civil society and the state, or this opposition is of a fragmentary character	Russian population of Latvia	2
Necessity for predominant development of liberal values in the Russian environment, of “individual autonomy” of the Russian identity bearers	“Russian world of Latvia”, diaspora	2
There is no dramatic intensity in the evaluation of dissociation of the Russian non-governmental organizations	“Russian world of Latvia”	2
Preserving education in the Russian language, functioning in the social life of Latvia	“Russian world of Latvia”, diaspora	2
Preserving the Russian identity through the intensive cultural connections/ties with the Latvians	“Russian world of Latvia”, diaspora	1

P.S. Taking into account the large share of the Russian population in modern Latvia the process of self-identification of this ethnic group affects directly the prospects for formation of a consolidated civil society. The

Latvian political elite keep the track of self-identification processes undergoing within the largest national minority of the country. The liberal range of political parties, which mainly represent the voters of Latvian origin, is inclined to pragmatic cooperation with that part of the Russian ethnic minority which does not emphasize the tough variant of self-identification as an autonomous and self-sufficient “Russian community” in Latvia. Thus, the municipal elections in spring, 2009 demonstrated the possibility for formation of the ruling coalition in Riga, in the metropolitan municipality, which would consist of the Harmony Centre (a political alliance representing mainly Russian voters) and the coalition of Latvian parties – First Party/Latvian Way (Pirma partija/Latvijas celsh). Apparently, the results of these elections and election of Nil Ushakov, a Russian, to the post of the mayor of Riga will enhance the liberal variant of self-identification of Russians as one of the ethnic communities in Latvia.

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