Content Evolution of the Concept «Ethnic Minority» in Latvian Sociology in the Period 1991 - 2007

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The concept «ethnic minority» (variation - «national minority») belongs to that group of scientific terms without which Latvian sociology in the period of the restored national state system since 1991 is impossible to imagine. This interest of Latvian sociologists is explained by the ethnopolitical reality: Latvia historically, and especially in the second half of the 20th century and in the beginning of the present century, comes forward as an ethnically varied society. In 2007 from 2.275 million of the Latvian population, Latvians comprised 59.0% of the country's population, the Russians – 28.5%, but other ethnic groups (the Belarussians, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Poles, the Jews, and others) – 12.5% (Latvija, 2008).

1. Interdisciplinary character of the concept «ethnic minority» in Latvian social knowledge.

Latvian sociology borrows the concept «ethnic minority» from the works of the representatives of western ethnosociological ideas. The given concept characterizes ethnic groups which permanently live in the territory of a definite country and state, but are different from the ethnic majority of the population. At the same time, in western sociology's usage of the concept "ethnic minority" there are two main meanings.

On the one hand, sociologists underline the differences between the ethnic majority of the country's population and the ethnic minorities as differences in origin, culture, historical development, language, religion, and behaviour. In this case the concept "ethnic minority" is often replaced by the concept "ethnic group". Thus, the Oxford edition of "A Dictionary of Sociology" (2005) interprets the ethnic group as "a group of people which characterizes itself or is characterized by others as sharing common peculiarities which make this group different from other ethnic groups and are revealed in the behaviour of the given group"(Ethnic group 2005, p.197). As is evident from this definition, although cultural and other characteristics

of ethnic minorities (ethnic groups) are different in comparison with the culture of the ethnic majority, they are, for all that, no less valuable.

On the other hand, western sociology fairly highlights numerous facts of unequal distribution of the social capital between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities in modern (and post-modern) societies. Ethnic groups as well as social classes form a complicated system of social stratification and social inequality. (Смелзер 1994, p. 304-327) That is why the insight into the social essence of ethnic minorities as a result of oppression or stigmatization which is based on "racial, ethnic, biological or other characteristics" (Minority group 2005, p.415) is relevant as well.

Analysis of the works of Latvian scientists demonstrates that sociological interpretation of the concept " ethnic minority" was carried out under a strong influence of four humanitarian disciplines which carefully study and interpret Latvian ethnic variety. They include:

- sociolinguistics;
- politology;
- demography;
- jurisprudence/study of law.

Moreover, it is correct to assert that the interpretation of the concept "ethnic minority" by these disciplines was often integrated into the sociological discourse.

The works of Latvian **sociolinguists** influenced greatly the formation of the sociological interpretation of the concept "ethnic minority". It was sociolinguistics which offered the first scientific definition of this concept in Latvian humanities in the beginning of the 1990s. According to a sociolinguistic definition, an ethnic minority is "a social group which in the definite period occupies a subordinate position in social life" (Druviete 1998, p. 47).

This insight into the ethnic minority concept is connected with the fact that sociolinguistics adheres to the subordination principle of the social functions of the state language and the languages of ethnic minorities on Latvian territory in conditions of a national state revival. This subordination principle suggests that the state language and the ethnic minority languages perform different social functions in national, social, and private lives. If the Latvian language possesses all the social functions on Latvian territory, the ethnic minorities' languages can be used only as a part of the social and private life of people and where there is such a necessity within the ethnic minorities. In fact, the idea of the subordination of languages' social functions worked out

in sociolinguistics serves as an explanatory metaphor for the sociological understanding of a social essence of ethnic minorities as well. To illustrate this approach, it is possible to refer to the evaluation of opportunities for non-Latvians to use their language in Latvian national and social life: "other nationalities which representatives permanently live on the territory of Latvia, but whose national languages thoroughly function in their historical motherland, have neither legal, nor constitutional, nor moral rights to claim any privileges on the territory of Latvia"(Skujiņa 1992, p. 23).

Politology formed the most widespread and developed comprehension discourse of the concept "ethnic minority". It is characterized by scientific generalizations, establishing relations of the concept "ethnic minority" with such fundamental concepts as the "Latvian nation", "Latvian national state", "multicultural society", "democracy", "human rights", "minority rights", "society integration", etc. On the whole politological discourse specified a systematic approach to the analysis of Latvian ethnic minorities in the structure of the Latvian nation within the national democratic state. Ethnic minorities are viewed as an inseparable/organic part of the Latvian people's restoring a democratic modern state. (Apine, Vēbers 1992, p. 1)

Definitions of the concept "ethnic minority" are similar to those accepted in Latvian sociolinguistics. However, in these definitions researchers emphasize the feature of inequality to a lesser degree and subordinate social position in comparison with the nation. A feature of cultural differences between the ethnic minority and the nation is clearly marked. An ethnic minority "is a social group which differs from the ethnic majority by its origin or other peculiarities". (Dribins 2004, p. 11) Daina Stukuls Eglīte and Juris Rozenvalds described Latvia's multiethnicity using the notion „changing identities". These scientists analyzed "ethnic minority" in opposition to "normal", "conformity", etc. (Rozenvalds 2005, 45.lpp.)

In the framework of **jurisprudence,** to an extent which cannot be seen in any other scientific disciplines dealing with the problem of ethnic minorities in Latvia, the liberal approach to the rights of representatives of the given groups of population is carried out the most systematically. Lawyers consider that the ethnic minorities' rights are a reflection of individual human rights, thus, they indirectly are against any claims of multiculturalism's adherents to add a "recognition policy" to a liberal

ethnopolicy (Mazākumgrupu (minoritāšu) integrācijas aspekti 2001, p. 33).

Latvian **demographical science** uses the concept "ethnic group" without making any differences in the legal status of its representatives. Thus, in the framework of this approach, the differences between the concepts "ethnic minority" and "ethnic group" are not observed. For this science it is important to analyze ethnic (group) differences in the demographic behaviour of Latvians and non-Latvians (Zariņa 1993, p. 14-15) and the influence of the non-Latvians' migration/emigration on the situation in the labour market. (Eglīte 1994, p. 6) For demography it turns out to be crucial to show quantitative sizes and an ethnic group's ratio within the population structure, in order to explain such a peculiarity of large ethnic groups as their ability to assimilate small ethnic groups. To this effect demographers speak about "two numerically large nationalities which intensively assimilate minorities" in Latvia. That is why in demography you can find another, different from politology and history, structuring of the ethnic area: two numerically large nationalities (the Latvians and the Russians) + a great number of small nationalities (the Belarussians, the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, etc.) (Ezera, Zvidriņš 1994, p. 32-34).

2. Sociological interpretation of the concept "ethnic minority".

With reference to the situation in the Latvian Republic, the concept "ethnic minority" is connected with the concept "Latvian nation". The absolute majority of publications explain this connection based on liberal ideas about a modern nation as "a civil unity" which forms, and in its turn is actively formed, by the democratic national state. That is why a civil nation of a modern society is opposed to the "ethnic, cultural unity" typical for traditional societies. (Levits 1998, p.79) There are two factors which influence the propagation of such ideas:

1. Historically Latvia is a multiethnic society and will remain the same in the foreseeable future, but at the same time the Latvian national democratic state is considered to be the only possible form of political structure;
2. Liberalism is a dominant intellectual trend in the European Union countries, and as Latvia is a part of that Union, it has a strong impact on modern social research.

The liberal tradition views a nation primarily as a civil unity of people for whom common civil values are more important than their religious, ethnic, or social identity/affiliation. It is this civil unity which serves as a basis for a national democratic state. (Dribins 1995, p.39, Pabriks 1998, pp.104.-105, Vēbers 1997, p.8) That is why the ethnic minority also comes forward as an ethnic group within the modern civil nation which considers common civil identity basic, but its ethnocultural identity as supplementary to common civil identity.

The historic, political, and ethnodemographic context within which the Latvian nation was being restored influenced significantly the assertion of the concept "ethnic minority" in Latvian sociology in the period 1991-2007. The complexity of this process is determined by the fact that under incorporation of Latvia into the USSR and the mass migration of representatives of mainly eastern Slavic peoples (the Russians, the Belarussians, and the Ukrainians), a large Russian community was formed and some representatives of the part of the given community claimed political recognition along with the Latvians, which means legitimization of a split into two communities in Latvia. (Birkavs 1994, p. 5, Dribins 1998, p. 7) At the same time, the majority of Latvian Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Gypsies see themselves simply as the country's ethnic minorities. Within this context the basic notion in the concept "ethnic minority" is the notion "ethnic", which is revealed in people's perception of their "ethnic identity". (Dribins 1998, p.7, Иванов 1993, pp. 44-45) Ethnic identity is opposed to, firstly, the mentality of representatives of the "Russian-speaking group", secondly, "the Russians", who, according to scientists, have a prevalence of identity with the "Russian empire". That is why the very concept "ethnic minority", which applies to "numerically small ethnic group with an expressed identity, for example, the Poles etc." (Zepa 1992, p. 26, Laķis 2000, p. 387) is not opposed to the concept "Latvian nation".

The analysis of works of Latvian sociologists and other scientific disciplines which study a country's ethnic minorities suggests the following trends in the analysis of ethnic minorities in Latvia:

- the most optimal model of the Latvian nation is a variant of "the Latvians + ethnic minorities", thereby revealing the negative attitude to addition of a self-sufficient Russian-speaking community to this model;

- gradually, the importance of borderlines between ethnic groups in Latvia, similar to borderlines between social groups, in social behaviour models, and in social communication, is recognized.

In the sociology of the 1990s there was some research in which the concepts "ethnic minority" and "ethnic group" were clearly delineated methodologically. Considering the differences in these concepts was important in order to show the different degree of loyalty of the non-Latvians towards the Latvian state. B. Zepa points out that Latvian citizenship status positively influences the degree of the non- Latvians' civil awareness development and increases the level of their political loyalty. (Zepa 1995, 43. lpp).

Sociologists' research carried out in the first half of the 1990s showed the impossibility of applying the concept "ethnic minority" to all ethnic groups in Latvia. First of all it referred to the Russian (Russian-speaking) population of the country. Consequently, perception of contradiction between a chosen normative study model for polyethnic Latvian society and a reality, which was impossible to describe by means of the Latvian nation model "Latvians + ethnic minorities", was typical of sociological and, in general, of social research. Thus, for example, in Vilcins's research (T.Vilciņš «Attitude to science and scientists in Latvia: changes in 1965-1990») it is shown that the Russians (and the Russian-speaking) more than the Latvians praise the prestige of such professions as shop assistant, waiter, and lorry driver. The author of the research explains it by a certain fixation in the mind of the Russian ethnic group, that is to say, "a migrant's life perception and psychology". (Vilciņš 1992, p. 37) R. Rungule in the research "Olaine's people's of different nationalities attitude towards the lifestyles in their town" (public opinion poll data of 1991) shows that the non-Latvians (the Russians, the Belarussians, the Ukrainians, the Poles, etc.) have an immigrant attitude to their area of residence. They find important such values as care about their home, payment, and job, but not an ecological situation in the place of residence (Rungule 1992, p. 28).

At the same time there is an example of an ethnic Russian group differentiation. Thus the research of 1992 «Adaptation of immigrants in Latvia», carried out by D.Fišmeistere, shows the differences in psychological adaptation to Latvia of "migrants" on the on hand, and members of Russian national-cultural societies on the other. (Fišmeistere 1993, pp. 1-5) It is clear that the chosen division of respondents does not fully correspond to a strict analytical differentiation of the concepts "ethnic group" and "ethnic minority". But at the same time it is evident that Latvian

sociologists already in the beginning of the 1990s tried to use the concepts as similar in their content to the concept "ethnic minority".

In sociology, such a characteristic of respondents as other national is often used, which includes the representatives of all non-Latvian ethnic groups in Latvia – citizens of Latvia and therefore representatives of ethnic minorities as well as non-citizens, who do not fall under the strict definition of "ethnic minority". Thus, B.Zepa's research "Social thought in the transitional period in Latvia: views' dynamics of the Latvians and representatives of other nationalities (1989-1992)" demonstrates that the substantially different views on the established state status and state institutions of the Latvian Republic and economic reforms are connected with the Latvians/other nationals differentiation in the society (Zepa 1992, p. 22). Sociologists also pointed out the different roles in the restoration of Latvian independence played by the Latvians and the non-Latvians (Zepa, Kārkliņa 1995, pp. 177 -179).

In the beginning of the 1990s in sociology there were some works where one could sense a very evident distance from the concept "ethnic minority", which led to an attempt to consider Latvian society as a unity of two ethnic communities – Latvian and Russian. Thus, the research by G.J.Ķeniņš (Kings), Dž.Teds Bārnovs, and S.Baņkovska, "Personal values of the Russian speaking executives in Latvia" (1992) shows that in Latvian entrepreneurship culture there exist autonomously both the values of the Latvians and the values of the Russian ethnic group. Moreover, the authors of the research considered a formation of Latvian entrepreneurship culture common values based on cooperation between company managers, both the Latvians and the Russians (Russian-speaking), to be very important.: "It is important that the policy makers, within the acceptable limits, take into account the values of both the Russian speaking layer of population as well as the Latvians and other people" (Ķeniņš (Kings) u.c. 1995, p. 15). Actually, this research realized the idea of Latvian society as a multi community multicultural formation.

In the 2000s some changes in the interpretation of the concept "ethnic minority" occurred. At that time the idea that affiliation of the non-Latvians with the ethnic minorities itself did not guarantee at all the unity of the Latvian nation, appeared more often. Therefore, the state programme of integration of Latvian society put an emphasis exactly on integration as a way of connection between the Latvians and all the non-Latvians, both Latvian citizens and non-citizens. If in the 1990s it was considered that the threat to the integrity of the Latvian nation in the form of bi-community

state comes from the Russian-speaking community, whose representatives are not Latvian citizens, in the 2000s this reason is seen in the existence of a self-sufficient Russian-speaking sphere (informational, value). (Kruks, Šulmane 2002, p.7, Tabuns 2006, p.56, Vasariņa 2007, p.324) Some scientists regard this self-sufficient Russian-speaking sphere in the Latvian state as a „de facto bi-community state". (Dreifelds 2007) It is clear that self-sufficiency of the Russian-speaking sphere in the social life in Latvia is reproduced not only by the non-citizens but by Latvian citizens as well. Sociologists note the fact of ethnic mobilization among the non-Latvians by both Latvian citizens and non-citizens. (Šņitņikovs 2007, p.10) Apparently in this case the concepts "ethnic minority" and "ethnic group" can be used as synonyms. That is why the methodological meaning of the concept "ethnic minority" was being relatively diminished in order to emphasize the idea of a nation and a national state integrity.

It seems possible to mention different sociological research of the 2000s in which the problems of Latvian society integration in fact led to a complete identification of the concepts "ethnic group" and "ethnic minority". Thus, I.Šūpule in the article „Ethnic relationships and acculturation processes in Latvia: people's attitudes towards different acculturation strategies" writes about the importance, for the research respondents, of keeping the ethnic culture. The Latvians as well as the Russians act as the respondents no matter whether they are Latvian citizens or non-citizens (Šūpule 2007, p. 36). In the research project «Cultures. Young People. Media» the target audience are visitors to many Russian-speaking Internet portals, "Latvian other nationals whose first language is not Latvian" (Tabuns 2006, p. 4).

The 2000s, for Latvian sociologists who analyse social position and role of ethnic groups and minorities in the society, is the time of approbation of new ideas connected with a deeper analysis of the real variety of Latvian ethnic life. For instance, in the analysis of the position of the Russian ethnic minority, the concept of a large language community which forms its own ethnopolitical discourse, in addition to that of the Latvian language community, is becoming more frequently recognised (Kļave 2007, p.19). "Ethnic minority" status itself does not guarantee preservation of the ethnic culture and identity. N.Muižnieks and A.Tabuns believe that it is necessary to observe the social position of ethnic minorities by means of such a concept as «the ethnic equal guarantee». Within this context scientists find it important «to reconsider the concept of ethnic culture along with the traditional concept of culture including into it some modern means of

expression as well as the principle of cultural interaction» (Muižnieks, Tabuns 2007, pp.17, 51-52).

Under the circumstances of a relative re-evaluation of the concept "ethnic minority" in order to show the integration prospects of the Latvian nation, sociologists more often appeal to a wider context of ethnicity analysis – to the ideological analysis of the state ethnopolicy and to ideological foundations which exist in the social conscience. The most frequently used ideologies are liberalism, multiculturalism, and nationalism (Zepa B. 2007, p. 44; Vasariņa 2007, p.326). Sociologists pay attention to the specific character of Eastern Europe for which there is a typical formation of democratic nations both on the basis of the state and civil society as well as on ethnicity (Šņitņikovs 2007, pp.11-17).

In general it can be noted that at the modern stage of Latvian ethnosociological research, in the content analysis of the concept "ethnic minority" in particular, multicultural ideas of Latvian sociologists about multi-ethnic Latvian society are taking on more special significance.

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