

# **Manufacturing Enemy Images? Russian Media Portrayal of Latvia**

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# Introduction

Nils Muižnieks

According to sociological surveys, the inhabitants of Russia have long considered Latvia to be among the “least friendly” countries towards Russia.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Russian government has devoted an astonishing amount of energy to demonising Latvia in international organisations and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> As documented and analysed below, the Russian media has devoted significant attention to Latvia, much of it negative. Why has Latvia evoked such animosity? To what extent are the Russian media responsible for manufacturing an enemy image of Latvia?

At first glance, a combination of several factors would seem to explain negative media portrayal and perceptions of Latvia among many Russians. Latvia hosts a large Russian-speaking minority whose status has diminished significantly since independence. Latvia and its Baltic neighbours pose a systematic challenge to the official Russian understanding of history and core Soviet/Russian legitimising myths (e.g., regarding the “Great Patriotic War”). After independence, Latvia adopted a distinctly pro-Western foreign policy with a focus on accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

However, other countries also share these characteristics without evoking anywhere near the same degree of animosity from Russian officialdom, the Russian media, and the Russian public. Ukraine and the Central Asian countries, for example, also have large Russian-speaking minorities whose status has diminished significantly since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Poland has been just as active as Latvia and its Baltic neighbours, if not more so, in reminding the world of the darker episodes of Soviet history, especially during World War II. Latvia is but one of many post-communist countries neighbouring Russia to have joined NATO and the EU. If Latvia is not so different from many other neighbours of Russia, why has it merited pride of place among Russia’s enemies? This book seeks to answer that question.

The Russian government and the Russian media, which became increasingly beholden to the Russian government during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, have played a central role in creating Latvia’s image in Russia. Of course, the creation of Latvia’s image did not begin under Putin,

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Stephen White, “Russia and ‘Europe’: the public dimension,” in Roy Allison, Margot Light and Stephen White, eds., *Putin’s Russia and the Enlarged Europe* (London: Chatham House, 2006), 143.

<sup>2</sup> See Nils Muižnieks, “Russian Foreign Policy Towards ‘Compatriots’ in Latvia,” in Nils Muižnieks, ed., *Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and International Dimensions* (Rīga: University of Latvia Academic Publishers, 2006), 121-5.

or even under Yeltsin for that matter. Russians have long considered Latvia a “window to Europe,” one of the most Western parts of first, the Russian empire, then, the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Many Russians, particularly members of the elite, harbour a certain nostalgia for Latvia in general, and the Latvian seaside resort Jūrmala in particular. Along with Crimea on the Black Sea, Jūrmala was the prime vacation destination for the *nomenklatura* during the Soviet years. While the image of Latvia as “the West” and nostalgia about Jūrmala persist, these positive associations intermingle with and are often overshadowed by far more negative ones in contemporary Russian political and media discourse.

Insofar as most inhabitants of Russia have not been to Latvia personally and do not have relatives there, they acquire their information and get an impression about Latvia primarily from media discourse. Another source of information about Latvia, particularly among younger inhabitants of Russia, is teaching materials in Russian schools. This topic is not examined here, but is the subject of a new research project planned by the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI). This book examines how the media in Russia construct the image of Latvia – the topics covered, the discursive strategies employed, and the way in which Latvia is portrayed.

Thus far, Russian media portrayal of Latvia has received very little academic attention in both Russia and Latvia.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the research below is based almost solely on an investigation of primary source materials. The research team benefited from access to a unique source of information – a data base of Russian media materials mentioning Latvia and/or Latvians that the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs commissioned from a media monitoring company in Russia.<sup>5</sup> The data base covers press, radio, and television reports mentioning Latvia or Latvians. It is solely a text database, which means that images, often so crucial for understanding media portrayal, were not analysed. The data base contains materials covering the time period January 2002 through May 2005. Subsequent materials are available, but not in as comprehensive a fashion. Thus, the research team decided to focus only on the portrayal of Latvia for the period in which the full data base was available.

As the chronology at the end of the book suggests, January 2002 through May 2005 was a very eventful period in Latvia, Russia and in Latvian–Russian relations. On the Latvian side, it saw accession to the EU

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Roman Szporluk, ed., *The Influence of East Europe and the Soviet West on the USSR* (New York, Praeger, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> For a rare Russian analysis, see R.X. Simonyan, “Obraz stran Baltii v Rossiskikh SMI,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya* 2004, No. 6, pp. 98-106. For a Latvian analysis, see Mārtiņš Lācis, “Baltijas valstu tēli un ar tiem saistītie stereotipi Krievijas federācijas plašsaziņas līdzekļos” [“The Images of the Baltic States and Related Stereotypes in the Mass Media of the Russian Federation”], unpublished master’s thesis, University of Latvia Communications Department, 2003. For Russian media influence on Latvia, see Ainārs Lerhis, ed., *Outside Influence on the Ethnic Integration Process in Latvia* (Rīga: Centre for East European Political Studies, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> The company is called *Agenstvo monitoringa SMI WPS*. See its website at [www.wps.ru](http://www.wps.ru).

and NATO, as well as mass mobilisation of Russian-speakers against the education reform. On the Russian side, it saw the consolidation of Putin's power as president, moves to bring media and Russian "oligarchs" to heel, the onset of the Iraq War, as well as challenges to Russian influence posed by the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. In bilateral Latvian-Russian relations, the period was marked by a failed attempt to reach agreement on a border treaty, as well as controversy over the Latvian president's participation in events in Moscow commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II.

The Advanced Social and Political Research Institute at the University of Latvia assembled a team of young scholars from the departments of political science and communication studies to analyse the media materials. The methodologies used by the authors are broadly the same, combining elements of discourse analysis, sociology, and political analysis. As a first step towards making sense of the vast amount of empirical material in the data base, the team reviewed the evolution of topics concerning Latvia, and found that the materials could be divided into a number of categories: the situation of Russians, controversies over history, Latvian (in both the ethnic and territorial sense) culture and Russian culture in Latvia, Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO, and issues pertaining to the economy, including energy relations. However, in order to understand media portrayal of these topics during the period in review, some background analysis was necessary.

Thus, Part I begins with an analysis by Toms Rostoks of the evolution of relations between the Russian state authorities and the media. It is important to bear in mind that the media situation in Russia differs significantly from that in most Western countries, with Putin-era Russia witnessing increasing censorship and self-censorship, restrictions on access to information, direct and indirect state ownership of media outlets, and dangerous conditions for journalists to work in. As Edward Lucas has noted, in national television in particular, the official view became increasingly predominant during the Putin years, as "editors receive weekly or even daily instructions from the Kremlin on the 'line to take' on important stories."<sup>6</sup> As elaborated in subsequent chapters, the "line to take" on Latvia was generally a negative one.

As noted above, Latvia already had an image in Russia upon which media coverage from 2002 to 2005 could build. The next chapter by Kristīne Doroņenkova explores the key turning points in Latvian-Russian relations throughout the 1990s and compiles the available survey data in Russia about Latvia to provide a portrait of the legacy of the Yeltsin years regarding Latvia's image. As suggested by the evidence marshalled in this chapter, Latvia's foreign policy orientation was a critical element in placing Latvia, along with Estonia and Lithuania, on Russia's "enemy list."

Many of the stories about Latvia in the Russian media are written, recorded or filmed by journalists based in Latvia. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how these journalists work, Dmitrijs Petrenko and Solvita Denis interviewed a number of them about political interference in their

<sup>6</sup> Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 84.

work, their relations with Moscow-based editorial offices, and the role played by market, political and ideological factors. Insights from the interviews are presented in Chapter Three.

Subsequent chapters analyse in depth the core themes regarding Latvia that appear in the Russian media: the situation of Russian-speakers, controversies over history, Latvian culture, Latvian accession to the EU and NATO, and the Latvian economy. This analysis should provide a useful baseline for future studies analysing the evolution of Latvia's image in the Russian media. It could well be that Russian media portrayal of Latvia is beginning to change as this book goes to press. There is evidence that Russian media interest in Latvia is waning as other, more "problematic" Russian neighbours elicit greater interest. Moreover, after ratification of the Russian-Latvian border treaty in 2007, a certain warming in relations has taken place. As a consequence of this warming, new Russian ambassador to Latvia Alexander Veshnakov recently claimed that one of his tasks was to "enhance the positive perception of Latvia by inhabitants of Russia."<sup>7</sup> If the ambassador's stance has the Kremlin's backing, his possibilities of success are quite good, given Russian officialdom's influence in the media.

The materials in this book should prove of interest not only to students of Latvian-Russian relations, but also to those interested in Russian media policy and Russian foreign policy more broadly. Clearly, with increasing state control, the media in Russia have become an important tool for implementing both domestic and foreign policy. How this tool is used should be a matter of concern not only for the inhabitants of Russia, but for Russia's neighbours and partners in the region and beyond.

The project benefited greatly from the support of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which provided the research team with the media data base and start-up funding for the project. While grateful for the support, the authors would like to stress that the analysis and conclusions are solely their own and reflect in no way the official stance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Latvian government. At the same time, the team would not have embarked on such an ambitious project without financial support from the University of Latvia, which provided a research grant in 2007. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to the other members of the research team for excellent cooperation in bringing this project to fruition and to Ieva Zlemeta for indispensable administrative assistance.

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<sup>7</sup> N.A., "Vešņakovs vēlas vairot Krievijas iedzīvotāju pozitīvu uztveri par Latviju" [Veshnakov wants to enhance the positive perception about Latvia among Russia's inhabitants], *LETA*, 8 February 2008.

# Relations between the Media and the State in Russia

Toms Rostoks

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of relations between the media and the state in Russia since the Cold War, especially over the past 8 years. This time period covers the Putin presidency, during which media relations with the state changed considerably. At the same time, the database used for analysing Latvia's image in Russia's media in this project covers the time period from 2002 until mid-2005. The main focus in this chapter will be on radio, TV and the press. While the internet has been growing in importance during the past 10 years in Russia, its changing character and diversity make it difficult to draw any broader conclusions at this point. Moreover, internet sources are not included in the database used in this project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of the internet as a source of information has risen dramatically in Russia in the past 10 years, but there is little agreement among researchers as to how many Russians actually use the internet and whether this is a credible source of information. Available information indicates that in 2000 approximately 10 million Russians used the internet, but only 20% of them could be considered active users. Yelena Vartanova, "Media Structures: Changed and Unchanged," in Kaarle Nordenstreng, Yelena Vartanova and Ivan Zassoursky, (eds.) *Russian Media Challenge* (Helsinki: Kikimora Publications, 2001), 57-62. Research done by the Russian public opinion research centre VCIOM in 2006 indicates that 10% of Russians are using the internet for obtaining information, but its importance compared to other types of mass media is negligible. People mostly use the internet during working hours, and they do not look for information on the internet during weekends. Internet users are mostly young people who live in big cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. "Internet v Rossii," VCIOM, 2006 at <http://wciom.ru/files/06-07-12-Internet.doc>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007. That the internet is largely used by the younger generation of Russians indicates that its importance is on the rise, but most internet users think that the internet is not a reliable source of information. Only 13% of respondents indicated that they consider information on the internet trustworthy. "Publikatsii v SMI," VCIOM, 12.10.2006, at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3372.html>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007. Information about the actual number of internet users in Russia is controversial. A survey undertaken by the Russian public opinion research centre VCIOM about sources that Russians use for obtaining information about political events indicates that 29% of respondents have looked for information about politics on the internet, but only 13% were of an opinion that information that could be found on the internet was trustworthy. "Televidenie – glavnoe oruzhie izbiratel'nikh kampanii," *Press-vypusk*, No 657. VCIOM, 23.03.2007. at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/4248.html>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007. Recent research shows that the number of Russians going online has slowed down in 2007. See Paul Goble, "Growth Slowing in Last "Relatively Free" Sector of Russian Media – the Internet," 17.10.2007.



While regional media outlets are also significant players in Russia's media market, this chapter will focus upon national mass media. First, it is impossible to embrace the multiplicity of both national and regional media in Russia in a single chapter. Second, there are good reasons to believe that the national media are more important players with regard to portraying Latvian-Russian relations, because regional media are far more likely to be more concerned about national politics, while national media pay more attention to Russia's relations with its neighbours.

This chapter starts with an overview of the development of Russia's media system after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Subsequent sections discuss relations between the media and the state. The second section highlights the process through which the media became a valuable instrument for capturing political power. The third section describes the main problems that Russia's mass media have encountered over the past 10 years. Among these problems are ownership issues, possibilities for obtaining and distributing information related to politics, and the physical safety of journalists. Most experts are of the opinion that freedom of expression has worsened during the past 10 years, therefore the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of this process. At the end of the chapter, some implications for Latvia's image in Russian media are discussed.

## **The Media in Russia after the Collapse of the Soviet Union**

The media in every society perform certain functions, and the most important of these is mediation between society and those who are in power. Sarah Oates writes that there are several important questions with regard to the relationship between the media and the state. First, are people consumers or citizens? Second, do the media assume leadership in initiating discussions about politically significant issues or do they follow the lead of others? Third, do media create the impression that they can influence those who are in power or that they lack power? Fourth, do media try to expose those who are in power or provide help in concealing failures and imperfections? Fifth, are the media socially responsible?<sup>2</sup> There are also important questions to be asked about media ownership, but all these questions clearly point to the fact that the social and political context greatly influences the way the media perform their functions.

The media have attracted a lot of attention, not least because of the key role they played in Russia during the transition period and in the demise of the Soviet Union. However, media were not only the cause of change, they were also greatly affected by political, social and economic changes in Russia's society. In the Soviet Union the mass media were used to strengthen the impact of the ruling communist ideology and contribute to regime stability. Although the break-up of the Soviet Union brought significant changes to Russia's mass media, some continuity can also be observed. Yelena

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia* (Routledge, 2005), 4–5.

Vartanova writes that the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian media environments share two characteristics. First, in geographic terms Russia is the biggest country in the world, therefore it inevitably consists of several media markets. Of course, there are national TV and radio stations and newspapers, but there are also significant regional media outlets. Vartanova argues that regional newspapers do not even take Moscow newspapers seriously as rivals for local audiences.<sup>3</sup> Second, the density of Russia's population is very low and the transport infrastructure is underdeveloped, which means that linkages between Russia's regions are weak.<sup>4</sup> As a consequence, the situation in Russia's regions with regard to freedom of the press is very diverse.

However, Russia's media sector has also been characterised by significant change. Vartanova argues that there are three key trends of transformation. First, Russians have ceased to be a reading nation and have become a watching nation, primarily because of economic constraints.<sup>5</sup> In 1999 95% Russians watched television on a regular basis. Radio was the second most important source of information with 82% listeners, and 80% read newspapers and magazines.<sup>6</sup> The transition from a reading to a watching society was marked by several events that significantly affected circulation of Russia's newspapers. Ivan Zassoursky argues that the circulations of most newspapers and magazines fell by 10 times or more in 1992 and 1993.<sup>7</sup> The national press was affected more by the economic meltdown than the regional press. The collapse of the press distribution system also significantly contributed to falling press circulation. People disapproved of constant delays in press delivery, and this problem was especially acute in the most remote regions. What is more, people started to lose confidence in the media. During the first years of transition, the media had moral authority,<sup>8</sup> but this changed, and in 1999 only 13% of Russians trusted newspapers and magazines while 36% trusted television.<sup>9</sup>

The second important aspect of transformation is the change in the structure of the Russian press media market. This market was vertically

<sup>3</sup> Elena Vartanova, "Russia," in Mary Kelly, ed., *Media in Europe: The Euromedia Research Group* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 193.

<sup>4</sup> Vartanova, "Media Structures," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky, (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Oates refers to a survey that was conducted during the first half of the 1970s in Leningrad and argues that 75% of inhabitants of Leningrad were reading newspapers on a daily basis. Another 19% were reading newspapers several times a week, therefore it can be argued that an absolute majority of Russians were reading newspapers almost daily. It is hardly surprising that daily circulation of the biggest newspapers such as *Pravda* and *Izvestiya* reached several millions (*Pravda* – 11 million, *Izvestiya* – 7 million). Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Vartanova, "Media Structures," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Zassoursky, "Media and Power: Russia in the Nineties," in *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> In 1996 more than two thirds of Russians trusted the mass media.

<sup>9</sup> Vartanova, "Media Structures," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky, (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 25.

integrated in the Soviet Union, but in the years following the demise of the Soviet Union it has become horizontally integrated.<sup>10</sup> This means that the national press became less important, while the regional press gained importance because it provided Russians with information relevant for their regions.

The third important aspect of Russia's media transformation was the gradual introduction of advertising that allowed the media to attract additional financing in order to compensate for falling circulation. It should be noted that advertising has two main functions. First, it is one of the most important sources of financing for mass media. Second, advertising provides information about prices of goods and services. Most Russians experienced economic difficulties after the break-up of the Soviet Union, therefore the media performed a crucial function of providing people with information that helped them to get by. It is hardly a surprise that some of the newspapers with high circulations were advertising newspapers that were distributed free of charge. Introduction of advertising stimulated segmentation of the media because many newspapers and magazines had to find their specific audience and organise advertising accordingly.<sup>11</sup>

The media had to learn how to function according to market principles, and the transformation from being state outlets to normal business projects was inevitable. Functioning according to the rules of the market meant that revenues depended on broader economic trends. Thus, the economic crisis of 1998 was a particular financial blow for the media, because people bought fewer newspapers and magazines, and there was less advertising. Other significant transformations in Russia's media sector include growing regionalisation. It should be noted that not all of Russia's media have become part of the market economy because many are supported by regional authorities or controlled by government-owned industries.<sup>12</sup>

## Mass Media and Political Power after the Demise of the Soviet Union

The media were an important part of Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* policy. When the reforms went beyond the government's control, the media provided society with communication channels and reliable information. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s, Boris Yeltsin was supported by Russia's media because, as Ivan Zassoursky writes, the authorities simply registered the media during the first wave of privatisations. This allowed the media to escape their former owners, because property rights were not even mentioned in the Soviet media law of 1991. Of course, the state retained property rights over several important media outlets, but

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> There is a widespread belief in Russian society that "he who pays orders the music." Many think that this is inevitable and therefore take into account the possibility that information in the media may be biased in favour of those who control or own them. See Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, 44-65.

even these enjoyed considerable freedom both in terms of expression and management.<sup>13</sup> Russia's media highly valued their newly gained freedom and supported Yeltsin and his team, as it was believed that freedom of the press wouldn't survive under the rule of the Communist Party.<sup>14</sup>

Relations between the media and those with political power remained controversial throughout the 1990s, because most media supported Boris Yeltsin when his position became weaker against the communists. At the same time, the media were also aware of possible illegal actions during the privatisation of Russia's large formerly state-owned enterprises. Journalists turned away from Boris Yeltsin in 1994 when the first Chechen war started, but the media again supported the president in 1996 when his re-election was endangered.

It would be a mistake to argue that all Russia's mass media are politicised, as those in power have been more interested in exerting control over the large national TV and radio stations. National radio stations and newspapers that featured news and analytical programmes also experienced attempts at control by the state, but there were many smaller media outlets that were not politically important, and these could operate rather freely.<sup>15</sup> However, the distinction between political and commercial media outlets doesn't coincide with the divide between national and regional media.

Growing politicisation of Russia's mass media took place in the mid-1990s. The development of independent media was considered to be one of the greatest successes of Russia's political transformation up to the presidential election of 1996, when the media made a tactical retreat.<sup>16</sup> Support from the media turned out to be decisive in Boris Yeltsin's victory over Gennady Zyuganov, and experts saw the elections as the turning point towards state control, because they clearly highlighted the importance of the media in influencing public opinion.<sup>17</sup> In the beginning of 1996 Yeltsin's popularity was at its lowest, and it seemed that only a miracle could get him re-elected for a second four year term. Despite media support for Yeltsin, "reformers" suffered a major defeat in the parliamentary elections of 1995. Yeltsin's re-election became possible because of the joint support from state television, Vladimir Gusinsky's media holding Media-Most (television channel NTV)<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In fact, freedom of Russia's mass media was actively supported by the state because a large part of the newly independent media continued to receive support from the state even after 1992 when prices were liberalised.

<sup>14</sup> Zassoursky, "Media and Power," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Laura Belin, "Political Bias and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media," in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 323.

<sup>17</sup> Osmo Kuusi, Hannah Smith, Paula Tiihonen, (eds.), *Russia 2017: Three Scenarios* (Helsinki, 2007), 72.

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that Gusinsky's TV channel NTV very harshly criticised the Chechen war and didn't support Boris Yeltsin from the very beginning. Only later, when it became clear that negative publicity could ruin Yeltsin's campaign, did NTV start to support Yeltsin.

and Boris Berezovsky's media holding MNVK (television channel TV6). These elections clearly demonstrated that with the help from mass media it is possible to gain and to keep political power even in seemingly hopeless situations. Television emerged as the prime instrument for gaining and keeping political power. In the presidential elections of 1996 opposition candidates were not allowed to express their opinion and the mass media were flooded with positive news about the economic situation in the country.<sup>19</sup> In other words, a virtual reality was created with the help of the media that did not match the true situation in the country.

Most experts on Russian politics would probably agree that it was very profitable to support those who were in political power in the 1990s. Of course, this applies only to owners of media holdings and not to journalists, who gradually became puppets used to fight off business or political opponents. Owners of media holdings benefited enormously from supporting Boris Yeltsin in 1996. For example, Vladimir Gusinsky's television channel NTV was allowed to pay a discount fee for transmission services, and a few months later it received permission to broadcast around-the-clock on the fourth channel where previously it could broadcast only a few hours daily.<sup>20</sup> Vladimir Gusinsky sold 30% of his shares in NTV to *Gazprom* for about USD 120 million, which was enough to establish a satellite TV network. Gusinsky also managed to acquire the oil company *Sibneft*.<sup>21</sup> This suggests that the drawing together of the media and political power was caused by economic rather than ideological considerations.

The media were used not only to fight political battles, but also to fight off economic competitors. As a result of the presidential elections of 1996, political and economic groupings increasingly tried to gain control over the media. It became a well-known principle that unless you had your own media holding, you were doomed to lose out to your economic and political competitors. This resulted in a situation where at the end of the 1990s there were approximately 10 media holdings in Russia, but only four were able to influence political outcomes at the federal level. These holdings were: state owned and controlled television channels, Vladimir Gusinsky's Media-MOST holding with its crown jewel NTV, Boris Berezovsky's MNVK with TV-6, Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov's media holding with TV-Centre. These were the most influential media holdings when Vladimir Putin was chosen by Boris Yeltsin as prime minister in summer 1999.

## Russia's Media after 1999

After the 1996 presidential elections, businessmen rushed to invest in the media, but these investments were politically rather than economically motivated, as large portions of Russia's mass media were not profitable. The

<sup>19</sup> Zassoursky, "Media and Power," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky, (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 78-79.

<sup>20</sup> Andrei Raskin, "Television: Medium to Elect the President," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky, (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 93-94.

<sup>21</sup> Zassoursky, "Media and Power," in *Ibid.*, 79.

independence of Russia's mass media was further eroded in 1998 when the economic crisis dealt a heavy blow to the last independent media outlets. The advertising market crashed, and the last independent media went on sale. When Vladimir Putin became the prime minister in 1999 the situation in Russia's mass media sector was such that almost all significant media outlets were controlled by influential economic and political actors. The next presidential elections were scheduled for the year 2000, and ownership over mass media was acquired with an aim to use the media as an instrument during the election campaign. The only thing that was unclear was which media holding was going to support which candidate.

It should be noted that Russia's mass media at the end of the 1990s were characterised by a growing convergence of opinions, but this did not imply that there would be no serious competition before the elections. Vladimir Putin became Russia's prime minister in August 1999 replacing Sergey Stepashin. Yeltsin emphasised that he saw Putin as the next president. On the same day Putin agreed to run for president in the forthcoming elections. At that time a very strong coalition was formed between Yuri Luzhkov and Yevgeny Primakov, and Putin had to face this coalition if he was to become president. Primakov was nominated as the candidate for president by the coalition of political forces *Fatherland – All Russia*. This coalition was supported by regional leaders and several political groupings in Moscow. However, as Tom de Waal argues, it was evident that Primakov was not the best candidate for president because his appearance reminded Russian voters of the old communist leaders of the Soviet Union. As a result, it could have been difficult for him to obtain enough votes to become president.<sup>22</sup>

Putin's becoming a prime minister coincided with terrorist attacks on several cities in Russia and the war in Dagestan. It was decided later in August to start the second Chechen war. This decision paid off for Putin, whose popularity skyrocketed during the first weeks of war.<sup>23</sup> The reason behind his popularity was his uncompromising stance with regard to the Chechen issue. A new political party – *Unity* – was formed before the parliamentary elections that were scheduled for December 1999. This political party was supported by both Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin and it came in second in the December elections, losing only to the Communist Party and gaining considerably more seats than *Fatherland – All Russia*.

Boris Yeltsin caught many by a surprise when he resigned on New Year's Eve and announced Vladimir Putin as the new president of Russia. The time was right for this move because Putin enjoyed overwhelming

<sup>22</sup> Tom De Waal, "Analysis: The problems facing Primakov," BBC, 18.08.1999, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/423914.stm>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007.

<sup>23</sup> In 1995 the government lost the battle over shaping the coverage of the first Chechnya war. As Laura Belin argues, the coverage of the second war was qualitatively different. Due to rampant crime and kidnappings Russia's journalistic community had become alienated. As a consequence, coverage of Russia's military action in Chechnya was neutral or positive in most media outlets. See Laura Belin, "Political Bias and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media," 323.

popular support. For example Andrei Raiskin writes that Putin's popularity rose from 14% at the beginning of October up to 41% in November (percentage of people who were ready to vote for Putin in presidential elections). His popularity rose further to 56% in January 2000. Besides, approximately 70% supported his policy with regard to Chechnya, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  believed that he was going to become the next president of Russia.<sup>24</sup> Yeltsin's resignation allowed the organisation of presidential elections in March (originally elections were scheduled for June), before Putin's popularity had started to decrease and before other candidates had been able to organise meaningful election campaigns. The timing for Yeltsin's resignation was very symbolic, because it took place at the turn of millennia and because an older politician (Yeltsin) handed over power to a younger politician (Putin), thus symbolising the beginning of a new political era. As most Russians spend New Year's Eve at home watching television, almost the whole country watched the transfer of power.

The media played a significant role in the presidential elections of 2000. Initially, various media holdings could not agree on a single candidate, but later the media supported Vladimir Putin and reflected upon his personality and activities, thus showing loyalty to the would-be president of Russia. At this moment one might ask: how could this happen? Political and economic groups prepared for presidential elections, and there were other candidates to be considered. Why did Putin win so easily? First, he was supported by state television. Second, "administrative resources" were used against private media. At the beginning of 2000, the media in Russia still felt the consequences of the 1998 economic crisis, which means that they were vulnerable to external pressure. Media outlets such as Gusinsky's NTV that took the liberty of criticising Vladimir Putin over his conduct of the Chechen war were punished, and Gusinsky himself started to feel pressure from the authorities. Third, soon after parliamentary elections in December 1999 political groupings agreed on a candidate – Vladimir Putin – that was most likely to become the next president and therefore tried to establish productive and mutually beneficial relations with him. This mood was soon picked up by the media that supported Putin and let other candidates build support on their own. The Russian press was more impartial in the run-up to the presidential elections, but there were also many publications where Vladimir Putin was portrayed in a favourable light. The press also informed the public about his biography and his friends and colleagues at school, university and place of work.<sup>25</sup>

Russia's election law stipulates that presidential candidates are granted free advertising time on national television. Usually advertising for agitation was granted during the day, when a majority of television watchers were still at work. Besides, Putin never used free advertising time, because his activities and opinions were highlighted by the media in prime time. Vladimir Putin also did not participate in television debates with other candidates, thus creating an image of himself as a candidate who stands above

<sup>24</sup> Andrei Raiskin, "Television: Medium to Elect the President," in Nordenstreng, Vartanova, Zassoursky, (eds.), *Russian Media Challenge*, 102, 107.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 99.

quarrels with other candidates. His image was strengthened by opinions of political commentators that appeared in the media. Thus, the media played an important role in Russia's presidential election of 2000, though Putin's elevation to the office of president was facilitated by strong popular support and a successful election campaign.

Though most media supported Putin during the election campaign in spring 2000, there was some evidence that dissent and criticism would not be tolerated. Though the freedom of the press decreased in Russia since 2000, it would be a mistake to conclude that they were free and independent before Putin, because this was clearly not the case in the 1990s. There are three models of how relations between mass media and political and economic groupings can develop. First, the media can be independent from political and economic groupings. In this model, the media ensure their financial existence by attracting advertisement and (in the case of the press) by increasing the circulation of newspapers and magazines. Second, media are owned by big businesses and are used as instruments to fight political and economic battles. It was typical for Russia that owners of media holdings had developed close relations with political groupings who were in power. As a consequence, the media were used as a tool for improving their owners' relations with the Kremlin by providing the public with information that showed the president and his supporters in a favourable light. Third, the state takes control over the media from their owners because the media are thought to be too important not to be controlled directly by the political authorities. The transition from the second to the third model was caused in Russia by fear that powerful economic interests could turn against those in power. The second model was characteristic for Russia at the end of the 1990s, but Russia moved towards the third model after the year 2000 when Vladimir Putin was elected Russia's president. This transition from the second model to the third was also marked by a considerable decrease in the freedom of press.<sup>26</sup>

The freedom of press has been curtailed in all aspects during the past 8 years. The following sections will examine three important aspects of freedom of the press. First, issues of ownership will be examined, with the primary attention devoted to highlighting the process by which the television channels NTV and TV-6 came under state control. Second, issues of access to information will be discussed. Third, the situation with regard to the physical security of journalists will be investigated.

## Ownership Issues

The most important mass media in Russia are those television channels that broadcast on a national scale. Media holdings whose owners were Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky were not politically neutral, but were also sufficiently powerful to be able to criticise political authorities. Both NTV and TV6 did not go openly against Vladimir Putin during

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., the sections on Russia in the Annual Reports of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights for 1999-2007.



the 2000 presidential elections, but it was widely known that at least NTV offered viewers different and critical information about Russian politics. Thus, it was natural that Vladimir Gusinsky with his media holding Media-MOST was the first to be punished. Although formally NTV and TV6 were closed down legally, there is good reason to believe that the main goal was to silence TV stations that were criticising political authorities.<sup>27</sup>

On the surface, the reason for closing down NTV was purely commercial, as the Media-MOST company owed more than USD 200 million to Russian oil and gas giant *Gazprom*, and in March 2000 *Gazprom* demanded reimbursement for a USD 211 million loan that it had repaid to a bank on behalf of Media-MOST.<sup>28</sup> Charges were brought against the owner of Media-MOST Vladimir Gusinsky and *Gazprom* tried to take over the Media-MOST holding company. Gusinsky was arrested and later released when he agreed to sell enough Media-MOST shares so that *Gazprom* would be in a position to control NTV. Representatives from the ministry of press and information were also present during negotiations between Gusinsky and *Gazprom*, which has been interpreted as a clear sign that these representatives were primarily interested in securing state control over Media-MOST. This has been confirmed by Gusinsky himself after he fled Russia, when he accused Russian authorities for pressing him to sign an agreement with *Gazprom*. This information has been strongly rejected by the Russian authorities. Although accusations against Gusinsky were lifted after he agreed to sign the agreement with *Gazprom*, charges were again brought against him when he provided the press with information about the circumstances under which the agreement with *Gazprom* was signed.<sup>29</sup>

The role of *Gazprom* in the Gusinsky and NTV affair was rather ironic because this company invested in NTV and Media-MOST in 1996 to secure itself against potential attacks and accusations by the Russian authorities. *Gazprom* also guaranteed several large loans that NTV needed. When the authorities wanted to collect higher taxes from *Gazprom* in 1998, NTV was used to defend its patron. Relations between *Gazprom* and NTV became worse only in February 2000, when after a meeting with Vladimir Putin, the company's representative criticised NTV's reports from the second Chechen war. A month later in March, *Gazprom* demanded that NTV repay its debt. NTV and Gusinsky were not able to comply, and *Gazprom* gained control over NTV.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> It has been noted by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights that on the federal level the situation with regard to freedom of the press started to worsen in 2000, while in Russia's regions the situation started to deteriorate three years earlier in 1997. See International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights "Russia," in *IHF Annual Report 2001*, 260. This is confirmed by Belin, "Political Bias and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media," in Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics*, 340.

<sup>28</sup> Belin, "Political Bias and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media," in Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics*, 335.

<sup>29</sup> See International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2002*, 266-267.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Belin, "Ten Ironies of the NTV Saga," *RFE/RL Russia Report*, 1.11. 2001.

LUKoil, an oil company, played a crucial role in the events that led to the elimination of TV-6. In the case of NTV, it could be argued that *Gazprom* defended its legitimate economic interests, while liquidation of TV-6 was against the economic interests of its minority shareholder LUKoil-Garant which owned 15% of TV-6 shares. LUKoil-Garant employed a very rarely used paragraph of the joint-stock company law that allowed minority shareholders to defend their interests by liquidating companies whose liabilities exceed assets for two years in a row or longer. The ruling of the court in favour of LUKoil-Garant was not logical, because after several years of losses TV-6 became profitable in 2001 when Yevgeni Kiselev together with other former employees of NTV started to work for TV-6. Surprisingly, the court managed to produce the ruling very quickly, though court proceedings often drag on for years. The court's quick decision played into the hands of LUKoil-Garant and the authorities, as longer proceedings would have allowed TV-6 to provide a positive balance sheet for 2001. It should also be noted that minority shareholders usually try to sell their shares if they are dissatisfied with how a company works, but LUKoil-Garant did not attempt to sell its shares in TV-6. Boris Berezovsky even made a public statement about his readiness to buy out shares that were owned by LUKoil-Garant, but this company did not respond to the offer.<sup>31</sup> In short, there is enough evidence to argue that the goal of the whole process was to silence TV-6 rather than to seek economic profitability.

It should also be noted that it would have been possible to use the 35th paragraph of the law on joint-stock companies to do away with more than half of all Russian companies, but this option was seldom utilised. Finally, in January 2002 the court ruled in favour of liquidating TV-6. Soon after the court's ruling, the management of TV-6 reached a deal with the ministry of press and information that it would voluntarily give up its licence and would later try to establish a new company without Boris Berezovsky's participation, and this company would participate in a tender that would be announced later. Several days later the management of TV-6 stated that this deal was imposed on them, and then the authorities suspended TV-6 broadcasts a few hours later.<sup>32</sup>

Part of the management and employees of TV-6 then participated in the competition for a new license. They managed to obtain the licence after forming a partnership with another bidder Medium-Socium. The new television channel TV Spektrum (TVS) started broadcasting on 1 June 2002, but it was not as popular as NTV and later TV-6. A year later in June 2003 TVS was liquidated and replaced by a sports channel. The Ministry of Press and Information explained this decision as caused by the inability of TVS to generate profits and by the necessity to defend the public interest. Sceptical voices were of an opinion that this was the last step towards ensuring full state control over national television channels.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Larua Belin, "Will TV-6 Go Out With a Bang or a Whimper?," *RFE/RL Russia Report*, 1.31. 2001.

<sup>32</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2003*.

<sup>33</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2004*, 324-326.

Of course, the events surrounding NTV, TV-6 and TVS do not provide a full picture of the changes that took place in Russia after 2000, as many other cases when the Russian authorities have silenced the mass media have been registered. It would be an exaggeration to argue that the NTV and TV-6 television channels were politically neutral and that they always honestly informed society about Russian politics. Although journalists who worked on NTV were considered to be more professional and objective than journalists working on national television channels, there have been cases when NTV and TV-6 have put particular political and economic interests ahead of the necessity to provide society with honest and reliable information.<sup>34</sup>

Today the situation is that the state remains the main actor in the television business.<sup>35</sup> The three largest television stations are partially or fully state-owned. The state owns the Rossiya channel (RTR), it has a majority of shares in Channel One (ORT) and through Gazprom, and it owns the private channel NTV. Moreover, "Gazprom Media" owns the NTV+ satellite channel, the TNT regional TV channel, the *Ekho Moskvy* radio channel, the *Izvestiya* and *Kommersant*' newspapers, and *Itogi*, a weekly current affairs magazine. The state also owns the *Radio Mayak* and *Radio Rossiya* radio stations. Similarly, the news agencies RIA and ITAR-TASS are owned by the state."<sup>36</sup>

## Accessibility of Information

Restricted accessibility of information is a major problem in Russia in the context of freedom of the press. The previous section dealt with infringements on the freedom of the press that were caused by the fact that the authorities took control of private television channels. However, freedom of the press can also be curbed in more subtle ways, for example, by restricting access to information.

Basically, there are three ways in which the authorities can use access to information as an instrument for controlling journalists. First, authorities can hide information from journalists, thereby making their work difficult. Second, authorities can use access to information as a tool that can be played selectively against some reporters who are too critical. The authorities can grant access to information to some reporters, while restricting it to others. The first group would be afraid to criticise the authorities for fear of losing their access to information, while the second group would become less critical in order to gain access to information. Third, the government can deter journalists from writing about sensitive issues by blurring the line between confidential and permissible information.

The latter strategy was widely used throughout the 1990s when the Russian army tried to silence journalists who wrote about the impact of

<sup>34</sup> For example, before the presidential elections of 1996, NTV concealed information about Boris Yeltsin's poor health condition. Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> Elena Vartanova, "Russia," in Mary Kelly (ed.) *Media in Europe: The Euromedia Research Group* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 196.

<sup>36</sup> Kuusi, Smith and Tiihonen, (eds.), *Russia 2017*, 72-73.

Russian military forces on the environment. For example, in 1997 charges of treason were brought against Grigory Pasko who had written an article for a Japanese newspaper about how the Russian army disposed of nuclear waste, thus causing environmental damage.<sup>37</sup> Usually court proceedings in these cases dragged on for a long time, and suspects had to spend a considerable amount of time in jail. The case of Grigory Pasko was only one among several such cases. What is more, citizens of other countries have been accused of spying, and have been sentenced to jail in Russia.

The issue of Chechnya has proved to be especially sensitive, and many journalists have been denied access to Chechnya during the second Chechen war. Journalists have been detained and humiliated. For example, Anna Politkovskaya arrived in Chechnya in 2001 in order to collect evidence about human rights abuses in the region. She was detained and later released, but after another visit to Chechnya she started to receive threats and was forced to leave the country for a while.<sup>38</sup>

Many journalists started to practice self-censorship after the NordOst hostage crisis in October 2002. The media collected information about the hostage crisis and published interviews with people who participated in liberating the hostages.<sup>39</sup> The authorities disapproved of such initiatives and issued warnings that journalists should use only those bits of information that were approved by the authorities. As a result, journalists increasingly practiced self-censorship.<sup>40</sup> The effects of the NordOst hostage crisis were evident in September 2004 during the Beslan hostage crisis, when journalists' reports were very cautious. Journalists were forced to coordinate information for publishing with the authorities. Many journalists were detained and their materials were confiscated. Such actions were also directed against foreign journalists. Several journalists under suspicious circumstances were denied access to Beslan, while Anna Politkovskaya was poisoned during the flight to Beslan.<sup>41</sup>

Freedom of the press in Russia deteriorated further in 2005 and 2006. For the first time since 1991, Freedom House assessed the situation in Russia with regard to freedom of the press as "not free" because legislation was passed that allowed the authorities to curb the activities

<sup>37</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 1999*, 215-217.

<sup>38</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2002*, 266-267.

<sup>39</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2003*.

<sup>40</sup> The decision to practice self-censorship was prompted not only by restricted access to information, but also by threats to journalists' physical security - more than 100 attacks on journalists related to their professional activities were registered in 2003. It is very difficult to verify that attacks are directly related to a journalist's professional activities, but there are many cases when such linkages were evident. See International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2004*, 324-326.

<sup>41</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2005*, 347-349.

of non-governmental organisations (especially those that received financial assistance from abroad). Moreover, Anna Politkovskaya, who was one of the most vocal critics of the Kremlin, was murdered in 2006.<sup>42</sup> National television channels were already under state control, and the press was cautious in dealing with politically sensitive issues. Live broadcasts almost disappeared from national television channels, and this measure allowed authorities to increase control over the content of news reports. Reporters were denied access to those regions where armed forces conducted anti-terrorism operations. Foreign reporters were denied Russian visas. Government authorities frequently refused to provide journalists with information, and there were cases when journalists were not allowed to enter government buildings. There were also cases when journalists were not issued press cards. Publishing houses sometimes refused to print independent newspapers, and occasionally the media were caught by surprise by sudden increases of office rent.<sup>43</sup>

Negative trends have been balanced by a few positive developments when the authorities have backed journalists after having taken inappropriate decisions. For example, in November 2002 Vladimir Putin decided not to approve amendments to the law on the mass media and the fight against terrorism. These amendments would have seriously endangered journalists' ability to cover anti-terrorism operations. However, some experts were of an opinion that Putin's move was staged in order to show him as a democratic leader who backs journalists and is ready to go against other forces who want to curb freedom of the press.<sup>44</sup> There have been other positive examples when federal authorities have curbed illegal restrictions that have been imposed upon journalists in Russia's regions,<sup>45</sup> but on the whole it would be fair to conclude that journalists' access to information deteriorated after 2000.

## The Physical Security of Journalists

Infringement of the physical security of journalists is the last and ultimate test of freedom of the press. Russia has been known as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for practicing journalism because of the numerous attacks on journalists. Several journalists have been murdered, and concerns have been expressed that these murders have been related to their professional activities. It should be noted that available data on infringements on physical security of reporters are rather controversial and inconsistent, but, nevertheless, experts are of an opinion that regional and federal authorities have been involved in some of the murders.

<sup>42</sup> Freedom House, "Map of Freedom 2007. Country Report Russia," available at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&country=7258&year=2007>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007.

<sup>43</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2006*. "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2007*, 140-141.

<sup>44</sup> Laura Belin, "Putin Vetoes Media Restrictions," *RFE/RL Russia Report*, 2:40, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2000*, 311-313.

For example, nine journalists were murdered in the first eight months of 1998, and six out of nine murdered reporters were investigating cases of corruption in government institutions and private banks.<sup>46</sup> 11 journalists were murdered in 1999, while 19 journalists died in Russia in 2002. These statistics clearly indicate that Russia was one of the most unfavourable countries in the world for journalists.<sup>47</sup> It would be a mistake to conclude that all cases were related to the professional activities of reporters, but at least some cases were clearly contract killings because journalists had received threats and were under constant pressure.<sup>48</sup> 10 journalists were murdered in 2003, and at least 100 attacks on journalists were registered.<sup>49</sup> Other experts argue that the number of murdered journalists is much smaller. For example Sarah Oates argues that 29 journalists have been murdered in Russia since the break-up of the Soviet Union, and 11 of them died during the first presidency of Vladimir Putin.<sup>50</sup> In most cases journalists' deaths are related to the wars in Chechnya or can be regarded as contract killings.

Journalists have also been persecuted and attacked in subsequent years. One of the most well-known cases was the death of the editor-in-chief of *Forbes* magazine's Russian edition Paul Hlebnikov.<sup>51</sup> 6 journalists were murdered in 2005 and 3 in 2006. Although there is an overall tendency for the number of death cases to decrease, this cannot be interpreted as reflecting any improvement in journalists' working conditions. Rather, it is the result of journalists' decreasing ability to provide impartial and critical information to the public. The absence of cases when journalists have suffered because of their professional activities is an indicator of the disappearance of critical and investigative journalism in Russia. As this type of journalism has been on the decline, the number of attacks on journalists has also decreased.

## Conclusions

Freedom of the press (and other media) in Russia has been in continuous decline since the end of the 1990s. It would be a mistake to argue that the mass media have experienced true independence in Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union, but throughout the 1990s the possibilities for critical and investigative journalism were greater than they are today. The Russian media gained freedom from the state at the beginning of the 1990s, but they soon became an instrument in the hands of political and economic groupings, because it was difficult for the media to successfully adapt to the

<sup>46</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 1999*, 215-217.

<sup>47</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2000*, 311-313. "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2003*.

<sup>48</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2003*.

<sup>49</sup> International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, "Russia," *IHF Annual Report 2004*, 324-326.

<sup>50</sup> Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, 21.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

rapid economic and political transformations of Russian society. Financial weakness was the main reason the media could not exist without the help of either state or private owners.

Freedom of the press deteriorated after 2000, when Vladimir Putin became president. Since then power has become more centralised and federal and regional authorities have tightened their grip on the media. Various mechanisms have been used for establishing control over Russia's mass media, starting with law-suits – instrumental in establishing government control over Vladimir Gusinsky's and Boris Berezovsky's media holdings – and ending with restricted access to information and physical attacks on journalists.

Of course, developments with regard to the media have not gone unnoticed by the Russian public, and therefore it is interesting to examine public opinion and interpretations of what has been happening with Russia's media. Public opinion surveys reveal that people think the media have sufficient opportunity to be critical, and the political opposition can freely express its opinion on television. VCIOM survey data show that 59% of those surveyed think that the political opposition is allowed to express its opinion on the most important national television channels. People are even more positive when it comes to evaluating opportunities to voice one's opinion in the press – two thirds think that the political opposition can express its opinion rather freely.<sup>52</sup> 62% of those surveyed are of an opinion that censorship is required,<sup>53</sup> and more than half pays more attention on TV to news programmes.<sup>54</sup> People trust the president, but do not trust political parties. Sometimes attitudes are rather controversial, but it seems that Russians like the idea of a strong and powerful Russia, and there is a widespread belief that achieving this requires censorship. Interestingly, Russians are aware that state-controlled television channels are not telling the whole truth. Nevertheless they have confidence in these television channels precisely because they are creating an image of Russia that Russians would like to see, instead of showing Russia with all its real problems and shortcomings. People are tired of bad news, and therefore they prefer to watch television programmes with good news that raise their national self-esteem. It is better to watch good news that do not correspond with reality than bad news that remind Russians of persistent social problems.<sup>55</sup>

The freedom of the press and the possibility to choose alternative sources of information are on the decline in Russia, therefore the mass media cannot function as a supporting mechanism for civil society. The authorities continue to control the flow of information, therefore the media cannot

<sup>52</sup> VCIOM, "Pust' govoryat'!", 16.08.2006., available at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3015.html>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007.

<sup>53</sup> VCIOM, "Nuzhna li tsenzura v sredstvakh massovoy informatsii?" 30.08.2006, available at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3107.html>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007.

<sup>54</sup> VCIOM, "Kakie novosti nam nuzhny?," 07.09.2006., available at <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/3102.html>. Last accessed on 25.07.2007.

<sup>55</sup> Oates, *Television, Democracy and Elections in Russia*, 17.

provide the public with impartial and critical information. Legislation is applied selectively, and there is a wide array of instruments available for punishing media outlets that do not want to yield to government control. Journalists are easy to intimidate not least because of the high crime rate, the omnipresent corruption and the willingness of authorities to silence critical voices in the mass media. However, it would be a mistake to assume that only corrupt and repressive political authorities and an indifferent society are the root of the problem, because to some extent journalists themselves are to blame for the sad situation with regard to the freedom of press. Low ethical and professional standards are part of the problem, because journalists themselves are of an opinion that there can be no independent mass media, that mass media are part of the power structure and that a multitude of opinions is a sign of weakness of those in power.<sup>56</sup> Therefore many journalists support façade democracy and order because they fear chaos and deep political divisions.

### **Implications for Latvia's Image in the Russian Media**

What are the implications for Latvia of the changed relations between the state and the media in Russia? What effect do these changes have on Latvia's image in the Russian media? To answer these questions, one has to examine who reports from Latvia and how. This issue is analysed in greater depth by Dmitrijs Petrenko and Solvita Denis in another chapter in this volume, so only the most important aspects are mentioned here. The context in which Latvia's image in the Russian mass media is created is that most important television and radio channels as well as newspapers and the main news agency ITAR-TASS are either owned or controlled by the state. This makes it possible for the state to develop a certain image of Latvia in the Russian media.

The actual process through which Latvia's image is created looks somewhat different. Most news reports for the main Russian television stations are made by Latvian journalists. Relations between the Russian media and journalists in Latvia can be characterised in terms of supply and demand. For example, NATO should be depicted as an unfriendly alliance or shouldn't be mentioned at all. Also, demand exists to report on events on certain dates of historic importance, such as March 16, May 9, etc. However, even taking into account existing demand, not all news reports will be accepted even if they are in line with state policy towards Latvia. It seems that it has become more difficult in recent years to sell news reports from Latvia to the Russian media. Demand has decreased, and currently supply is stronger than demand.

It would be wrong to assume that certain rules of the game are imposed upon Latvian journalists working for the Russian news market. There are several reasons for this assumption. First, local journalists often have friendly relations with professionals representing the demand side in

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.



Russia. Second, there is a certain degree of convergence of opinions between Latvian journalists (especially Russian-speaking journalists) and the Russian media. Latvian journalists working for the Russian market assume that it is their mission to improve the status of Russian-speakers in Latvia. Third, on the Latvian side there is a pronounced economic interest to sell news reports to the Russian market, therefore journalists and producers are more interested in selling news reports than in not being censored or “guided” by the demand side. Occasionally, news reports are somewhat modified after having been submitted to the Russian side, but such “adjustments” are accepted, as both sides know the rules of the game, have good personal relations, think alike and tend to perceive their relations in economic rather than political terms.

# Latvia's Image in Russia: The Legacy of the 1990s

Kristīne Doroņenkova

## The Baltic Challenge to Post-Soviet Integration and to Soviet/Russian Myths

The 1990s witnessed a dramatic change in Russia's position, both internationally and domestically. The former superpower rapidly lost its economic and military position, and the standard of living of the majority of its citizens dropped swiftly. A serious additional blow to Russian dignity was the unwillingness of the Baltic States to remain protectorates of Russia. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania demonstrated no interest in joining in the creation of the first post-Soviet integration project under Russian tutelage, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>1</sup> Instead, from the onset of independence, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania demonstrated a strong pro-Western foreign policy course. The unwillingness of the Baltic States to join the CIS and their pro-Western foreign policy had a crucial influence on both official Russia's and the Russian public's attitude towards the Baltic States, which in turn, set the parameters for future bilateral relations.

In a survey conducted three years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a significant percentage of Russian respondents believed that the Baltic States gained the most from the dissolution of the Soviet Union (21% named Latvia, 19% Lithuania, and 17% Estonia).<sup>2</sup> At the same time only 4% of respondents in Russia considered it in the interests of Russia to reunite with Latvia (one percent more than for Lithuania and Estonia, which drew 3% each). In comparison, reunion with both Ukraine and Belarus drew a positive response from 24% of respondents, whereas nearly 23% said that Russia should not unite with any of the former Soviet republics.<sup>3</sup> Two years later, 61% of Russians regretted the disintegration of the Soviet Union. For these 61%, the independent course of the Baltic States was clearly not a sign of friendship. Another year later only 5% of Russians said that they

<sup>1</sup> Officially, Russia never attempted to impose CIS membership on the Baltic countries. See Dmitri Trenin, *Baltic Chance. The Baltic States, Russia, and the West in Emerging Greater Europe* (Moscow: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 1997), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Svetlana Migdisova and Elena Petrenko, "Po mneniyu respondentov, bol'she vsego vygrali ot rasspadu SSSR strany Baltii," 29 July 1994, available at [www.bdfom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19941805](http://www.bdfom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19941805).

<sup>3</sup> Public poll conducted in June 1994 by the fund "Obshchestvennoe mnenie," available at [www.bdfom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19941292](http://www.bdfom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19941292).

would like to see Latvia (5% said Lithuania and 3% Estonia)<sup>4</sup> as part of the Russia-Belarus Union that was considered a step towards revival of the Soviet Union.

The Baltic States posed a challenge not only to Russia's attempts to reintegrate the former Soviet space, but also to official Russian historiography and core legitimising Soviet/Russian myths.<sup>5</sup> While victory over Nazi Germany in the "Great Patriotic War" remains a foundational myth, the Baltic States undermined this myth by pointing out that the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression treaty leading to the occupation of the Baltic. Influenced by the Soviet propaganda machine throughout most of their lives, many Russian citizens had never heard about the occupation and continued to believe the official line that the Soviet Union had "liberated" the Baltic States, which joined the Soviet Union "voluntarily." Thus, according to an opinion poll carried out in 2005, 36% of respondents believed that absorption of Latvia into Soviet Union in June 1940 was Latvia's decision, while an equal number believed that it was a forced Soviet occupation.<sup>6</sup>

Independence notwithstanding, the Baltic States have traditionally been seen in Russia as "a space in the middle – between the CIS and the countries of the old Warsaw Bloc." They are neither considered part of the CIS nor full-fledged countries, like, for example, Poland. The Baltic States are largely seen as a non-integrated part of the post-Soviet space.<sup>7</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to say that many Russians consider the Baltic States to have been a part of the country since the eighteenth century, rather than since 1940 (and then 1944).<sup>8</sup> A negative Russian response to the independent course adopted by the Baltic States was, then, logical and flowed from historical perceptions of the region, as well as the challenge the Baltic governments posed to Russian assumptions about the inevitable reintegration of the post-Soviet space and foundational regime myths.

## The First Years of Independence: 1991-1997

Russia's very first foreign policy paper adopted at the end of 1992, the "Foreign Policy Conception of the Russian Federation," defined the so-called "near abroad," including the Baltic States, as a traditional sphere of

<sup>4</sup> Anna Petrova, Svetlana Klimova, "Khotyat-li rossiyane vosstanovleniya SSSR," 26 April 1997, available at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/border/latviya/of19972502>.

<sup>5</sup> See David Mendeloff, "Causes and Consequences of Historical Amnesia: the Annexation of the Baltic States in Post-Soviet Russian Popular History and Political Memory," in Kenneth Christie and Robert Cribb, eds., *Historical Injustice and Democratic Transition in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe: Ghosts at the Table of Democracy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 79-117.

<sup>6</sup> Vserossiskii tsentr izucheniya obchestvennogo mneniya, "Rossiya i Latvija: rossiyane luchshe otsenivayut proshloe nashikh otnoshenii, zhiteli Latvii – nastoyashchee i budushchee," *Press-vypusk* No. 202, May 3, 2005, available at [wciom.ru/tematicheskii-arkhiv/single/1234.html](http://wciom.ru/tematicheskii-arkhiv/single/1234.html)

<sup>7</sup> A. Foldin, "In Russia, Private Doesn't Mean Independent," *Transition*, Vol. 4, No. 5, October 1997, 90-92.

<sup>8</sup> Trenin, *Baltic Chance*, 14.

Russian influence, a space in which it must not lose that influence.<sup>9</sup> While Russian officials ceased using the term “near abroad” in the latter half of the 1990s, the policy of seeking to maintain influence in neighbouring post-Soviet countries was consistently followed. Despite the mild rhetoric of then Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev (who even recognised the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States in 1940), the 1992 strategy envisaging a special role for Russia in the Baltic countries remained a high priority; in Russia itself, Kozyrev was widely criticised for ignoring the Baltic issue in the country’s foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

Latvian relations with Russia in the first part of the 1990s were complicated by an inheritance from Soviet times – the presence of Russian troops and military installations in Latvia until August 1994 (the Skrunda early warning radar station in Western Latvia was operational until 1998). Latvia’s uncompromising position on the necessity of withdrawing Russian troops and closing all Russian military facilities also raised additional tensions. However, due to international pressure, the troops were withdrawn and the facilities were shut down, but as was to be expected, this added to the tension with Russia. It was also the time when the issue of the Russian language and Russian minorities was first raised by Russia, though maybe not as vocally as several years later.<sup>11</sup>

As Žaneta Ozoliņa argues, the two years that followed the withdrawal were overshadowed by the military and political ambitions of Russia in Latvia. It was not until 1995-1996 that economic interests gained precedence in Russia’s policy towards Latvia and the other Baltic States.<sup>12</sup> As subsequent events would demonstrate, however, Russia never pursued its economic interests in isolation from broader political goals in the Baltic States.

In the mid-1990s, the possible membership of the Baltic States in NATO entered the international political agenda, and Russia demonstrated strong reservations and disapproval. One of the major themes of the “The Main Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation” adopted on 2 November 1993 said that Russia might use military force in the event of an expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the military security interests of the Russian Federation.<sup>13</sup> In 1996 President Boris Yeltsin

<sup>9</sup> Aivars Stranga, “Russia and the Security of the Baltic States: 1991-1996,” in Atis Lejiņš and Daina Bleiere (ed.), *The Baltic States. Search for Security* (Rīga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 143.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145.

<sup>11</sup> On the link between the troop withdrawal and the minority issue, see Sven Gunnar Simonsen, “Compatriot Games: Explaining the ‘Diaspora Linkage’ in Russia’s Military Withdrawal from the Baltic States,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 5, 2001, 771-791.

<sup>12</sup> Žaneta Ozoliņa, “Crisis Prevention or Intervention: Latvia’s Response to the Proposed Russian Security Guarantees,” in Eric K. Stern and Dan Hansen (eds.), *Crisis Management in a Transitional Society: The Latvian Experience* (Stockholm: Forsvaghogskolan, 2000), 191.

<sup>13</sup> Draft Russian Military Doctrine, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/991009-draft-doctrine.htm>.

sent a letter to his American counterpart warning the US not to include the Baltic States in the expansion of NATO.<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the core issue from Russia's perspective was NATO enlargement; other issues contributing to the tensions and rhetorical warfare that existed between the Baltic States and Russia from 1995 to the beginning of 1997 were secondary in importance.<sup>15</sup>

The Baltic bid to join NATO evoked a new policy response from Russia. In 1997, Russia developed a long-term strategy in regard to the Baltic States. Though the document did not introduce any radically new elements, it aimed to create a buffer zone in which neutral Baltic States would remain outside NATO. In the context of the new strategy, in autumn 1997 Russia tabled two initiatives, namely Russian Security Guarantees and a Pact for Regional Security and Stability.<sup>16</sup> All three Baltic States rejected the Russian initiatives outright. What irritated Russia more than the rejection was perhaps the fact that in January 1998 Latvia (as well as Estonia and Lithuania) signed a Partnership Charter with the United States.

At the same time, Russian think-tanks also took a more active role in analysing the prevailing state of affairs regarding Russia's relations vis-à-vis the Baltic States, rendering advice on possible models for future development. In autumn 1997 two reports on Russia's Baltic Policy were prepared. Sergey Karaganov's Council on Foreign Policy recommended a combination of sharp pressure (on Latvia and Estonia) with a more effective use of the Russian-speaking community in both countries in pursuit of Russian goals.<sup>17</sup> The second report by Dmitry Trenin recommended toning down the rhetoric over NATO expansion and offering the Baltic States a security model outside the alliance while supporting EU membership as well as signing of border agreements without linking them to the situation of the "Russian-speaking populace" in Latvia and Estonia. Clearly, both initiatives were launched as a reaction to increasing cooperation between Latvia (and the other Baltic States) with the EU and NATO.

While Russia focussed increasingly on the NATO issue, in the mid-1990s it also regularly began to link the further development of relations with the issue of the "Russian-speaking" minority. For example, a scheduled visit to Moscow by Prime Minister of Latvia Andris Šķēle was cancelled by the Russian side as Russia wanted political concessions on the issue of "Russian speakers" as a condition for approving the visit. The issue of the Russian-speaking minority was also brought up by Russia in connection to the issue of the unsolved border agreement between Latvia and Russia that

<sup>14</sup> Trenin, *Baltic Chance*, 29.

<sup>15</sup> Aivars Stranga, "Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995-beginning of 1997", in Atis Lejiņš and Žaneta Ozoliņa, (eds.), *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: the Baltic Perspective* (Rīga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs,) 192

<sup>16</sup> Ozoliņa, "Crisis Prevention or Intervention," in Stern and Hansen, (eds.), *Crisis Management in a Transitional Society*, 189.

<sup>17</sup> See I.Yu. Yurgen and S.A. Karaganov, eds., "Rossiya i Pribaltika (Analitichesky doklad)," subsequently republished in S.K. Oznobishchev and I.Yu. Yurgens, eds., *Rossiya – Baltiya: Doklady SVOP, Materialy konferentsii* (Moscow, 2001), 13-80.

was to be signed in 1997. In 1998, Russian concerns over NATO enlargement combined with the interminable minority issue and economic grievances to generate a full-fledged crisis.

### The "Crisis" of March 1998

In 1998, Russia's anti-Latvian propaganda reached its highest point. The political environment influencing relations between Latvia and Russia in early 1998 was charged by the fact that the Prime Minister of Latvia was a representative of the nationalist party "For Fatherland and Freedom Party/Latvian National Independence Movement." This party steadfastly opposed international pressure to liberalise Latvia's Citizenship Law, which was an ongoing irritant to Russia. Moreover, the Latvian government restricted the participation of Russian companies like *Gazprom*, *Lukoil*, and *Yukos* in the privatisation of such Latvian companies as *Ventspils Nafta* and *Latvijas Gāze*, at the same time increasing tariffs for Russia's transit of oil through the Latvian port of Ventspils.<sup>18</sup>

On 2 March 1998, a daily Russian language newspaper in Latvia *Panaroma Latvii* called for an unauthorised picket in the centre of Rīga the following day to protest poor socio-economic conditions. While all pensioners, regardless of ethnicity, lived in deprivation at the time, the readers of the newspaper, and thus, the protesters who went out on the streets of Rīga on 3 March 1998 were primarily Russian-speakers. Poorly trained in crowd control, the police were caught off guard by several thousand pensioners who blocked a major thoroughfare. Police dispersed the crowd using excessive force, attracting a negative reaction in Russia's media without precedent.

Scenes of policemen violently dispersing elderly protesters were broadcast throughout Russia, and the incident was actively employed by Russia's politicians to create and further develop negative sentiments towards Latvia. The results of an opinion poll held on 18 March 1998 showed that only 14% of respondents were not aware of the events of 3 March 1998.<sup>19</sup> Events in Rīga attracted the attention of 83% of respondents, 84% of which supported the reaction of Russia's politicians and only 7% objected. Immediately after the demonstration, the media in Russia widely discussed the possibility of applying economic sanctions against Latvia. Nevertheless, considerably fewer respondents expressed their support for radical steps – 53%, while 22% objected.<sup>20</sup>

After the events in March 1998, a number of surveys were conducted in Russia in connection with treatment of ethnic minorities in Latvia and the Russian reaction thereto. Though many Russian politicians called for a boycott of Latvian goods to protest alleged discrimination against minorities,

<sup>18</sup> Daina Bleiere and Aivars Stranga, "The Latvian Russian Crisis of 1998," in Stern and Hansen, (eds.), *Crisis Management in a Transitional Society*, 218.

<sup>19</sup> Public poll carried out by the fund "Obshchestvennoe mnenie" on 18 March 1998, available at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/border/latviya/t8033811>.

<sup>20</sup> Anna Petrova, "Sobytiya v Rige ne bezrazlichny Rossiyanam," 26 March 1998, available at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19981204>.

49% of survey respondents in Russia gave a positive answer to the question: “will you purchase goods if they appear to be of Latvian origin,” while 35% gave a negative answer, and 16% could not provide a definite answer.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, 42% of respondents thought that a boycott of Latvia’s goods should be applied as one of the measures to exert pressure on Latvia, 41% responded that it should not be done.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, Russia’s respondents in general agreed that some kind of pressure on Latvia “to defend the interests of the Russian-speaking population” should be employed – 75% were in favour and only 15% were against.<sup>23</sup>

Interestingly, alongside questions on human rights, the survey of March 1998 asked questions on the perceived economic situation of minorities. To the question: “in which former Soviet Union republic does the Russian-speaking population live worse, poorer than in Russia,” Latvia topped the list with 19% of respondents claiming that Russian-speaking minorities in Latvia were worse off than Russians in Russia, while only 6% thought they lived better in Latvia. To compare, the figures for Estonia were: 12% thought minorities in Estonia were worse off than in Russia, with 7% rendering an opposite view. Latvia also took first place as the country where the rights of the Russian-speaking population were thought to be suppressed in comparison to the rights of the ethnic majority with 46% concurring, leaving Lithuania (40%) and Estonia (32%) considerably behind.<sup>24</sup> Remarkably, Lithuania, with its relatively small portion of Russian-speakers, was second on the list, 8 points ahead of Estonia. The three Baltic States together create a separate group, since the fourth country in this list was Kazakhstan, with just 8%. The results of this particular poll show how uninformed Russian respondents were about their “compatriots” outside Russia.

Less than two weeks after the dispersal of the pensioners’ demonstration, Russia seized on another event – the annual commemorative procession of veterans from the Latvian Legion on 16 March – to tar Latvia as a country where “fascism was being reborn.” While some Latvians joined the Latvian Legion voluntarily to fight against the Soviet army under Nazi Germany from 1943-1945, many more were conscripted. For several years in a row in the mid-1990s, veterans had commemorated their fallen comrades each year on March 16, the day in 1944 when the two Latvian Legion divisions fought side by side. Until 1998, Russia’s media had largely ignored the handful of veterans who, after a church service, walked through town to lay flowers at the Freedom monument in downtown Rīga. In the fraught atmosphere of March 1998, the event provided additional ammunition to those in Russia disposed to see Latvia not only as an oppressor of their countrymen, but as a country reviving the mantle of the Nazi regime which had caused so much suffering in the Soviet Union.

<sup>21</sup> Public poll carried out on 22 April 1998 by the fund “Obshchestvennoe mnenie,” available at <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/t8034924>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/t8034923>

<sup>23</sup> Public poll held on 22 April 1998 by the fund “Obshchestvennoe mnenie,” available at [bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/t8034922](http://bd.fom.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/t8034922).

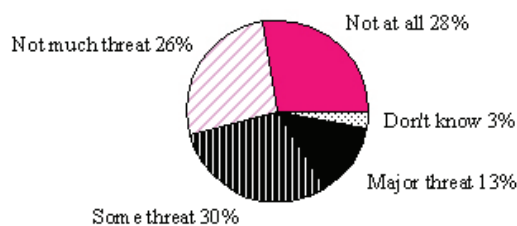
<sup>24</sup> Public poll held on 21 March 1998 by the fund “Obshchestvennoe mnenie,” available at [bd.om.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19981404](http://bd.om.ru/report/cat/frontier/countries/latviya/of19981404).

While Latvia was a convenient target for Russian official and public enmity in the late 1990s, it is interesting to note that Lithuania was also regularly considered by the Russian public one of the least friendly countries. This is despite the lack of a significant Russian minority or symbolic events such as Latvia's March 16 processions. In hindsight, it is clear that Lithuania's relations with Russia were not significantly better than Latvia's or Estonia's. It should be added that Lithuania was the first former Soviet Union republic that signed a border agreement with Russia, in October 1997.<sup>25</sup> However, the absence of controversy around local Russian-speakers and the ability to reach early agreement on the border issue has not been reflected in any more positive attitudes in Russia towards Lithuania. This suggests that the common Western foreign policy course of the three Baltic States and their common challenge to Russian founding myths trumped local minority issues in importance in affecting Russian perceptions of the three Baltic countries.

## NATO Enlargement

From the mid to the latter part of the 1990s some authors predicted a serious worsening of relations between Russia and the West if NATO expansion would include the Baltic States.<sup>26</sup> However, no notable change for the worse occurred before and immediately after NATO enlargement. Moreover, survey results belied the assumption that the Russian public perceived NATO membership of the Baltic States in an unambiguously negative manner. A survey conducted approximately a year before the Baltic States joined NATO demonstrated that more than half of the respondents did not perceive any threat from such an alliance and only 13% regarded it as a major threat (see graph below).

*Q. What would your attitude be if the Baltic countries joined NATO? Would such an alliance present any threat to the security of this country?*



Source: New Russia Barometer XI, 12-26 June 2003, N=1601

According to another survey conducted shortly after NATO enlargement, 11% of Russians viewed NATO with the Baltic as members positively,

<sup>25</sup> Aivars Stranga, "Baltic-Russian Relations: 1997," in *The First Round Enlargements – Implications for Baltic Security*, 2(19)/3(20), University of Latvia, 1999, 162.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g., Trenin, *Baltic Chance*, 10.



while 36% were indifferent and 40% were negative.<sup>27</sup> However, the varying formulation of the questions in these surveys makes it difficult to make direct comparisons and draw definitive conclusions.

Russian attitudes to the European Union have traditionally been more positive than towards NATO. According to the results of opinion polls conducted between January 2003 and June 2007, the share of those with positive attitudes towards the EU generally hovered in the 60-70% range.<sup>28</sup> The attitude of Russians toward the integration of the Baltic States into the EU has always been more positive in comparison to membership in NATO. As can be seen in the table below, this more positive stance was probably linked to benefits Russians themselves hoped to receive – being able to buy more European goods and to work in European countries. Thus, one can surmise that negative attitudes towards both NATO and EU expansion were not so much a concern of the average Russian, but rather an issue for Russia's political elite.

*Q. In the next few years, many of Russia's neighbours, such as Poland and the Baltic states, are likely to join the European Union. What effect do you think this will have on:*

	Positive	No effect (Percent)	Negative
Being able to buy European goods in Russia	42	41	17
Russians being able to get work in a European country	38	43	19
Russia's economy as a whole	23	46	31
Russia's military strength	18	47	35

Source: New Russia Barometer X, 17 June-3 July 2001, N=2000

## Trends in Russian Public Opinion towards Latvia

While the Russian public has generally harboured positive attitudes towards the United States, Western Europe and the European Union, these positive views have not been extended to include Latvia and the other Baltic States. A poll conducted by the Levada Centre in 2000 showed that 48% of respondents thought that partnership with the countries of Western Europe was in their interest, while 39% thought the same regarding the USA. However, only 9% of the respondents thought that partnership with the Baltic States corresponded to their interests. The New Russia Barometer of 2003 showed that Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia take the last position in the list of countries with which Russian respondents want closer ties.

<sup>27</sup> The Public Opinion Foundation Database, Nation-wide home interviews conducted April 10-11 2004 in 100 residencies in 44 regions with a sample size of 1500 respondents.

<sup>28</sup> August 2006 was an exception – only 17% were positive and 69% said it was difficult to say.

What is more, since the early to mid-1990s, Latvia has been seen as one of the least friendly countries by the Russian public. In the mid-1990s, Estonia and Latvia interchanged positions a few times as the main 'enemies'. For example, in 1996 after the Latvian parliament adopted a declaration concerning the occupation of Latvia in 1940 and a statement of support for Chechnya, Estonia gave up its leading position to Latvia as the key enemy in surveys.<sup>29</sup> Traditionally, a more negative attitude toward Latvia can be observed among people of older generations, particularly pensioners, while students and young people with a higher education tend to have a neutral or more positive attitude.

Latvia's position has improved since 2005, when the border agreement failed. On the other hand, the president of Latvia was the only leader from the Baltic States to attend the 60th anniversary of the end of the WWII, which is without an exaggeration a 'holy' day in Russia. Thus, 61% of respondents assessed negatively the refusal of the Lithuanian and Estonian presidents to take part in the celebration.<sup>30</sup> But Latvian participation did not help to improve Latvia's image in the eyes of Russian respondents – 49% of them still named Latvia as the main enemy of Russia, with Lithuania in second place with 42%, followed by Georgia with 38% and Estonia with 32%.

The situation changed somewhat in 2006 after Russia's conflict with Georgia, and again in spring 2007 with the events in Estonia. While 28% of Russian respondents named Estonia as the main enemy in 2006, in May 2007 the figure had risen to 60%! Latvia is no longer the primary enemy, but it still ranks in the top 10. In May 2007 Latvia was named by 36% as the least friendly – 10% less than a year before. Now, Latvia is grouped together with countries such as Georgia (46%), Lithuania (32%), Ukraine (23%), Poland, the United States, Iran and Afghanistan.

Generally there is more negativism towards Latvia and bilateral relations among the Russian population than there is among the population in Latvia. A survey carried out in May 2005 in both Russia and Latvia showed that only 16% of Russia's respondents have positive emotions about Latvia, while 41% harbour negative ones. In Latvia the situation is quite different, where 50% of respondents had positive emotions when asked about Russia and only 20% negative. While 41% of respondents in Latvia believed in the possibility of positive changes in bilateral relations, only 13% of respondents in Russia shared this optimism. Negative prospects were foreseen by 14% in Latvia and 27% in Russia. It is worth noting here that respondents in both countries think that they are more interested in improving relations than the other side.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Stranga, "Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995-beginning of 1997," *Small States in a Turbulent Environment*, 201.

<sup>30</sup> "Rossiya i Latvija: rossiyane luchshe otsenivayut proshloye nashikh otnosheniy, zhiteli Latviyi – nastoyashchee i budushcheye," *Press-vypusk* Nr.202, May 3, 2005, Vserossisky tsentr izucheniya obshchestvennogo mneniya, wciom.ru/tematicheskii-arkhiv/single/1234.html.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition to the portrayal of Latvia by Russian politicians and media, one explanation for the persistence of negative attitudes towards the Baltic States is the lack of direct ties of family or friends between Russians in Russia with the population in the Baltic States. Only 7% have relatives or friends in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania, which is almost the same as in Western Europe (6%), whereas 32% have relatives or friends living in the CIS countries.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusions

The foregoing points to the following major interrelated conclusions:

1. The negative attitude to Latvia has been predominantly shaped during the very first years of independence as the country took a foreign policy course away from integration with Russia. This is supported by the fact that the attitude towards Lithuania has been very similar despite the absence of ostensible 'irritants,' such as a significant Russian-speaking minority and policy towards it.
2. This leads to the second conclusion, namely that all three Baltic States are generally a single unit in the perception of Russians and the level of awareness about conditions and policies in the Baltic States is too low to form an informed opinion.
3. In forming their opinion, Russian respondents are more oriented towards the past than the present and the future in assessing relations with former Soviet republics. A core dimension involves the general distance that has emerged over the preceding decade and a half.
4. The attitude towards NATO is still quite reserved, if not hostile, in Russia and the perception of the public to a large extent follows the official line. As a result, the image of Latvia (and that of the other Baltic States) is shaped by the desire to join NATO as early as the mid 1990s (less by the desire to join the EU) instead of aligning with Russia in some sort of institutionalised cooperative arrangement.
5. The issue of the Russian-speaking minority and official portrayals of its "plight" have affected the tenor of Latvian-Russian relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, it is only in conjunction with other factors that the minority issue became a contributing factor towards negative public attitudes towards Latvia.

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<sup>32</sup> New Russia Barometer IX, 12-26 June 2003.

## The Editorial Policy of Russia's Media and Journalists in Latvia

Dmitrijs Petrenko and Solvita Denis

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the editorial policy of Russia's media, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with seven journalists who create reports for Russia's media, including the largest TV stations, newspapers and the largest news agency ITAR-TASS.<sup>1</sup> Most of these journalists are permanent residents of Latvia and Latvian citizens; their primary link to Russia is working for a Russian media outlet. Each of the interviewed journalists regularly creates material for Russia's media, ranging from several reports a month to more than 20 per month.

The interviewed journalists perceive their work in the Russian media as a business. Some of them are regular journalists, for example, representing the Latvian or Baltic office of a media outlet (Baltic First Channel, RTR). Others produce reports on an *ad hoc* basis or work as independent producers selling their materials to several Russian media outlets (e.g., the TV company Alter-A). Regardless of the form of cooperation, almost all the journalists stress that they have an interest in getting as many orders as possible for preparing materials about Latvia. For some, this is an issue of earnings, for others – the justification for the long-term existence of a branch office in the region:

*It is our earnings. We are ready for any newsworthy occasion to send materials to Moscow. (J1)*

*I know that I need to send as many clips as possible! It is not like at ORT, where there was a permanent correspondent – if they approved the topic, fine, if not – even better, you can go have a smoke. I need to sell. That is why I send, for example, five topics – two weak ones, so that they definitely take the rest. (J2)*

Almost all the journalists stress the importance of informal contacts. Relations with employers are friendly, permitting “better understanding” at work:

*With some, relations are no more than business-like, but with others they are rather friendly. (J3)*

<sup>1</sup> The journalists are Natālija Ābola (Television Company Alter-A, which has produced clips for the First Baltic Channel, NTV, Ren TV, TVC, and TVS), Danuta Dembovska (*Vremya novostei*), Igor Dmitreyev (production of clips for NTV, Ren TV, TVC, TVS), Abik Elkin (*Moskovsky komsomolets*), Nil Ushakov (ITAR-TASS, also radio reports), Natal'ya Vasil'yeva (First Baltic Channel), and Ekaterina Zorina (RTR). In the text, the journalists have been made anonymous and are referred to merely as J1 to J7, which does not accord with their alphabetical order. They were all interviewed in December 2007.

*Relations develop simply – we exchange e-mails, call each other. We got to know each other personally only a year or two after I started working, when I went to Moscow. (J4)*

*Relations with the editors have always been very good. We go to them to Moscow, talk, have a drink, and play billiards. (J2)*

*With the editors from the internal correspondents' net we have already got drunk and sung together. As a result, they order significantly more materials from us. (J1)*

Certain journalists also speak of “patriotism” with regard to their media:

*A certain patriotism exists with regard to one's channel. You are proud that you work there, try to stress it in every possible way. (J 2)*

Cooperation with Russia's media develops in line with similar principles. Based as they are in Latvia, the journalists follow events and inform their editors in Moscow. The journalists stress that, most of the time, the offer to create a report comes at their initiative. They offer topics for materials on average two to three times a week. There are also cases when the editors themselves call to Rīga and order a report. However, most journalists are already accustomed to the demand for topics, which is why they stress that they are ready to follow events in a timely fashion and “anticipate demand”:

*There are topics which come from above. But knowing the turf, you can even plan such materials in advance. (J2)*

*For example, I know what might interest my employer; moreover, I often try to act in such a way that my proposition “anticipates demand.” (J4)*

*Russians in Latvia – that is an eternal topic. But that is natural. For them, Latvia is also Russian land in some sense. That means that for people in Russia it is more interesting to find out about the life of their compatriots in small countries. (J5)*

In general, the journalists say that they do not perceive any patterns determining the intensity of demand. Most believe that it is dependent only on the course of events that the media must reflect. Another consideration is the international context, when events in other countries push Latvia off the agenda of Russia's media.

With regard to the thematic supply, the journalists acknowledge that there are certain themes about which they have always been more interested. First of all, journalists mention the problems of Russian-speakers in Latvia. The popularity of this subject can be explained in a variety of ways. Some think that this topic is part of Russian domestic policy:

*I suppose that the topic of the violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking minority was made a top topic in Russia and was used for domestic political needs by the efforts of television. Newspapers were also forced to satisfy demand for this topic. However, it should be recognised that the impression in Russia of what is going in Latvia in this sphere is rather confused. (J4)*

*A negative perception of Latvia predominates in Russia. Still the general number of materials with a negative evaluation is more... That is the government's policy in Russia, to play this card. Always it is necessary to show one's co-citizens that things are bad elsewhere as well. After all, the scale of problems in Latvia is nowhere near that in Russia. So many complaints from Russia at the European Court, it is of an order greater than in Latvia, it is calmer to live here. (J1)*

*Interest in the life of compatriots... Before the elections in Latvia, many Russian politicians came to make political PR for themselves against the backdrop of compatriots. (J6)*

The popularity of this topic is also linked with Russian foreign policy and not only in relation to the Baltic States:

*The policy of Russia is to support her "co-tribe"[soplemmeniki]. Of course! Co-citizens. As they say, compatriots abroad. Of course! That is in the interest of the government of Russia – that is understood! (J1)*

*Russia is most interested in herself and her interests. Theoretically, I suppose that Russian-Latvian relations can be seen as a kind of litmus test for relations with the EU and the USA. At least, "geopolitical" relations. (J4)*

In accordance with the experience of the journalists, among the topics in the greatest demand are all manner of negative information about the representatives of the Latvian state, as well as certain novelties in politics or economic life that Russia is planning to implement, but Latvia has already implemented.

The journalists claim that in preparing materials for Russia's media, they have become accustomed not only to the topics in demand, but also to the orientation of the content. One requirement the journalists mention is that the story be scandalous:

*The publication itself is yellow. A mass, scandalous publication. With an orientation towards the most varied inmates' [obyvatel'skie] news, scandalous, for example, the paedophile scandal, fights. They try to find the yellow tinge in everything. Political scandals as well, for example, the love exploits of some deputy. (J7)*

*They have little interest in political events in Latvia, in the parliament, unless they did not end up fighting, in a drunken debauchery and so forth. Insofar as fights are rare in Latvia... Most often, they take scandalous topics linked with violet [non-citizens] passports. It is an understandable thing that Russians have heard about non-citizens, but they don't understand what kind of documents they have, what kind of rights. (J7)*

*NTV and TVS are channels that have chosen a non-standard style, for them, the main thing was to have something unusual – scandals, a little yellowness, but based on facts. (J2)*

*I think that the First Channel and RTR have more specific demands. Because I see – I really like how Katya Zorina works, but I see the presentation, which the editors clearly demand of her – it moves you to tears.*

*That can be understood, it is a state channel. The state has its interests. But in any case, the material must be sharp – but artificial demands from the channels are not fewer! (J1)*

Another demand mentioned by the journalists is that the event has a global nature. If the event is too local, it can be difficult to understand for a Russian audience or without clear consequences.

One of the most important phases in the creation of media materials is a discussion with the editor about the possible content of the material. All the journalists interviewed acknowledged that, before they create a report (an article, a TV clip), they agree with the editor, who usually is based in Moscow, on the theme, but also on the possible content. But the respondents were not very willing to reveal the degree of detail which is agreed with editors:

*Discussion of the material takes place, but it mostly concerns the quality of the clips – that there should be as few bureaucrats as possible, and definitely the hero of the clip himself. We practically do not discuss sources, insofar as Moscow cannot orient well in local sources. (J6)*

*The materials are discussed until the filming. Not whom to interview, but how to make the clip more interesting. (J3)*

*The material was created by me. Sometimes they called and gave some advice. Said what they wanted to see, some kinds of emphases. But in general they do not know the local situation. (J7)*

*Usually, they arrange in advance the necessity of expert or politician's commentary inside the text. If I plan on doing a big interview, we discuss the questions. (J4)*

However, some also admit that editors request an emphasis on problems:

*Most often they correct the style, the language. Sometimes they ask to explain the situation or individual terms that Russians might not understand. If the text is agreed upon, ready, the edited clip can still be shortened. What is more, they cut without thinking. Thus, sometimes after they have shortened a clip, the whole idea behind it was practically lost! Sometimes we send an unedited clip when we have no time. They put it together in Moscow themselves – then strange things happen. Once, for example, they put in a small picture – in general it was not Latvia, though the story was on Latvia. (J6)*

*In the first place they look at the chronometer. And also at how sharply the problem is highlighted. (J3)*

*The text of the clip is also sent “for agreement.” Basically, they do lexical editing. It happens that the conclusion of the clips is not done the way we wrote it – sometimes they make it sharper – that happened with ORT. (J1)*

One of the journalists interviewed asserted that the editor in Moscow does not correct the text from an ideological point of view. However, in discussing the technical side of creating a clip, the journalist mentioned the contrary:

*Sometimes in Moscow they redo the sound on the clip done in Rīga, but only out of consideration of the bad quality of the recording. Not out of ideology. Ideology can be corrected in the process of writing the text. (J2)*

Journalists disagree on requirements or interference in determining the tone and mood of the reports. On the one hand, they assert that a concrete stance in the report “is not demanded.” At the same time, some link this issue with the policy of the media outlet in question:

*It is not said in hints, but in a completely direct text – we are not interested in the fate of a legionnaire. We simply will not consider such a position! Even the word “occupation” – we already use this term sometimes, even if in inverted commas. But this always evokes in Moscow editors a dumbfounded reaction – what occupation? What’s going on with you, are you crazy! (J2)*

*If it is a clip on protests in Russian schools, the context is always understood! (J7)*

*Definitely, there needs to be some kind of “pepper,” something negative. It is a scandal sheet. (J7)*

*The channel is Russian, Russian-speaking. And it is understood that I.. not that I am on the side of the left... But it is understood that I ... who is going to be placed in a less advantageous light! It depends on, the left – they are our guys, for the channel, for Russia and for Russians living there. And I am also a correspondent that is sent by them. And if I take the position of “Tēvzemei un brīvībai” [the nationalist right party], about whom one can find not a few things that are not bad! But I cannot illuminate this, because they will not take it and they will not understand it. You can develop a large clip on why all Russians should leave Latvia, and even if the clip has a logical basis, they will never take it! You could say that that is not politics. (J2)*

Journalists also indicate that the stance of the report may not correspond to their own stance:

*For example, legionnaire’s day. From a human point of view, you can understand anyone. People who were young, they burned their whole farm down, shot their family... And he ran off and joined the legion, and not the Red Army, which is logical, and went to fight the Russians. From that point of view, you can understand it. It would be interesting to make such a story, which Latvian media outlets do. And right they are to do so. But, naturally, Russian channels are not interested in any live fate, the fate of a person who was a legionnaire. No condescension. Serve it up concretely – in a black light, make fun of them. But there can be no empathy! (J2)*

Some journalists explain the political orientation of reports with reference to Russian foreign policy in general:

*If you remember the portrayal of the struggle against the education reform, then I harbour no illusions about the kind of reactions this topic evokes in the Russian [rossiskoi] milieu. In that case, the negative context*



*was given not so much by me, but by the natural and expected reaction of Russia to events in Latvia. I think that a Latvian politician who would tell about the benefits of the education reform on the pages of the Russian press, he could be crucified, for a Russian auditorium he would still be a negative hero. (J4)*

*Concerning NATO, the leitmotiv was the following – NATO is the image of evil and approaching the borders of Russia. And that was a topic. And flowing from that you had to present it, that NATO was evil and organising parties on our very doorstep!(J2)*

*In the opinion of Russians, Latvia is an enemy of Russia. That is the policy and my task is to illuminate that policy, not change it. If the policy changes, so will the selection of topics to be covered. For example, the warming up of Russian-Latvian relations now is gradually squeezing out the topic of the violation of the rights of the Russian-speaking population. (J4)*

Some explain the political orientation of the reports with their own stance, which often coincides with the editorial line:

*In principle we are in the opposition with our editorial policy and our convictions. We are in opposition to the ruling parties and to ethnic policy. That is self-understood! Though I think that at RTR there is a surplus of that. We don't have such requirements – it rather coincides with our oppositional position... About non-citizens, that is an eternal topic. And we make the clips absolutely honestly. (J1)*

Journalists explain that their job requires them to simplify matters, thereby creating a clear context:

*For understandable reasons, on Russian television a clip lasts a maximum of three minutes. What can be said in this time? You can't even in general terms tell about what people are protesting against. You can say: against the closing of Russian schools, although they are not closing the schools. (J7)*

With regard to the positions of the journalists and the political orientation of stories, several of the interviewed journalists saw it as their mission to not only inform inhabitants of Russia about events in Latvia, but to defend Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia by telling Russia about their life in Latvia:

*Of course, one of our functions is to defend Russians in Latvia. (J6)*

*For me, it is rather the defence of the interests of Russian-speakers and a demonstration of an oppositional attitude. After all, there is always something you can criticise... In this regard, we have in Latvia a certain lawlessness – not so much as in Russia, of course. But by conviction, I am in the opposition. And the main task is to show the authorities that they have to reckon with us! In general – to teach them democratic principles... That is a normal position for a person – to defend those who are being wronged. (J1)*

Certain journalists assert that they have no mission and see their job as a business and their goal is to sell their materials:

*In general I see no mission and do not want to speak about any mission! Because I earn money with this and that's all! I don't want to enlighten anyone, convince anyone, if you like it, watch it, if not – don't! (J2)*

Notwithstanding the fact that the journalists think they can affect Latvian-Russian relations, they indicate that journalism is not primarily a political instrument. While journalists mention their role in creating the image of the state, they note that they more often reflect this image, than create it themselves. One of the journalists also notes that affecting policy (also with regard to Russian-speakers) through the media is almost impossible:

*To defend the rights of Russian-speakers in Latvia by preparing publications for Russia is impossible. You can only bring to attention [aktualizirovat'] one topic or another. How this is used by politicians – Russian, Latvian or European – we cannot know, nor whether it benefits Russians in Latvia. (J4)*

At the same time, the journalists are convinced that in making orders for reports on Latvia, Russian media are oriented only towards an audience in Russia, even if television from Russia is popular in Latvia as well. They note that the Latvian audience is too small for the Russian media to consider it a target audience.

The journalists noticed that the Russian media has recently taken less interest in issues pertaining to Latvia's Russian-speakers (the interviews took place in December 2008). Some explain this with reference to fatigue about traditional topics on the part of the Russian media:

*They took the Occupation Museum with hurrahs in the first years. They said, oh my God, how could such a name even exist. And then they said – get out of here with your Occupation Museum! We are sick of it! (J2)*

Others link the flagging interest to changes in Latvia's ethnic policy:

*Lately there is less interest in the situation of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia – if you compare it with 2004. By the way, in Latvia itself the temperature of ethnic tension has also fallen, and that is an objective fact. (J4)*

*They took my clips because I know how to sell them. Now many have a problem – they don't want any materials. That is because they don't know how to sell them! In Russia, you can repackage many clips, but the problem is we don't know how to sell them! (J2)*

*Latvia is a small country. It is very difficult to sell interesting materials from here. For Russia many of them seem petty and unimportant. (J5)*

The journalists generally agree that interest in Latvia is waning. They explain this with reference to the fact that “more painful” issues, such as Belarus and Ukraine, are becoming more topical. Thus, indirectly, the journalists confirm that communication policy in relation to Latvia is dependent on Russia's foreign policy.

# How Does the Russian Community Live in Latvia?

Dmitrijs Petrenko

## Introduction

When covering events in Latvia, the Russian media often examine the situation of Russians in Latvia. Consumers of the media in Russia receive not only information on the life of Russians in Latvia, but also on their relations with the authorities in Latvia and with Latvians, the role Russians play in political life and the broader society, as well as the role of Russia in the life of Latvian Russians. Journalists address all these issues directly or indirectly in their reporting.

To understand how the Russian media treat these issues and craft the image of Latvia, several core themes were selected for analysis, and the analysis was divided chronologically by year. The first major theme is the increase in Latvian language instruction in minority schools in Latvia, a topic that entered media discourse under the labels of “Education reform” or “Reform-2004.” This was the single topic Russian journalists discussed most actively, as can be seen by the number of materials devoted to various aspects of the topic by month, which is shown in parentheses.

## 2003

- Preparation of protests against the reform and acts of protest (February – 18, April – 18, May – 20, June – 12, August – 22, September – 32, October – 18)
- Creation of the Headquarters for the Defence of Russian Schools (April – 30)
- Letter of schoolboy Yaroslav Karpelyuk to Vladimir Putin (July – 24)
- Acts of protest in Latvia and a picket in Strasbourg (September – 19)
- The visit of schoolchildren from Latvia to Vladimir Putin (October – 20)

## 2004

- Preparation of the reform and acts of protest (January – 12, February – 17, March – 14, June – 27, August – 45, September – 52)
- Discussion of the Law on Education in the Latvian parliament (January – 18)
- Russia expects a reaction from the European Union (March – 23)
- Signature campaign against the reform (June – 19)
- Schoolchildren from Latvia protesting in Strasbourg (June – 28)
- Hunger strike in protest against the reform (July – 25, August – 22)
- Discussion of the “results” of the reform (December – 28)

## 2005

- Preparation of new acts of protest (January – 15, February – 7, March – 13, August – 26, September – 21)
- The Constitutional court assesses the Law on Education (April – 10)
- Russian schoolchildren go to Tallinn (April – 15)

A second major theme was court proceedings against former Soviet military or KGB veterans and, in deportation cases, their families. This topic also occasioned extensive description of the life of Russians in Latvia. Journalists often generalised from these cases, claiming that the state's treatment of the person in question was representative of its treatment of Russians in Latvia overall. For the analysis, the following reports were selected:

## 2002

- The case “Slivenko against Latvia” (January – 18)
- The release of Mikhail Farbtukh (March – 15)
- The case of Podkolzina in the European Court of Human Rights (April – 20)
- The review of Kononov's case (May – 27)
- Larionov's case (September – 22, December – 29)
- The case “Sisoyevs against Latvia” (September – 38)

## 2003

- The sentencing of Kononov (September – 20, October – 29)
- The renewal of Larionov's case (September – 15)
- The case “Slivenko against Latvia” (October – 26, December – 30)
- The case “Vikulovs against Latvia” (October – 15)
- Nikolay Tess's case (November – 13)
- Farbtukh's case (December – 19)

## 2004

- Kononov's case (January – 18, May – 24, October – 22)
- The case “Vikulovs against Latvia” in the European Court of Human Rights (January – 12, March – 18)
- The case “Slivenko against Latvia” in the European Court of Human Rights (May – 27, July – 22, August – 30)
- Farbtukh's case in the European Court of Human Rights (December – 25)

## 2005

- The case “Sisoyevs against Latvia” (September – 13, November – 17)

A third major theme involves various reports concerning alleged discrimination against Russians in Latvia. These include official Russian statements about Latvia and the adoption of various laws in Latvia actively discussed by Russian journalists.

## 2002

- Closure of “Russian radio” (March – 12)
- Examination of discrimination towards Russians in Latvia in Russia’s State Duma (March – 18)
- Elections in Latvia (October – 27)
- The case of the eviction of the Shirshin family from their apartment (December – 23)

## 2003

- The days of Russian education are celebrated in Latvia (January – 8)
- The visit of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Rolf Ekeus (May – 22)
- Russia’s statement on discrimination against Russians in Latvia (July – 20)

## 2004

- The Russian Patriarch declines to visit Latvia (March – 9)
- Latvia does not want to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (April – 18, May – 12)
- Russia’s statement on the discrimination of Russians in Latvia (May – 15, November – 17)
- Russia’s statement on the revival of Nazism in Latvia (July – 6)
- The creation of the United Congress of Russian Communities of Latvia (September – 25)
- The visit of the OSCE Commissioner on National Minorities Rolf Ekeus (October – 23)

## 2005

- Municipal elections in Latvia (March – 32)
- Russia’s statement on the abuse of human rights in Latvia (April – 9)
- Latvian Security Police interrogate journalists from the newspaper “Chas”(April – 6)
- During the EU-Russia summit human rights in the Baltic States are discussed (May – 10)
- The Latvian parliament ratifies the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (May – 21, June – 19)
- Discussion on EU policy towards human rights issues in Latvia (June – 12)
- Restrictions on receiving citizenship (August – 10, November – 7, December – 7)
- Inspections of the State Language Centre (December – 12)

In analysing Russian media discourse about Russians in Latvia, the narrative below seeks to address three main questions: 1) how do the Russian mass media construct the status of Russians in Latvia through events in Latvia? 2) What impression of the life of Russians in Latvia is created by the Russian mass media? 3) What role do journalists allocate to Russia in the life of Latvia’s Russians?

## "A Dishonourable Status": Constructing the Russian Community

In analysing discourse on the Russian community in Latvia, it is first necessary to address several questions. How do the mass media construct this community? Which semiotic and discursive methods are used? What are the frames and borders of this community and its relations with the Latvian authorities and Latvians? Discourse on the community can provisionally be divided into three groups: 1) direct statements asserting the existence of a single, consolidated Russian community in Latvia; 2) claims about the uniqueness of the status of the community and its identity; and 3) construction of this community's power relations with the authorities.

### The Unity of the Community

In the discussions in the Russian mass media that refer to Russians in Latvia, journalists posit the existence of a united Russian community. The journalists perceive this community in terms of its ethnic origin, as well as its connection with Russia as an ethnic homeland. The journalists use various labels in designating this community – "Russian," "Russian-speaking," "Russian citizens (*Rossiyane*) in Latvia" and "our compatriots." As a rule, journalists refer to the fact that Russians are a national minority in Latvia, albeit quite a sizeable minority:

*To be serious, the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia is almost half of the population.<sup>1</sup>*

The role of ethnic origin in this discourse is not only to mark the borders of the community, but also to connect this community with Russia. Journalists often emphasise the importance of this connection:

*Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov took part in the opening ceremony of the forum. He emphasised that Russia will support its compatriots worldwide, paying particular attention to their situation in Latvia.<sup>2</sup>*

Sometimes this connection is formed both on the semiotic level (for example the representatives of the Russian community are designated "*Rossiyane*," "our former compatriots" or Russian minority schools are called "*Rossiskie*"). However more often this connection is supported through the creation of some common world where the perspectives and values of Russians in Latvia and in Russia are portrayed as identical. In this discourse we frequently see reference to the Soviet Union (for example, the label "Russian-speaking populace of the former Union") that carries the symbol of a common historical past and shared memories.

The unity and homogeneity of the Russian community is attained not only through delineating its ethnic borders or maintaining the importance

<sup>1</sup> M. Leontev, "Odnako," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 19.05.2004.

<sup>2</sup> V. Biryukov, "Vmeste s Rossiyej," *Trud*, 17.10.2003., p. 3.

of the bond with Russia, but also through reference to the practices that characterise Russians in Latvia as a community with clear ethnic boundaries. Allegations of discrimination against Russians are widespread. Such reports stress the psychological discomfort of life in Latvia:

*Financial problems and a decreasing social status led to the emergence of an inferiority complex among our former compatriots.*<sup>3</sup>

*Now there are approximately 40% Russian-speaking [people] in the republic. They have already survived the most difficult period – when in the heat of rallying passions they were forced out of Latvia (“Suitcase-station-Russia”), when they were forced to take Latvian language exams, when a special commission could come to the enterprise any day with the language inspection and fire or fine people for insufficient knowledge of the state language.*<sup>4</sup>

As a rule, in the discourse of the Russian media, Russians in Latvia are portrayed as acting in a united fashion.

Thus, for example, in describing the events surrounding the shift in minority schools to increased instruction in the Latvian language, the Russian mass media pay considerable attention not so much to the pedagogical side of the reform, but to the acts of protest which demonstrate the unity of the community. First of all, this unity concerns perceptions regarding the illegitimacy of the reform: the Russian media form their discourse in such a way that Latvia’s Russian community gets representation through the protesters. In other words, all of Latvia’s Russians are seen as protesting:

*This year September 1 in Latvia was not just the Day of Knowledge, but a Day of Struggle for the rights of the large Russian-speaking community of the republic.*<sup>5</sup>

*Latvia intentionally ignores the interests of half of its populace.*<sup>6</sup>

*The Russian inhabitants of Latvia regarded governmental school reform as directed not towards improving knowledge of the Latvian language, but towards decreasing the competitiveness of Russian schools.*<sup>7</sup>

The same conclusion obtains regarding the description of other acts of protest, in which protesters are generalised to the level of the Russian community:

<sup>3</sup> A. Fokin, “Nochnoe vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 09.10.2003.

<sup>4</sup> A. Lebedev and S. Popova, “Veliky i bessil’nyi,” *Izvestiya,* 10.06.2002., p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> E. Polyguyeva, “Geometriya so slovarem,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya,* 26.08.2004., p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> A. Borzenko, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV Tsentr,”* 05.02.2004.

<sup>7</sup> I. Pavlov, “Seim Latvii prikusil yazyk,” *Kommersant’*, 06.02.2004., p. 11.

*Russian-speaking Rīgans in Latvia fully support the demands of the picketers.*<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, this unity is expressed in a series of social and political practices common to all Russians in Latvia. According to most commentators in Russia's media, precisely this provided the opportunity to create the United Congress of Russian Communities in Latvia, henceforth designated by its Russian acronym OKROL. This is another event that gave journalists the opportunity to portray the unity of the Russian community through the representation of practices inherent only in this community:

*As a member of the committee Mikhail Tyasin states, this organisation is not created by a narrow circle of people, this is created, so to speak, by the whole parish.*<sup>9</sup>

The creation of OKROL is described as a forced reaction of the whole Russian community to discrimination by the Latvian authorities. In the articles devoted to the creation of OKROL (as well as in other themes), journalists talk about common Russian practices without showing the life of the representatives of the community through their individual beliefs and values. Pupils protesting against the education reform, their parents, representatives of the left-wing political opposition – all are inscribed in the discourse as one homogeneous object when discussing the protests and attempts to influence governmental decisions; all are one subject when journalists demonstrate that authorities take decisions without considering the opinion of the community (in this discourse, the passive tense is used: the “reform is imposed,” “rights are decreased,” etc.).

### **A Unique Status**

Another particularity in the construction of the community is the representation of the uniqueness of its status and identity. The category of “non-citizens” is actively used by the Russian mass media to indicate not only the difference in legal status of many Russians in Latvia, but also to demonstrate the absurdity of that status:

*The rights of people who have this status, mostly ethnic Russians, are limited to the maximum extent. They are forbidden to take part in the political life of the country, to buy real estate, to take a loan for acquiring an apartment, to claim a new residence... Only citizens of Latvia have the guaranteed help of the state abroad.*<sup>10</sup>

*Beyond the fact that these people are deprived of the right to vote, the laws forbid them from working in many professions. Socially they are less protected, but the years they worked outside the Republic of Latvia are eliminated from their official working life.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A. Andreyev, “24,” *Telekanal REN-TV*, 26.09.2005.

<sup>9</sup> N. Ushakov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 12.09.2004.

<sup>10</sup> V. Nesterov, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal TVTs,* 21.05.2004.

<sup>11</sup> E. Kachayeva, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 15.10.2003.



*There is a unique category of inhabitants in Latvia, the analogue of which exists only in neighbouring Estonia.*<sup>12</sup>

Through the category of “non-citizens,” journalists demonstrate the marginal position of the Russian community in Latvia, which is attributed not to the characteristics or behaviour of the community as such, but to the policies of the authorities. Ethnic or social integration as a notion is generally not mentioned in Russian media analysis, but problems of integration are communicated only through the topic of discrimination.

In reports on non-citizens, the portrayal of government stances stresses the discriminatory nature of government policy. The category of non-citizens as such is used to demonstrate the unjust attitude towards Russians (in other words, the status of non-citizen is unjust). Journalists state that the creation of the status of non-citizen is a defect of democracy in Latvia, occasioning the use of the word “democracy” in quotation marks. Journalists also regularly quote those who support this idea in Latvia, such as politicians or activists of Russian origin:

*450 thousand Russians or Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia that have the status of non-citizens, which is shameful for contemporary Europe...*<sup>13</sup>

*Yes, of course, they have the status of second class people.*<sup>14</sup>

It is important to note that the Russian mass media do not accept the status “non-citizen” as a legitimate category of inhabitants from either the legal or moral point of view. On the contrary, journalists frequently express their negative attitude to the existence of such a category in Latvia – the word non-citizens is put into quotation marks or prefixed by the words “so-called.” Journalists often exhibit irony: for example, Latvia is called an “amazing country,” non-citizens are called “negroes,” an appellation Latvians themselves have never used with regard to non-citizens:

*The abbreviation NEGR, non-citizens, supplemented the lexicon of socio-political life.*<sup>15</sup>

By using irony, journalists construct the Russian community at large as one with lower status. Regarding the notion of “non-citizen,” journalists often refer to the events of 1991:

*Exactly 12 years ago the decision was taken regarding the restoration of citizen's rights in Latvia, and this law divided the people of the country into two categories – citizens and non-citizens. A quarter of the population*

<sup>12</sup> D. Dembovskaya, “V Latvii opyat’ ushchemili byvshikh sovetskikh,” *Vremya novostei*, 21.05.2004., p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> I. Ratiani, E. Shesterina, “V Latvii russkikh ne schitayut natsmen’shinstvom,” *Izvestiya*, 26.05.2005., p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> B. Zasl’sky, “Krupnym planom,” *Radiostantsiya “Govorit Moskva*,” 01.09.2005.

<sup>15</sup> E. Kachayeva, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak*,” 15.10.2003.

*was deprived of political rights and since then, the discrimination of this part of the populace began.*<sup>16</sup>

Journalists ignore the legal or historical context and explain the division of citizens and non-citizens in exclusively political terms. The media use this context to assert the uniqueness of the status of the Russian community. The category “non-citizen” gains symbolic meaning, connoting political and social alienation and political victimisation. Many metaphors used by journalists only strengthen this attitude:

*Those who have gathered commemorate, as they say, the black anniversary of a political act of betrayal.*<sup>17</sup>

In discussing the situation of non-citizens, the Russian media also frame the possibility of receiving citizenship through naturalisation as difficult and humiliating. They rarely analyse the causes why inhabitants in Latvia have not naturalised, limiting themselves to formulations such as “well, they could not receive citizenship of Latvia” or “they lost the chance to become lawful citizens of Latvia.”

### **Russians and the Authorities**

Another feature of the discourse is demonstrating the existence of tension between the Russian community and the authorities in Latvia. The juxtaposition of the community to authority takes place at both the semiotic level and the level of constructing socio-cultural identity and relations.

First of all, it should be noted that spokespersons for the Russian community use semiotics to separate their own group from all others (for example, “we are many here,” etc.). The same attitude is supported by journalists defining the group as “our compatriots,” “Russian non-citizens,” “Russian-speaking,” and sometimes using status-related definitions, such as “arrivals,” “migrants against their own will” and so on.

At the same time the authorities in Latvia are described through notions such as the “systematic abuse of human rights,” “unwillingness to solve the problems of Russian-speakers,” and “avoidance of negotiations.” In such reports journalists frequently call the representatives of Latvia’s political elite “nationalists” and “radicals,” “the aggressively nationalistic majority in the parliament,” “Latvian national-radicals ruling the country”:

*The authorities do not want to compromise. National-radicals are fully on their side.*<sup>18</sup>

*A significant part of Latvia’s political establishment has very clearly expressed nationalistic views.*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> I. Vasilyeva, “Vechernye novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 15.10.2003.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> N. Lashkevich, “Uchit’ po-russki,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta,* 01.09.2005., pp. 1, 16.

<sup>19</sup> A. Kokoshkin in an interview with Andrei Baturin, “Nochnoe vremya,” 09.10.2003.

Such a juxtaposition on the semiotic level is supported with more radical quotations from Latvia's politicians that are then elevated to the level of the official position of Latvia.

Many events described in the Russian media are employed for building relations in which the Russian community is not just contrasted to the authorities, its relations are frequently illustrated in quite emotional terms with the notions of struggle and hostility. Thus, for example, in the reports about protests against the education reform, the latter is called "forced," "a human tragedy", but the parents of the pupils "hope for victory":

*Education reform in Latvia was implemented to do away with rival Russian-speaking children.*<sup>20</sup>

*All present on the square came to the conclusion that a spiritual Beslan is taking place in Latvia.*<sup>21</sup>

*Even now Latvia is afraid of a part of its own people.*<sup>22</sup>

However, one should not simplify these texts to the level of a semiotic dichotomy. It is important to note where the vectors of discourses are directed. If the activities of the government are directed against the Russian community in general (including not only human rights, but culture as well), then the community itself demonstrates that it is trying to become a part of the political nation, and rhetoric is directed exclusively against certain activities of the government. Thus, for example, journalists frequently underline that non-citizens are "tax-payers just like everybody else," but the pupils protesting against the education reform are struggling not against the Latvian language, but for their rights to receive education in their mother tongue:

*Command of the state language is not in doubt. It is necessary to look for more civilised ways of teaching it.*<sup>23</sup>

*Absolutely all our children know the Latvian language. A simple example – of our activists at the Headquarters for the Defence of Russian Schools who finished school, two girls have entered the University of Latvia and are studying in Latvian in the department of political science [...] They all know the Latvian language.*<sup>24</sup>

At the same time Latvians are practically absent from the discourse and their opinions are conflated with those of the government:

<sup>20</sup> P. Garin, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak – 24,"* 29.08.2005.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandr Kazakov in an interview by I. Zhiznevsky, "Krupnym planom," *Radiostantsiya "Govorit Moskva,"* 01.09.2005.

<sup>22</sup> Editor, "Seichas," *Radiostantsiya "Govorit Moskva,"* 06.05.2004.

<sup>23</sup> A. Yablochkina, M. Alikbasarov, "Sobytiya," *Telekanal TV-Tsentr,* 12.04.2005.

<sup>24</sup> A. Kazakov in an interview by I. Zhiznevsky, "Krupnym planom," *Radiostantsiya "Govorit Moskva,"* 01.09.2005.

*In a few days after the congress demonstrators will again come out on the streets, but the autumn will start with an open-ended school strike. Only Latvians in no way understand what a victorious finish means for Russians.*<sup>25</sup>

Overall, however, the discourse of dichotomies is built not within the framework “Russians versus Latvians,” but “Russians versus Latvia’s authorities.” Journalists often emphasise this:

– *the point is, how to say this to you, that these Latvians... I am not talking about all Latvians of course...*  
– *We are talking about the authorities...*  
– *Yes, we are talking about the government (dialogue of the host of the programme with Dmitry Rogozin)*<sup>26</sup>

– *The movement does not aspire to national self-isolation. There are also young people from Latvian families in the delegation (about the protests of schoolchildren in Strasbourg).*<sup>27</sup>

The contradistinction “Russians versus the authorities” is also supported in reports about elections in Latvia. First, journalists pay particular attention to the left wing parties (during the 2002 parliament elections – For Human Rights in a United Latvia, during the local elections in 2005 – For Human Rights in United Latvia, the Party of National Concord, New Centre, and Motherland). Journalists call these the “parties protecting the interests of the Russian-speaking populace,” but any electoral success they achieve is a “political sensation.” Reports on the elections are built on the contrast between Russian parties and the rest of the parties, marked as “Latvian parties.”

However, it is important to note that this discourse is not constructed in the framework “Russians versus Latvians,” as Latvian parties are shown as “the authorities,” as parties in favour of continuing policies that are already being implemented by the government on the national level, that is why they are often called “right nationalists” (“their programmatic documents take into account only the interests of the titular nation, the Latvians”<sup>28</sup>). Journalists portray the “Russian parties” as the only opportunity for the Russian community to implement its interests:

*In Rīga Russian-speaking politicians hope that power in the city [...] will stay with the left parties. In this case, the interests of the Russian-speaking populace will be better defended.*<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> V. Takmenev, “Namedny,” *Telekanl “NTV,”* 07.03.2004.

<sup>26</sup> Yadviga Yuferova, “Yazyk i veto,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 09.02.2004., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> D. Khavin, “Segodnya,” *Telekanal “NTV,”* 21.07.2004.

<sup>28</sup> N. Myshinky, “Latviya popravela,” *Tribuna*, 15.03.2005., p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> N. Ushakov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 12.03.2005.

Secondly, through the participation of Russians in elections, the unity of the Russian community is demonstrated (the media do not doubt that “Russians vote for Russian parties”). Political participation is illustrated as a collective reaction of Russians to the discrimination of the authorities. The situation with non-citizens also enters into this discourse: practically every report on elections mentions that non-citizens do not have the right to vote:

*The conversion of forty percent of the population into the category of non-citizens, who are forbidden to take part in the political life of the country, created greenhouse conditions for right wing parties.*<sup>30</sup>

*The situation is rather strange, insofar as foreigners who are citizens of the European Union and permanently reside in Latvia can freely participate in voting.*<sup>31</sup>

*A quarter of the population is deprived of the right to vote. [...] In point of fact there is discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in Latvia.*<sup>32</sup>

Ironically, by suggesting that more and more people are voting for Russian parties, journalists themselves suggest that the Russian community in Latvia is pluralistic:

*Rīga has been Russian for a long time, right, therefore now, sooner or later what will happen is what has to happen. If the city is Russian, then the administration must belong to Russians. There should be a Russian mayor – this is absolutely normal.*<sup>33</sup>

*The left For Human Rights in United Latvia is celebrating success. Besides this is exactly the party of Russian-speaking toilers, not businessmen. Though big business in Rīga still speaks in Russian overall.*<sup>34</sup>

Thus, one can state that Russian media discourse creates the impression of the existence of a homogeneous, united Russian community united by common socio-political problems and a unique inferior status vis-à-vis Latvians. Russian collective identity is shaped by the notion of discrimination in an emotional context of struggle and psychological humiliation. These statements, along with a certain portrayal of the stance of the Latvian authorities, substantiate the necessity of Russia’s connection with the Russian community in Latvia.

<sup>30</sup> N. Myshinky, “Latviya popravela,” *Tribuna*, 15.03.2005., p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> V. Kriskevich, “Vechernye novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 12.03.2005.

<sup>32</sup> V. Taranov, “Provomerny ly takie vybory?,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta* 05.10.2002., p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> M. Tyasin in an interview with V. Kriskevich, “Vechernye novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 12.03.2005.

<sup>34</sup> A. Ivanitsky, *Noviye izvestiya*, 08.10.2002., p. 3.

## The Threat to the Language Community

Russian journalists posit that Russians in Latvia face a threat aimed at the community as a whole and its culture. The perception of a threat is constructed by use of the following strategies: 1) assertion of the existence of a threat for individual members of the group (community); 2) the portrayal of a link between individuals and the group as a whole; and 3) demonstration of the consequences of the threat.

### Constructing the Threat

First of all, journalists demonstrate the existence of the threat to separate representatives of the group. In the context of the education reform, these are Russian pupils and their parents. Journalists report in detail about practically every event with any connection to the reform, with particularly emotional coverage devoted to protests by pupils and their parents. Although the attitude of the Russian media to the reform is generally negative and does not change over time, the emotional tenor does. It is instructive to review how the various participants and events are described, including the pupils (and their parents), the state authorities, the reform itself, and acts of protest.

The Russian media talk most often about *pupils* in the context of the protests. According to the media, pupils are the initiators of the protests. At the same time, the attitude of journalists to the pupils does not change because of that: most often, journalists call pupils “chaps” and “kids” (“friendly boys,” “the kids are forced to learn,” “the children are subjected to discrimination”), but their parents are “mothers and fathers,” demonstrating against coercion and a lack of protection of the pupils from the decisions of the government:

*The kids were saying that the first half a year of the education reform confirmed their worst expectations. Academic results have worsened; it is difficult for teachers to explain and for pupils to absorb the postulates of physics and chemistry in the Latvian language. Russian pupils came to the parliament, but the majority of the deputies did not hear them.<sup>35</sup>*

Journalists emphasise the fact that Latvia’s authorities ignore school-children or do not take them seriously, but “impose” the reform, thereby mistreating children. In one of the interviews a schoolgirl discloses that the minister of education Ina Druviete, who came out to the protesters, did not want to speak to them:

*We wanted a dialogue. We were ready for a dialogue. But it looked more like her monologue. She did not even speak a word with us in Russian. Practically all high ranking officials do that.<sup>36</sup>*

<sup>35</sup> E. Andreyeva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 10.02.2005.

<sup>36</sup> E. Zorina, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 10.02.2005.

Journalists treat pupils as children abused by the authorities, often expressing pity, but sometimes even admiration:

*The children arrived in France by bus. They took along some cheap food and tents. The trip was supported by sponsors and parents. Part of the cost was borne by the European parliament. (on the protests near the European parliament)<sup>37</sup>*

*An awareness raising Special Forces unit of 40 of Latvia's senior pupils got off near the walls of the European parliament.<sup>38</sup>*

At the same time, journalists do not hide their negative attitude to Latvia in their reports about the education reform. Journalists call the government "nationalistically minded," "radicals," "ideologists of the reform," and assert that the authorities "remained deaf," "do not want to hear," "do not want to engage in dialogue," etc. Often, journalists emphasise that the authorities try to prevent protests, and thereby, the mobilisation of the community:

*Yesterday the Latvian authorities declared the intention of punishing severely participants in the recent protest.<sup>39</sup>*

*On the eve of the protests, the administration of secondary education institutions was warned that if pupils of any school are noticed among the protesters, the headmasters of the schools and the directors of studies will be fired. Therefore it is not surprising that the officials of the special services are intensively filming on video cameras the pupils who are participants in the protest march.<sup>40</sup>*

The Russian media reacted very bitterly to the decision of the Latvian authorities to organise a festive concert on September 1, 2004 – the day a large protest had been called. Journalists stated that the authorities deliberately wanted to distract the attention of Russian pupils from participating in the protest. They called the concert "propagandistic" and criticised Russian musician Ilya Lagutenko of the group "Mummy Troll" for his participation:

*The main "troll" Ilya Lagutenko has a business in Rīga: in April he became a board member of "Lisa Baltija," Ltd. Besides, for a long time Lagutenko has filmed his music clips in Latvia. As disclosed by reliable sources, Ilya has a young girlfriend in Rīga. Therefore why should the "troll" spoil relations with the local authorities?<sup>41</sup>*

<sup>37</sup> N. Sorokina, "Latyshkie detu dobralis' do Strasburga," *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 22.07.2004., pp. 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> E. Zorina, "Vesti," *Telekanal "Rossiya"*, 17.07.2005.

<sup>39</sup> Pavel Samarin, "Latviskuyu politsiyu otpravili za yazykom," *Kommersant'*, 27.01.2004., p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Elena Kachaeva, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 23.01.2004.

<sup>41</sup> K. Markaryan, "Mummy Troll" protiv russkikh shkol'nikov," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 01.09.2004., p. 6.

One should note that the negative attitude to the education reform in the Russian media during all four years of the period under review did not change. However, in terms of how the **reform** and **protests** are described, one can track changes on a semiotic level, provisionally dividing the period in review into two parts:

<b>Reform 2002 – 2003</b>	<b>Reform 2004 – 2005</b>	<b>Protests 2002 – 2003</b>	<b>Protests 2004 – 2005</b>
<i>Gradual transition to education in the state language; Abuse of human rights; Poorly prepared reform.</i>	<i>Reform is a deformity; Reform is an experiment (children = rabbits); Atrocities; Last drop in the cup of patience; Reform has split society; Our Stalingrad; Dismantling of the system of secondary education; Annihilation of Russian mentality; Complete elimination of education in Russian; Threat to Russian community.</i>	<i>Acts of protest; Rally for the right of free choice of instruction language; Consecutive protest rally; Demand the abrogation of the law; School strike; Condemnation of the reform; Very large action.</i>	<i>Russian Latvia is simmering; Youth revolution; Largest protests in the history of the country; Actions are gearing up; Strike that embraced... Wave of protest beyond the power of the government to stop; Escalation of national tensions; Largest mass rally in the history of Latvia; Hope for victory; Unprecedented protest.</i>

If one compares how journalists describe the education reform and the protests, it is evident that in 2004-2005 journalists used more negative and aggressive characterisations. Furthermore, this conclusion is applicable not just at the semiotic level. Journalists formed a more critical attitude to the reform after 2004 on the level of argumentation, as well. Before this period, journalists tended to explain the essence of the reform, mentioning the arguments of opponents of the reform, as well as those of the authorities. Moreover, journalists noted that some preparation for the reform had taken place beforehand and some subjects (mostly the simplest subjects, according to journalists) were to be taught in the state language:

*Preparation for the reform 2004 is already taking place. Now non-Latvian schools are to teach part of the subjects in the state [language] – history, singing, labour classes.*<sup>42</sup>

Before 2004 journalists also mentioned that the reform applied only to secondary schools and that education in state institutions of higher education had shifted to the state language a long time ago:

*The reform will affect only the oldest classes – from 10th to 12th. According to statistics, the overwhelming majority of graduates of secondary*

<sup>42</sup> D. Zhdanova, “V Latvii zakryvayut russkie shkoly,” *Moskovskie novosti*, 29.04.2003., p. 13.



*schools enter institutions of higher education. But in state higher education instruction takes place exclusively in the Latvian language.*<sup>43</sup>

*In the Baltic States, unlike in neighbouring Belarus, everything is in order with freedom of speech, particularly now, on the eve of joining the European Union. It is difficult, but the Balts have to make concessions to the Russian-speaking populace, broadening the possibilities of teaching in the mother tongue.*<sup>44</sup>

In reports for 2004-2005 journalists note the abruptness and unexpected nature of the reform, claiming that “schools could not prepare for the transition to instruction in the state language.” In addition, journalists create the impression that the reform applies not only to secondary education, but to Russian schools in general. The opinions of the opponents of the reform became clearly dominant in the discourse of the Russian media, and opinions became more aggressive:

*My mother’s friend finished school during the German occupation. And she brought her diploma – her diploma was in two languages – in German and Russian. [...] These are fascists, true occupants and we know perfectly well what they were doing, how they shot down the Jews and so on – but they did not change the languages at schools.*<sup>45</sup>

Another essential difference is that during the first two years of the period in review, journalists provided background information on how the shift to more instruction in the state language would take place. After 2004, reports noted that schools would have to implement a “full transfer to the state language.”

Another particularity was that in 2004-2005, journalists more often used irony when describing the education reform:

*The oldest pupils in Russian schools will be able [...] to learn how to play the balalaika in Russian or to take gym classes in Russian.*<sup>46</sup>

*One can learn the Russian language, the history of Russian literature and the culture of the Russian State with the same success, for example, at schools in Zimbabwe, New Zealand or Easter Island. But there, hardly a single Russian class can be put together. But Latvia deliberately ignores the interests of half of its population.*<sup>47</sup>

Journalists speak ironically not only of the reform, but also of the Latvian authorities:

<sup>43</sup> A. Novitskaya, “Reformy boyatsya – v shkolu ne khodit’,” *Vremya MN*, 06.08.2003., p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> S. Kucher, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 03.08.2003.

<sup>45</sup> V. Kuz’min, “Segodnya,” *Telekanal “NTV,”* 01.09.2004.

<sup>46</sup> I. Vasil’eva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 23.01.2004.

<sup>47</sup> N. Borzenko, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 05.02.2004.

*[Latvian Minister of Education] Kārlis Šadurskis [...]sits at his desk day and night and finishes writing the Reform. It will be aimed at schools exactly the day of joining the European Union.*<sup>48</sup>

*The State President, who has signed the law on the new reform, received a script with marks. The highest mark of 10 points was for genocide.*<sup>49</sup>

Through a sharply negative attitude to the reform, a description of the acts of protests, as well as opposing pupils and authorities (both at the semi-otic and discursive levels), the Russian media clearly constructs the existence of a threat to the Russian community.

Another group depicted by the Russian media to demonstrate the existence of a threat are military and KGB veterans and their families residing in Latvia. Journalists actively report on all court proceedings in which these people are involved. Some faced legal proceedings for crimes against humanity for their actions during and immediately after World War II, while others fought deportation to Russia for having a questionable right to residency in Latvia. Despite the vast difference in the nature of the various cases, the stories in the Russian media are constructed quite similarly.

First, journalists invariably remind the reader that the veterans and their families are “our compatriots,” “Latvia’s Russians,” or Russians. Journalists frequently emphasise their link to Russia. Here are some examples used by journalists to construct the participants at the semiotic level:

Families of Slivenko, Sisoyev, Vikulov	<i>Family of Russian military, Russian officers, Soviet officer, pensioner of the Armed Forces, simple people, they have elderly parents, our compatriot, act of heroism, victory, hunt for the members of the family, fight for their rights, mother is struck blind, father has cancer</i>
Farbtukh, Kononov, Larionov	<i>He is now 81 years old, an 82 year-old veteran, a cavalier of the order of Lenin, was regarded in Latvia as a legendary commander of a partisan unit, on his account more than one destroyed German transport echelon with logistics and armament of the German army, schoolchildren were told stories about his acts of heroism, disabled person who is not able to get around himself, he was just obeying orders, he suffers from progressive diabetes mellitus and cerebral atherosclerosis, he was a hero-partisan and veteran of the Great Patriotic War, he has a difficult destiny, legs refused to function because of injuries sustained at the front</i>

Analysing the labels used by journalists in relation to the participants in the court proceedings, it becomes evident that the media not only are allied with them, but also seek to exonerate them. Thus, for example, in the case of families struggling for the right to live in Latvia, journalists

<sup>48</sup> V. Takmenev, “Namedni,” *Telekanal “NTV,”* 07.03.2004.

<sup>49</sup> I. Vasil’eva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 06.03.2004.

do not emphasise the legal aspects of the issue, but the humanitarian side, emotionally describing the person's life in Latvia as unstable and insecure. Their plight is often demonstrated as absurd:

*In 1999 Soviet officer Nikolay Slivenko and his family were deported from the country on the ground that none of them resided in Latvia before 1940. As a result he and his wife Tatyana and daughter Karina were forced to move to Kursk.*<sup>50</sup>

*The misfortune of Tatyana and her daughter, born in Latvia, is that the head of their family is a veteran.*<sup>51</sup>

Journalists frequently show details of “the perils that [the participants of the proceedings] are forced to endure”:

*Searches and arrests, a wooden plank bed in a cell, a sealed apartment and an order to leave the country within a period of seven days. All this happened to the Slivenko family in Latvia.*<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, the discourse stresses the inhumanity of the authorities:

*A real hunt for the members of the family has started: twice they were detained and taken to the detention centre for illegal migrants. People are kept there in prison-like conditions for up to six months, in cells without windows, without ventilation, with a wooden bed without a mattress and pillows.*<sup>53</sup> (on the Slivenko family)

*This story was not without aspects that came almost from a detective story. Tatyana and Karina were detained twice and thrown into short-term confinement, apparently in the hope of frightening the women in such a way that they did not think to appeal where “one should not,” in other words, to the European Court.*<sup>54</sup> (on the Slivenko case)

Journalists state that the activities of authorities are dictated “not by common sense and obeying human rights,” but by an “absurd ideology”:

*He is an occupier. That means one can treat him accordingly. For example, to be thrown out of his own house, put behind bars together with his wife and son, forcibly deported from the country where they lived for decades, denied elementary human rights.*<sup>55</sup> (on the case of the Vikulov family)

<sup>50</sup> M. Glebov, R. Kirillov, “Tatyane Slivenko dadut vid na zhitel'stvo v Latvii, no zhit' yey budet negde,” *Izvestiya*, 08.07.2004., p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> I. Vasil'yeva, “Nochnoe vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 09.10.2003.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> E. Zapodinskaya, “Evropeisky sud uschemil prava russkikh,” *Kommersant'*, 24.01.2002., p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> V. Dymarsky, “Tatyanin den',” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 10.10.2003., pp. 1, 3.

<sup>55</sup> V. Dolganov, “Demokratiya po-latyshki,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 21.01.2004., p. 7.

All these cases are constructed so as to create an image of the Latvian authorities acting against the Russian populace of the country. If the former are described as unjust, cruel, sometimes absurd, then the latter are represented as heroes both in historical terms (by reference to military themes, World War II, service in the Russian army) and presently (the contrast with Latvia's authorities makes them heroes). This tone is sustained through military terminology and in the discourse of the participants and journalists:

*Everything leads to victory. We will go to the Senate [of the High Court] as well. And not only to the Senate. We will take it somewhere else as well. I would like to say that the battle does not stop.*<sup>56</sup>

*But meanwhile the coming celebration of Victory Day is the most important thing for a veteran.*<sup>57</sup>

Thus, for example, in reporting on the Kononov case, journalists call the court proceedings political and directly assert Kononov's innocence. The prosecution's point of view is either not presented at all or is reformulated in such a way as to be insufficient:

*The court considered a war crime a partisan operation which resulted in the destruction of a German support point.*<sup>58</sup>

In this case, the massacre of civilians claimed by the prosecution is reformulated as the "destruction of a German support point." In other cases, journalists include the phrase "civilians" in quotation marks, thereby denying the prosecution's claims.

The argumentation of the prosecution in other court proceedings is constructed in a similar way. For example, in the case of Farbtukh the journalists emphasise that he is not responsible for war crimes:

*Mr. Farbtukh himself did not deny this fact [the deportation of 31 families from Latvia to Siberia], however he affirmed that he was just a soldier who was obeying orders.*<sup>59</sup>

When the Sisoyev family is accused of providing false information, journalists quote the defence, which responded by accusing the Latvian authorities:

*This was a forced means connected with the policy implemented in relation to Russians and Russian-speakers in Latvia.*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> V. Kononov in an interview with R. Voskoboinikov, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 30.04.2004.

<sup>57</sup> N. Ushakov, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 30.04.2004.

<sup>58</sup> M. Antonov, "Vesti," *Telekanal "Rossiya"*, 30.04.2004.

<sup>59</sup> A. Ushakov, *Kommersant*, 14.03.2002., p. 11.

<sup>60</sup> O. Shommer, "Vechernie novosti," *Telekanal "ORT"*, 19.09.2002.

Journalists seek to demonstrate the absurdity of the actions of the Latvian authorities by underlining the age of the accused (both Kononov and Farbtukh were more than 80 years old at the time of court proceedings), as well as their poor health. Sometimes journalists speak ironically about the actions of authorities, for example, affirming that “Farbtukh is not able to tie his laces, but the authorities of Latvia found him to be dangerous to society.”<sup>61</sup>

### **The Threat Affects All Russians in Latvia**

The next step in constructing a threat perception is to establish a link between the representatives of the group and the group as a whole. The media use this strategy in an attempt to demonstrate that the stance towards individual representatives of the group is the stance towards the group as a whole.

Thus, in the context of the school reform, journalists use the example of pupils of Russian schools to depict the condition of the whole Russian community in Latvia. Journalists construct relations between the community and the state through the attitude of the authorities to the pupils.

*The Russian community in Latvia appears to be starting systemic activity in Europe: the trip to Strasbourg is one of the links in this chain.*<sup>62</sup>

*Today the inhabitants of Latvia try to influence the decision of their parliament from the inside. Near the Saeima building a protest will take place today in which thousands of schoolchildren will take part.*<sup>63</sup>

*This year 1 September in Latvia is not just the Day of Knowledge, but also a day of struggle for the rights of the large Russian-speaking community of the republic.*<sup>64</sup>

Journalists describe the reform as a distinctive example of the attitude of authorities towards Russians. In such reports, pupils are described not only as wronged children, but also as politically active citizens able to stand in opposition to the authorities:

*Their slogans suggest that their intentions are serious enough. You can hear these people chanting “No to the reform!” [...] Their intentions are rather serious!<sup>65</sup>*

<sup>61</sup> D. Zhdanova, “V. Latvii osvobodili “krasnogo strelka,”” *Moskovskie novosti*, 19.03.2002., p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> Editor, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvy*,” 21.07.2004.

<sup>63</sup> D. Dembovskaya, “Russkie shkolniki mogut pokhoronit’ pravitel’stvo,” *Vremya novostei* 05.02.2004., p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> E. Polyguyeva, “Gemoetriya so slovarem,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 26.08.2004., p. 7.

<sup>65</sup> I. Vasil’yeva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal*,” 04.09.2004.

One of the news reports even has the title “Russian pupils can bury the government.”<sup>66</sup>

The Russian media suggest that the reform is not a discrete problem that should be resolved, but a symptom of the behaviour of Latvia’s authorities towards the Russian community; here, the reform only serves as proof of a general attitude towards the community:

*The threat of the elimination of secondary education in the Russian language in Latvia – this is a threat to the whole language community.*<sup>67</sup>

*After mass protests by students the President of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, scolded deputies for deceiving Russians.*<sup>68</sup>

The media speak ironically about Russian schoolchildren, teachers and parents who support the education reform or simply do not participate in the protests:

*One managed to include in this choir even some teachers and headmasters of Russian schools who, afraid of being fired, turned into “Russians on call”. One can also find “conscientious” pupils and parents who are fed by the authorities.*<sup>69</sup>

Journalists do not acknowledge that differences in opinion on the reform can exist within the Russian community, as alternative opinions are not reflected.

KGB and military veterans and their families are also used to create the perception of a threat to the entire Russian community. Journalists generalise disparate, individual cases to the level of the community as a whole, claiming that these are not exceptions, but reflect the consistent attitude of the authorities towards the Russian community. In talking about one particular case, journalists often mention that “this case is not the only one.” In the context of war crimes, journalists create the impression of Latvian authorities engaged in the “systematic pursuit of veterans”:

*Soon new court proceedings against veterans will follow.*<sup>70</sup>

*The trial of Larionov is already the tenth criminal case featuring veterans of the Great Patriotic War.*<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> D. Dembovskaya, “Russkie shkolniki mogut pokhoronit’ pravitel’stvo,” *Vremya novostei*, 05.02.2004., p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Yu. Petropavlovsky interviewed by A. Makarov, “Vsled za novostyami,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak*,” 19.01.2004.

<sup>68</sup> D. Dembovskaya, “Russkie shkolniki mogut pokhoronit’ pravitel’stvo,” *Vremya novostei*, 05.02.2004., p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> S. Kramnik, “Russkie shkoly – nash Stalingrad,” *Tribuna*, 02.09.2004. p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Editor, “V latvii prigovorili eshche odnogo pensionera,” *Kommersant*’, 27.09.2003., p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> A. Frolov, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya*,” 26.09.2003.

*Former officials of the KGB of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic 88-year-old Ilya Mashonkin and 87-year-old Trofim Yakushonok, 82-year-old Nikolay Tess and, the youngest of those accused of genocide, 75-year-old Janis Kirshteins are expecting the sentence of Latvia's Femiida. Vasily Kirsanov did not live to see the court proceedings, having passed away soon after arrest. Former minister of state security of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic Alfons Noviks was sentenced to life imprisonment and died in prison.<sup>72</sup>*

Journalists depict a link between each particular case and the life of the Russian community as a whole. The reports suggest that any representative of the community can end up in a similar situation:

*The story of this family is rather typical for post-Soviet Latvia.<sup>73</sup> (on the Slivenko family)*

*Hundreds of families are in a similar situation.<sup>74</sup> (on the Slivenko family)*

*There are thousands of similar complaints in the republic.<sup>75</sup> (on the Sisoyev family)*

*The claims are traditional for non-citizens of this republic.<sup>76</sup> (on the Sisoyev family)*

*An attempt by the authorities to create a precedent and to punish a person who was fighting fascism is too obvious [...]<sup>77</sup> (on Kononov's case)*

In these reports, journalists emphasise the importance of the court proceedings for each representative of the Russian community:

*What will happen in a few hours in Strasbourg can once and for all time solve the problem of Russian-speaking citizens in the Baltic States.<sup>78</sup> (on the case of the Slivenko family)*

*Thousands of people in the Baltic States are following the destiny of Tatyana Slivenko, who is separated from her immediate family.<sup>79</sup>*

<sup>72</sup> N. Glebov, R. Kirillov, "Obyknoennyi partizan," *Izvestiya*, 04.10.2003., p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> V. Dymarsky, "Russkoyazychnoe delo," *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 24.01.2002., p. 1.

<sup>74</sup> I. Vasil'yeva, O. Shommer, "Vremya," *Telekanal "ORT"*, 24.01.2002.

<sup>75</sup> Yu. Dolinsky, "Isk k gosudarstvu," *Trud*, 19.09.2002., p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> A. Lyashchenko, *Krasnaya zvezda*, 22.05.2002., p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> A. Sukhanov, "Segodnya," *Telekanal "NTV"*, 09.10.2003.

<sup>79</sup> I. Vasil'yeva, O. Shommer, "Vremya," *Telekanal "ORT"*, 24.01.2002.

This discourse becomes common for the whole Russian community because journalists argue that the cause of the troubles faced by representatives of the community is exclusively ideological.

It is important to note that this idea is underlined through the whole period of analysis. Already in 2002 Russian journalists pay particular attention to the problem of the denationalisation of apartments. This topic is formulated in the frame of the discourse “the authorities in Latvia are against Russians.” First, the Russian media portray the cruelty aimed at tenants:

*Dramatic events were developing today in Rīga. In front of the whole street the policemen were throwing out the residents, their furniture and clothes from the apartments.*<sup>80</sup>

Journalists describe these events emotionally, calling them “unprecedented,” “dramatic” “social conflicts.” Journalists portray this attitude on the part of the Latvian authorities as a norm:

*Eviction from the apartments takes place in Rīga. This is a usual situation for the capital of Latvia. The usual eviction of residents from a house in the very centre of Rīga today turned into an extraordinary situation.*<sup>81</sup>

Latvia itself in this regard is portrayed as a unique case:

*Events are taking place in Latvia the parallel of which have not occurred on the territory of the USSR. Residents are being expelled from apartments.*<sup>82</sup>

These events are generalised to the level of the whole community: the authorities are restoring their understanding of historical justice. Journalists stress that the understanding of justice in Latvia is built on taking away the rights of Russians to their places of residence in the country (“historic injustice towards a people is eliminated at the expense of others”<sup>83</sup>). Journalists emphasise that one speaks only about Russian families, but in the reports where the ethnic context is not directly mentioned, the context suggests that the events derive from the attitude of the authorities to those families that arrived in Latvia after 1940, that is, non-Latvian families.

### **The Consequences of the Threat**

The media form the perception that the threat to the Russian community can lead to serious consequences, ranging from social problems to the elimination of Russian culture in Latvia altogether. For example, in

<sup>80</sup> I. Vasil'yeva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 16.10.2002.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> I. Dmiriev, “Novosti,” *Telekanal “TVS,”* 16.10.2002.

<sup>83</sup> V. Smirnova, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “RTR,”* 16.10.2002.



the context of education reform journalists make predictions that a “third of the children will not be able to finish school.”<sup>84</sup> Moreover, journalists assert that:

*The reform is perceived by the minority as a display of hostility and scorn of the ruling elite towards its culture and national peculiarity.*<sup>85</sup>

It is important to note that, in quoting similar opinions, journalists often refer to the politicians of the left opposition in Latvia. Claims of assimilation are made more carefully:

*The participants of the protest meeting consider the reform now being launched by the government to be, at the least, poorly prepared. Local politicians go even further and are harsher in their statements: they say that this scarcely resembles the integration of society; this is an attempt at the assimilation of society – so say the left politicians who took the floor here at the meeting.*<sup>86</sup>

Subsequently, journalists paint the expected consequences of the education reform in even more emotional terms:

*The authorities want to implement a programme of forceful assimilation. The kids have already sensed this in their own experience.*<sup>87</sup>

*The fate of Russian education should be decided today in the Saeima.*<sup>88</sup>

*In fact, here we have both an international problem and a kind of human tragedy and arbitrariness on the part of officials. The way the Russian language in Latvia is being pushed out, I believe, goes beyond any law.*<sup>89</sup>

Fear is another notion that is actively used by journalists to communicate the importance of the consequences of this threat:

*Of course teachers are afraid. Afraid of all this. We are afraid of losing our teaching positions in our school, the headmaster is afraid of losing his administrative position. But we will fight, nothing will stop us. Even this.*<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup> E. Taranov, “V Seime pobedili natsionalisty,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 24.04.2003., p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> O. Ganyushkina, “Za Russky – na barrikady,” *Rodnaya gazeta*, 29.08.2003., pp. 1, 8.

<sup>86</sup> A. Medvedev, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 04.09.2003.

<sup>87</sup> Editor’s interview with T. Zhdanok, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvu,”* 21.07.2004.

<sup>88</sup> T. Shkel’, “Avtograzhdanka ne poshla na popravku – duma,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 05.02.2004., p. 74.

<sup>89</sup> Viktor Loshak in an interview with M. Ganapol’sky, “Personal’no vash,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvu,”* 05.02.2004.

<sup>90</sup> A. Prosovikov in an interview with I. Vasil’yeva “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 06.03.2004.

According to the Russian media, teachers are also a group that faces serious consequences. “Russian teachers will end up without a job” is a statement often used to illustrate the “fearful consequences of the reform.” Journalists support such statements not only by referring to language policy in education, but by referring to a never implemented proposal to require Latvian citizenship of teachers and headmasters:

*Bureaucrats in the field of education carry out the idea which is already directed against the teaching staff and the headmasters. They all must have Latvian citizenship.*<sup>91</sup>

*If this decision is taken then, for example, every fifth teacher in the capital of Latvia will be left without a job.*<sup>92</sup>

The seriousness of the threat is also illustrated in reports about a hunger strike of several representatives of the Headquarters for the Defence of Russian Schools, in which journalists label the hunger strikers “parents,” “mama,” “papa,” “grandfather,” “father of two schoolchildren,” “journalists,” “Old-Believers.” Journalists report that “the number of those on hunger strike is constantly growing,” regularly informing the public about the details of life of the people on hunger strike: “*Cheerful people: they sing, take part in the meetings of the Headquarters for the Defence of Russian Schools. To date everything is going normally.*”<sup>93</sup> However, the media keeps silent about the end of the hunger strike.

KGB and military veterans and their families are represented in the context of another threat – Latvia’s alleged reassessment of history in general and of the role of the Russian community in Latvian history. Journalists interpret accusations of war crimes as a “struggle with the antifascists,” calling these cases “rewriting history” and asserting that Latvia wants to assault all those who fought Nazism. The theme of historical memory is very important since journalists regularly note the solid historical foundation and role of the Russian community in Latvia (see also Solvita Denis’ chapter). Alternative interpretations of history evoke statements about the rebirth of Nazism:

*The Russian MFA assessed accusations against Vasily Kononov as a ‘challenge to all who respect the heroism of the fighters against Nazism’.*<sup>94</sup>

The same applies to the families of veterans who are presented by the Russian media as victims of ideology:

*Arkady Sisoyev retired from the army in 1989. But the family was regarded as occupants.*<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> E. Kachayeva, “Kommentarij,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak – 24,”* 22.01.2004.

<sup>92</sup> Editor, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak – 24,”* 22.01.2004.

<sup>93</sup> S. Kishkina, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak – 24,”* 26.08.2004.

<sup>94</sup> Yu. Dolinsky, “V Rige snova sudyat partizana,” *Trud,* 21.05.2002., p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> A. Koplev, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “RTR,”* 19.09.2002.

The fact that the media mark these families as “military families” increases the importance of the topic, as in Russian media discourse, this category traditionally enjoyed immunity from all criticism. Journalists talk about the participants as heroes, while the Latvian authorities not only challenge this heroism, but also reformulate the role of “antifascists” in history.

Journalists employ these examples (the “attitude of the state to anti-fascists,” the “humiliation of veterans”) to show that the state is trying to create a mono-ethnic state, “to clear the country of non-citizens.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, the activities of the authorities are directed towards expelling the Russian community from Latvia.

The consequences of the threat are also demonstrated through other events, such as Latvia’s ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. First, journalists emphasise the importance of culture, particularly the ability to use the native language in communication with the authorities. That is why journalists criticise Latvia’s decision to adopt a declaration to this article of the Convention. A report entitled “Music European, Words Latvian” notes:

*Latvia’s Saeima decided to slightly modify international legislation and ratified its own version of the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.*<sup>97</sup>

*In accordance with a tradition that has become a trademark of Latvia’s Saeima, the deputies did not refrain from the adoption of another clarifying declaration.*<sup>98</sup>

Second, journalists interpret the adoption of declarations not only as a unique international practice (examples of other countries adopting declarations are not mentioned), but also as evidence of official prejudice against Russian culture.

The most important issues for the Russian media in the context of the Convention are the status of Russian language and the possibility to acquire an education in the native language. However, journalists often speak ironically about the “wish of Latvia’s authorities not to allow the development of Russian culture.” For example, in one of the reports on the ratification of the Convention, a journalist arrives at this conclusion:

*It can get ridiculous. The authorities limit the commerce of Russian dolls, and for singing Russian folk songs one can end up at the police. In the spring the biggest Russian-speaking newspaper “Chas” was closed and now Russians do not have their print media.*<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> I. Vasil’yeava, O. Shommer, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 24.01.2002.

<sup>97</sup> N. Myshinky, “Muzyka Evropeiskaya, slova Latviskie,” *Tribuna,* 28.08.2005., p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> N. Drobyshevsky, “Latviskie deputaty “ogovorili” russkikh grazhdan,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta,* 01.06.2005., p. 5.

<sup>99</sup> Editor, *Moskovsky komsomolets,* 28.05.2005., p. 2.

This passage demonstrates that the construction of a threat is frequently based on inaccurate generalisations, unverified gossip and the extrapolation of individual opinions to alleged political decisions.

### **"Granny, Let's Write to President Putin!": Russia in Latvia's Events**

Russia not only follows events in Latvia, it is also a participant. Sometimes, Russia participates directly, but more often it participates on the level of discourse through the comments and assessments of Russia's officials, politicians and journalists. Russia's role in the life of Latvia's Russians is portrayed with the assistance of two main strategies: 1) asserting the political superiority of Russia, as well as demonstrating that Russia is an advocate of Russians in Latvia; and 2) stressing the high importance of the political and emotional link of the Russian community in Latvia with Russia.

### **Russia is an Influential Country**

Russian opinion on events in Latvia is presented in most media reports to show Russian influence and the ability of Russia to change for the better the life of the Russian community in Latvia. News reports often start with the exposition of Russia's position on the issue. In reports on the education reform in Latvia, this aspect becomes one of the most essential:

*Russia again drew the attention of the OSCE to the situation of the Russian language in Latvia.*<sup>100</sup>

*The Russian State Duma has adopted an appeal to Latvia's Saeima in connection with the possible ban on receiving an education in the Russian language in the republic.*<sup>101</sup>

Journalists emphasise not only the negative attitude of Russia to the education reform, but also demonstrate that Russia acts to defend its position. Journalists employ not only standard diplomatic lexicon, for example, "Russia criticises," "bitter criticism," "addresses the Saeima," "does not agree," "considers unacceptable," "expresses concern." Journalists also use rather emotional notions as well: "Russia is shocked," "considers it a profanation," "will fight" and so on.

In their reports on Latvia, journalists often elevate Russia and portray it as a politically and economically successful country compared to Latvia. The image of a successful Russia is contrasted not only with that of Latvia, but also with the European Union as a whole. This construction exists in two types of discourse: criticism of Latvia addressed to Europe and criticism of Europe itself. In the first instance, Russia's media give the opportunity to

<sup>100</sup> Zh. Agalakova, "Vechernie novosti," *Telekanal "1 kanal,"* 29.01.2004.

<sup>101</sup> I. Rodin, "Deputatov otseldyat po mikrochipam," *Nezavisimaya gazeta,* 05.02.2004., p. 2.

Russia's politicians to criticise Latvian democracy against the background of the rest of Europe:

*Latvia has joined the EU with the heavy burden of unsolved humanitarian problems. [...] The situation of pseudo-democracy has been created, and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity and language is taking place.*<sup>102</sup>

Russian journalists construct the conclusion that Europe must intervene. Thus, in the reports on the education reform the Russian media discuss the trip of Russian schoolchildren to Strasbourg:

*They were not heard in Latvia by the authorities of their country. Now they try to obtain the defence of their rights to instruction in the Russian language at the leadership of the European parliament.*<sup>103</sup>

*One must stop this political senselessness and I believe that the problem can be solved on the European level.*<sup>104</sup>

The position that "Europe must solve the problems of Latvia" is supported in other reports as well. Statements of Russian politicians on the abuse of human rights in Latvia cited by the Russian media often include direct or indirect appeals to the European Union:

*The Latvian authorities are under pressure from the EU and will be forced to allow the Russian-speaking non-citizens of the country to take part in voting.*<sup>105</sup>

*The presence in Europe of states that "do not comply with generally accepted norms of democracy and human rights, is perceived by Russia as a threat," stated the minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov.*<sup>106</sup> (Latvia and Estonia are mentioned further in the text)

*According to Latvia's experts, the assistance of Moscow in the form of harsh statements from the Russian MFA often leads to the opposite reaction. The solution is to act through international organisations.*<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup> V. Makarchev, "Etot den': sobytiya i mneniya," *Radiostantsiya "Radio Rossii,"* 21.07.2004.

<sup>103</sup> I. Sorokina, "Latyshkie deti dobralis' do Strasburga," *Rossiskaya gazeta,* 22.07.2004., pp. 1, 2.

<sup>104</sup> V. Taranov, "Latviskaya molodezh' govorit s Evrosoyuzom," *Parlamentskaya gazeta,* 21.07.2004., p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> G. Kotov in an interview with E. Shestakov, "Russkie idut," *Rossiskaya gazeta,* 14.03.2005., p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> A. Lyashchenko, "Baltiskaya ugroza," *Krasnaya zvezda,* 16.07.2004.

<sup>107</sup> I. Sekste, "Pristup politicheskoi allergii snyat," *Vremya MN,* 20.06.2002., p. 7.

However, subsequently the Russian media reformulated this discourse, concluding that Europe “does not want” to or “cannot” solve the “problems of democracy” in Latvia:

*Moscow has objections towards Europe in connection with compliance to its obligations [on the issue of securing the rights of the Russian-speaking minority]. However the position of the EU is not changing much for the moment.*<sup>108</sup>

*Mr. Ekeus himself [OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities] likes to emphasise: his mandate does not include the protection of concrete national minorities. [...] This, by the way, apparently should cool down the hopes of the Russian side on the participation of Rolf Ekeus in solving the problems of the Russian-speaking population of the Baltic States.*<sup>109</sup>

*The actions of Latvia with regard to our compatriots, accompanied by silence on the part of the leadership of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, are the starkest example of the double standards prevailing in Strasbourg.*<sup>110</sup>

The Russian media construct the attitude to Europe in the same ambiguous way in the context of court proceedings against KGB and military veterans and their families. Journalists emphasise that Europe (the European Court of Human Rights) must “restore justice” with regard to Russian inhabitants of Latvia, who require “rescue from an unjust state” (Latvia). At the same time, journalists stress the role of Russia in the proceedings. In other words, cases won in Strasbourg attest not only to the legal influence of Europe, but first of all to Russia’s political clout. Thus, for example, in the cases of Vikulov and Slivenko, Russia’s participation as a third party is portrayed as having a decisive role in the outcome:

*Russia was not a bystander, but participated as a third party that gave weight to the appeal itself and provided the plaintiffs with additional arguments.*<sup>111</sup>

*The case of Slivenko assumed a particular tone. Usually there are two sides in Strasbourg proceedings. [...] In this case there is also a third participant – the Russian Federation supports the claim.*<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> A. Lyashchenko, “Novaya osnova sotrudnichestva,” *Krasnaya zvezda*, 12.05.2005., p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> I Sorokina, A. Shapovalov, “Stavka na verkhovnogo,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, *EV* 10.03.2004.

<sup>110</sup> V. Dolganov, “Demokratiya po-latyshsky,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 21.01.2004., p 7.

<sup>111</sup> V. Dymarsky, “Tatyanin den’,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 10.10.2003., pp. 1, 3.

<sup>112</sup> L. Sokol’nikov, “Segodnya,” *Telekanal “NTV,”* 09.10.2003.

Journalists not only assert the importance of Russia's support, but also claim that the cases represent something special. The special nature of these cases, in the portrayal of Russia's media, is confirmed by the involvement of Russian President Vladimir Putin:

*The relevant request to President Putin has already been sent, and if he gives his approval, the participation of the Russian state in the court proceedings will undoubtedly give an additional chance for a successful outcome.*<sup>113</sup>

Here, journalists highlight the political meaning of the court proceedings, suggesting that the issue concerns more than the particular legal problems of individual families, but a broader struggle between Latvia and Russia for political and historical justice. Both in cases concerning military families and in those of veterans, the Russian media revert to a historical discourse where the plaintiffs are portrayed as victims of ideology. According to Russian journalists, the problems started after the collapse of the USSR because the Latvian authorities sought to rewrite history, because of the new Latvian political order, because of discrimination of non-citizens and so forth. Thus, the struggle between Latvia and Russia is presented as a struggle between two ideologies.

### **Why Russians Need Russia**

The presence of Russia in the discourse on Latvia is strengthened by one more strategy – demonstrating the importance of the link between Russians in Latvia and Russia as the land of their ethnic origin. The Russian media do not hide that this link is necessary for justifying Russia's political influence.

In the context of the education reform, the Russian media talk about the “Latvianisation” of Russian children. Journalists see this not only as the desire of Latvia's authorities to deny Russians their culture, but as a strategy “to do away with the influence of Russia.” The media assert that if Russian culture does not remain in Latvia, Russia will lose the opportunity to influence Latvia. At the same time, journalists add that the aim of that influence is to defend the interests of Russians:

*When the last Russian in Latvia dies out or is “Latvianised” to unconsciousness, Russia will lose the most reliable lever of influence and formal right to intervene in the arbitrariness wrought on a part of its co-citizens.*<sup>114</sup>

While reporting on the education reform, Russian journalists also relate how Russia helps Russian schoolchildren and teachers through scholarships and teacher training seminars. Journalists frequently use very emotional stories to prove the necessity for Russians in Latvia to sense a link with Russia.

<sup>113</sup> V. Dymarsky, “Russkoyazychnoe delo,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 24.01.2002., p. 1.

<sup>114</sup> O. Ivanova, “Slushai, Esplanada!”, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 31.05.2003., p. 6.

For example, journalists report widely about a trip of Russian pupils from Latvia to meet Russian President Putin in 2003. The reports relate the story of how one schoolchild, 10-year-old Yaroslav Karpelyuk, wrote a letter to the president, who then invited the whole class for a meeting in the Kremlin. Some important aspects of the story merit mention. First, this story is constructed through the prism of Latvian-Russian relations: Latvia “insults” Russian children and they are forced “to complain” to Putin.

*Granny, let's write to the President of Russia how they are going to deprive us of our mother tongue. He is Russian, he will help us!*<sup>115</sup>

The childish language suggests that there is no ambiguity regarding the presence of a serious political threat to the Russian community in Latvia. Some journalists conclude that Yaroslav's activism is a reaction to systematic injustice:

*His whole family did not receive citizenship of Latvia, as they were promised. Yaroslav was the most unlucky. Latvia's officials [...] denied him privatisation vouchers. [...] Maybe it was precisely this that bred the seeds of the quest for fairness in the soul of the boy.*<sup>116</sup>

Secondly, journalists emphasise how much Russians in Latvia need support from Russia and their emotional bond with the country: “to see for himself the Kremlin, about which granny had told him so much.”<sup>117</sup> According to Russia's media, seeing the Kremlin is a dream of all Russian children, so when the invitation arrived from the Russian president, “there were no limits to the children's joy.”<sup>118</sup> When discussing the trip to Moscow, journalists depict the children's admiration: “All the signs are in Russian! “I like it here!” Such comments underscore the important role of Russian culture, as well as the role of Russia in the life of Latvia's Russians.

The same conclusion pertains to reports about court proceedings involving KGB and military veterans and their families. Journalists stress not only Russia's political and legal participation, but its emotional involvement as well. Journalists present Russian politicians and attorneys as understanding and cooperative:

*The Slivenko family [...] accepted greetings from Strasbourg. First they were phoned by the plenipotentiary representative of the Russian Federation at the European Court Pavel Laptev: “Tatyana Fyodorovna, everything is all right!” – he said already with certainty. Next were [Russian] attorneys.*<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> E. Vostrukhov, “Ty ne odinok, Yaroslav!,” *Gudok*, 23.07.2003., p. 1.

<sup>116</sup> N. Myshinsky, “Slava Karpelyuk pishet dyade Vove Putinu,” *Tribuna*, 25.07.2003., pp. 1 – 2.

<sup>117</sup> N. Myshinsky, “Vot by ruku Putinu pozhat'...”, *Tribuna*, 02.10.2003., p. 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> V. Dymarsky, “Tatyanin den'”, *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 10.10.2003., pp. 1, 3.



Russia and its representatives are portrayed as human, while the European Court is “complicated,” “bureaucratic” and “messy.” Moreover, the joy of the Russian attorneys about the victorious case is contrasted to the stance of those representing Latvia:

*But Latvia’s journalists could not be seen. For Rīga yesterday’s event was among those that are extremely unpleasant.*<sup>120</sup>

Sometimes the link with Russia is stated directly: “they hope for Russia’s assistance to get protection from discrimination on the basis of ethnicity” or “the participation of Russia inspired Russians in Latvia – the number of petitions has increased.” More often, the link is illustrated through the example of concrete people:

*Vasily Kononov says: “I count very much on the support of Russia’s president, government and most important – the people of Russia”.*<sup>121</sup>

In the Kononov case, journalists pay particular attention to the fact that he gave up Latvian for Russian citizenship, a step that Russia’s media claim helped Kononov.

Journalists seldom hide their position and take the side of the plaintiffs in the court proceedings:

*Tatyana is in a live broadcast of our programme. Tatyana, our congratulations! You have won! Are you glad?*<sup>122</sup>(a journalist talks in the broadcast with Tatjana Slivenko after the announcement of the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights)

*Having congratulated the Slivenko family, I invited Tatyana and Nikolay to “Rossiskaya gazeta”. They will pass through Moscow on Sunday en route from Rīga to their home in Kursk and will spend these several hours in our editorial office.*<sup>123</sup>

The Russian media not only seek to demonstrate the importance of Russia in the daily life of Latvia’s Russians, but also try to become direct mediators of this emotional bond.

## Conclusion

In analysing the media reports on the life of the Russian community in Latvia, one notes that all are characterised by a certain inter-discursivity. The discourses studied here are all largely linked to each other, thus, broader conclusions can only be drawn by analysing them in their mutual context.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> N. Ushakov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 30.04.2004.

<sup>122</sup> Zh. Agallakova, “Vechernie novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 09.10.2003.

<sup>123</sup> V. Dymarkys, “Tatyanin den’,” *Rossiskaya gazeta,* 10.10.2003., pp. 1, 3.

In initiating the topic of Russian life in Latvia, the media introduce their audience to a wider discourse about relations within the Russian community, with the authorities and with Russia. These discourses also are largely characterised by inter-textuality. The texts created by journalists are often a reaction to the texts created by other journalists or to concrete events in Latvian-Russian relations. However, it is not the aim of this chapter to study in greater detail the mutual relations between these texts.

In speaking about Russians in Latvia, Russia's media speak about a united community, about people who think in a similar way and have similar value orientations. The boundaries of the community are clearly ethnic. The media also create the view that a certain link with Russia is one of the most serious questions on the agenda of this community. Several events (e.g., the minority education reform) are used to demonstrate how united, but at the same time, alienated Russians are from Latvians. These events are also used to demonstrate how necessary Russia's support is for this community. The Russian media not only consistently perceive a discriminatory attitude towards the Russian community in Latvia, this attitude characterises the life of the community, unites the community, and justifies Russia's media and public interest about certain events in Latvia.

In constructing the status of the Russian inhabitant of Latvia, the media take a stand against the category of "non-citizen." In describing this status, the journalists have a tone of negative irony and even sarcasm, thereby rendering this category discursively illegitimate.

In reporting on various events, the media employ as a context the relations of the Russian community with the authorities. These stories construct a discourse of separation in which the authorities are granted a negative role (the authorities threaten, are against Russians, adopt radical decisions), but the community receives a "label of submission." However, it is important to understand that in the media discourse, the Russian community seeks to become a participant in a wider civic culture, but the authorities deny it this opportunity. At the same time, the journalists suggest that in the constructed conflict, they are speaking about the authorities and not Latvians in general ("the authorities against Russians" not "Latvians against Russians"). Latvians scarcely merit mention in this discourse.

The Russian media assert that the Russian community lives in social and psychological discomfort. The journalists demonstrate that Russians are under threat. In the widely discussed topic of the education reform, journalists reinforce the impression that the authorities take decisions ignoring the opinions of minorities. Journalists frequently stress that the victims in this situation became children. Moreover, in stories about Russian war veterans and former soldiers the media suggest that individual trials against veterans do not involve only the concrete individuals, but represent a settling of accounts by the Latvian authorities against Russian inhabitants in general. Journalists illustrate these stories of a community under threat with very concrete consequences (e.g., children are denied the opportunity to study in the native language → they cannot finish school → the child is socially

excluded; a Russian military veteran is denied residency rights in Latvia → his family is split → any Russian in Latvia could end up in this situation, etc.). In relating individual stories, journalists generalise the circumstances to the entire community.

In creating stories about Russians in Latvia, Russia's media create a certain image of Russia as well. Russia is portrayed as an influential country which can often resolve the problems of the Russian community, particularly when Latvia is not able or willing to do so. Representatives of the community are allowed to speak and they thank Russia or the president of Russia personally. Journalists allow Russia to look like a socially and politically successful country. After Latvia's accession to the European Union, journalists create the image of a successful Russia not only against the backdrop of Latvia, but against the backdrop of the entire European Union, if only because the Russian media think that the EU cannot solve the problems of the Russian community.

# The Story with History

Solvita Denis

“Vodka, *voblas*, and folk songs”

“Dead donkey ears”

“Our MIGs will land in Riga”

## Introduction

This chapter examines the special context of “the past” as an instrument of constructing Latvia’s image. Thousands of pages of written items and hours of broadcasts were devoted to the theme “Latvia in 20th Century History” during the period in review. It should be mentioned at the outset that the number of reports on this aspect of Latvia saw an exponential increase in 2004-2005 in comparison with 2003-2004. The Russian media often single out Latvia as having a “separate story with history.”

The analysis investigates the historical “subtext” through two different temporal frames of reference. The first concerns the whole of the 20th century, which provides a historical context to which Latvia is invariably linked. One can also detect “missing years” and periods. The second point of specific interest for this study concerns “peak” years where a kind of *ritualisation* of news takes place. The material analysed in the latter context is structured according to dates that provide an opportunity to see the media’s agenda at that particular point in time. These two temporal tracks set the backdrop against which certain events converge and diverge in time and space.

The first historical period of interest can provisionally be labelled the “Latvian riflemen” and covers events at the beginning of the 20th century, the rise of Soviet Russia and the emergence of Latvia as a nation state. Curiously, Latvia as an independent state between the two world wars is practically ignored by Russia’s media during the period in review. The next period is the annexation of Latvia by the Soviet Union (1940) and the beginning of the “Great Patriotic War.” Few authors refer to Soviet Latvian history outside the context of the Great Patriotic War, for example, by describing the Brezhnev years. Relatively few news items are devoted to Latvia’s struggle for independence and role in the dissolution of the USSR. The Russian media mention the independence struggle predominantly in connection with the trials of former OMON soldiers in Latvia.

During the period under review, Latvian historical themes received almost daily mention in the Russian media, particularly during 2004 and 2005. The events of January 1991, when Latvian independence activists

constructed barricades and became the targets of attacks by Soviet Special Forces OMON troops, generated media attention. Though coverage of these historical dates is recurrent, it does not receive as much attention as other dates. Here, the Russian media mention Latvia in the context of the common struggle within the USSR, as well as in the context of trials.

Some Latvian veterans and many Latvian extremists regularly commemorate March 16 with processions and other activities. This day symbolises a World War II battle in which two divisions of the Latvian Legion fought side by side on the eastern front against the Red Army. This is the most stable theme within the whole period of research. Regardless of whether or not a procession was planned in Latvia, articles regarding March 16 began to appear like clockwork at the end of February and continued through March. The Russian media demonstrated little interest in the topic in 2002-2003, but devoted a large number of publications, TV talk shows and radio reports in 2004 and 2005. This theme also exists distinctly separate from the calendar, and commemoration of these soldiers in general became an *independent* topic.

May 9, celebrated in the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia as Victory Day, was a date of great interest for Russian commentators reporting on Latvia, particularly in 2004 and 2005. The most popular ancillary topic in this discourse is comparison of the status of veterans in Russia and Latvia. The month of October regularly saw reporting on the “liberation” of Riga and Latvia from Nazi Germany. The media saw no need to provide a rationale for having news stories on the issue. Federal television channels broadcast images of people laying flowers and presented brief discourses on the topics of veterans, occupation and liberation, etc.

From year to year, these events consistently enter into the discourse of Russia’s electronic and print media. A difference in the approach of written and broadcast media can be discerned. The former repeat the stories connected to the events of the 20th century, while the latter build up the story leading up to the dates and render the story “contemporary.” For example, around May 9, the veterans issue and the status of legionnaires might be portrayed as current and relevant, while the context may offer new or modern lines of interpretation.

### **Clarification vs. Rewriting History**

The theme of clarifying versus rewriting history can be defined as a cross-cutting theme that enters practically every news item examined within this analysis. The climax for this theme came in May 2005, the 60th anniversary of Victory Day, when diverse interpretation of ‘facts’ emerged as the main topic. Another example is issues related to territorial claims, alleged plans to deport Russians and other issues added on to the common themes of a “revival of fascism,” the “abuse of the rights of Russian-speakers,” etc.

Russian media discourse grants the active role to Latvia (communicator) and the passive role to Russia (recipient). The Russian media interpret every action in Russia as feedback or counteraction, which in turn,

initiates a special defence of history. The Russian media support this cycle of action and reaction by treating Russia's own historical context as axiomatic, while denying the arguments of the Latvian side. Russian media discourse about Latvian history is black and white with no grey tones. The major climaxes of Russian media activity are intimately connected with the introduction of new positions by the Latvian side challenging the existence of "historical axioms."

Leading Latvian politicians are deemed to be communicators in two main arenas: internally (through laws, permitting or banning various actions, etc.) and at the international level (through official statements, the unilateral declaration attached to the border agreement, diplomatic notes). The appearance of Latvian politicians at a European level marked a new level of "interpretation of history": the activity of Latvian politicians after EU and NATO accession was portrayed as an appeal to European leaders not to go to Moscow on 9 May 2005. Here, one should mark the appearance of other countries in the narrative, not only Lithuania and Estonia, but also Poland and Finland. Before joining the EU and NATO, the Russian media constructed the image of "Europe" as a restraining factor on Latvia that helped to explain a ban on the procession of legionnaires in 2003.

Opposition politicians in Latvia often appear in the role of experts in the Russian media, though not as participants in the events. Sometimes they receive the opportunity to approach a Russian audience directly. Thus, Latvian opposition politician Viktors Kalnbērzs appeals:

*It is necessary to do something urgently. Common soldiers must not leave for the other world prematurely with a wounded feeling in their hearts. Our duty is not just to help them to survive physically, they should learn to smile again and realise, while their faith in Russia and its President is still alive, that they did not fight for the Motherland in vain.<sup>1</sup>*

The Russian media thought the publication of the book *History of Latvia in the 20th Century* was scandalous:

*This creation is something between a history textbook and an anti-Soviet propaganda booklet. A furious reaction from the Russian side was evoked by the caption under a photograph of the concentration camp in Salaspils – "an instructional-labour camp." And this, taking into account that during WWII about a hundred thousand people were killed there by fascists!<sup>2</sup>*

*Our diplomats were upset by the book of the President of Latvia Viķe-Freiberga in which, to their mind, facts, gossip and falsifications are merged together. In Moscow they are astonished that the president of*

<sup>1</sup> Viktor Kalnbērzs, cited in *Gudok*, 5 October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Tyapkov, "Poshchchina veteranam," *Kuranty*, 9 February 2005.

*Latvia found it appropriate to distribute this book during mourning events in the former death camp at Auschwitz.*<sup>3</sup>

Though the book dealt with the entire 20th century, one caption about a camp in Salaspils received the greatest attention in the Russian media. That it was a “death camp” instead of a “labour camp” was a “commonly known fact”:

*But the concentration camp Salaspils that used to be called the Baltic Auschwitz is intelligently called “an expanded police type prison and instructional-labour camp.” Not a single word is said about the fact that next to Salaspils there was a camp of Soviet prisoners of war who lived and died under the open sky.*<sup>4</sup>

Here, the Russian media not only cast doubt on the description of Salaspils, but on the whole book and indeed history as presented by Latvia. The media also attack and discredit the author of the book, historian and adviser to the President:

*The author of the chapter on Salaspils is the adviser to the President of Latvia on issues of history Antonijs Zunda. This book has already been presented to the President of Russia and the President of Latvia. One should check not only the teeth of such gift horses, but also every single hair of the mane.*<sup>5</sup>

*The concentration camp that is also referred to as the Baltic Auschwitz is called “an expanded police type prison and instructional-labour camp.” It is precisely this kind of formulation that was used by the ideologists of fascism who claimed that death camps did not exist at all, but there were only “correction camps.”*<sup>6</sup>

*Somebody proves that the scale of death of prisoners in concentration camps is highly exaggerated and in general, those were merely labour correctional institutions, not factories of death and suffering. What are these political speculations built upon?*<sup>7</sup>

*It is good that at least that they are not called “rehabilitative” [camps]. Here, blood – up to 500 grams a day – was taken from underage prisoners for injured German fighters. It was even pumped from infants, thereby sending the children to their deaths. Nazi “doctors” conducted*

<sup>3</sup> “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Radio-popsa,”* 2 February 2005, 15:00.

<sup>4</sup> Ivan Demidov, “Russky vzglyad,” *Telekanal “3 kanal,”* 30 January 2005, 15:25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Boris Markov, “Holokaust ili prosto trud?,” *Komsomolskaya pravda,* 2 February 2005, p. 4

<sup>7</sup> Vitaly Tseplyaev, “Fabrika smerti ne daet pokaya zhivym,” *Argumenti i fakti,* No. 5, 2 February 2005, p. 37.

*atrocious experiments on the children, adding poisons to food in tests. Altogether, through “instruction and labour” more than one hundred thousand prisoners were exterminated in the camp. That was the kind of instruction – under the rear sight of machine-gunner on the turrets and with a background of two gallows in the middle of the camp.*<sup>8</sup>

Some articles included explanations by diplomats of the Russian Embassy in Latvia that the caption rendered the official camp’s name given by the German occupation authorities, but this information was lost in the narrative.

### **Occupation vs. Liberation**

The theme of occupation versus liberation in the Russian media was commonly portrayed in the context of “Latvia rewriting history.” Russian commentators tried to discern what Latvia had to gain by rewriting history and offered various reasons, including justification through accusation, *revanchism*, and pressing material and territorial claims.

The image of Latvia as a country on the offensive is cultivated by stressing that it denies the fact of “Liberation” and “Victory,” but substitutes the notion of a “Second Occupation.” The Russian media are selectively silent about the annexation of Latvia to the USSR, and there are woefully few articles about the beginning of World War II (not the Great Patriotic War) in comparison to those covering the outcome of the war. Russian media discourse on Latvia stressed the significance of victory not only for Latvia, Russia, and the former USSR, but for the world as a whole.

Latvia is portrayed as elevating SS soldiers to the rank of national heroes, and the Russian media responds by seeking to educate its audience, ignoring the fact that many legionnaires were conscripted:

*But Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians collaborated not out of fear, but served their new masters in good conscience for the right to join the “master race” in the future, for the right to become new slaveholders.*<sup>9</sup>

Here, one should note the activity of some Latvian opposition parties, and their timing in raising bills in the parliament. Thus, for example, around the 60th anniversary of the battle for Rīga, these parties sought to grant special privileges to veterans of the Soviet Army, a proposal rejected by the majority. As a result, this is presented along with news on how Soviet veterans wear their medals in a semi-legal way, while legionnaires receive special honours and benefits.

<sup>8</sup> Leonid Lipnyakov, “Latvijja: istoricheskie “zagoguliny” po ofitsial’nomy zakazu,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 1 February 2005, N18(1635), p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei Raizfeld, “Osvobozhdenie Pribaltiki,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 23 September 2004.



The Russian media and political response follows, and alongside the historical discourse appears commentary on Latvia's minority policy, non-citizens, and the education reform:

*My counter-thesis: if one puts the issue this way, then it is necessary to recognise the same right of Russians in relation to Latvians. My compatriots have something to say both about the punitive actions of Latvian SS soldiers and about reducing the rights and about reducing Russians to the level of second class people in modern Latvia.*<sup>10</sup>

*For two years already they have been broadly celebrating this date in LATVIA and veterans of the legion demonstratively march in the streets of RIGA. The only thing that makes the Nazis temper their enthusiasm is European public opinion.*<sup>11</sup>

This sort of "assault" opens new pages of history that are thought to be very dangerous for Latvia.

The Russian media create the image of a "vengeful" Latvia that seeks to compensate past perceived injuries by turning against Russian-speakers and contemporary Russia. Instances of vandalism in graveyards in Latvia, trials of KGB and military veterans are portrayed as a Latvian "pay back."

*At the same time, in Moscow they are convinced that the "existing differences in the approaches and evaluations of the events that took place in the Baltic States in the 1930s and 1940s should not be drawn into the spectrum of current political relations and be used to justify the discrimination of a significant part of the permanent residents of the country, as it is done in Estonia and Latvia".*<sup>12</sup>

The Western origin of the Latvian elite is also repeatedly stressed as contributing to Latvia's revanchism:

*The Latvian type of apartheid towards Russian-speakers and the official anti-Russian complex, apparently, can partially be explained by the imported character of the top power holders (Viķe-Freiberga is from a family of emigrants and arrived to Latvia from Canada), partially by the nationalistic blindness of the Latvian elite that prevents it from seeing the real national interests of the republic which do not run counter to building close, friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the Eastern neighbour. There is also a desire to please anti-Russian circles in a united Europe in the hope of gaining material help and political support.*

<sup>10</sup> Mikhail Demurin, "Pokayanie. Primerenie. Otsvetsvennost' – chestnyi podkhod ili politicheskie spekulyatsii?" *Izvestiya*, 15 September 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Sergey Lukovnikov, "Sobytiya," *Telekanal "TV-Tsentr"*, 16 March 2002, 14:00.

<sup>12</sup> "Ofitsial'noe mnenie po materialam ITAR-TASS i "Interfaksa," *Kommersant'*, 29 December 2004, p. 10.

*Let's take as our point of departure that time is the best healer. And the fog of provincial chauvinism will disperse.*<sup>13</sup>

Here one should mention that both journalists and those interviewed in reports often use metaphors borrowed from Krilov's fable "The Elephant and the Little Dog":

*Semyon Shurtakov, writer, participant in the Great Patriotic War:*

*– Barking at an elephant, to recall our Ivan Andreyevich Krilov, is not a laudable thing, but neither is inaction, as some people think. Rather it is even advantageous. First, it is completely safe, as the elephant may not notice and pay attention to some puny nothing. Second, there might be somebody who will hear the barking (who knows, maybe they will even hear it in The Hague!) and think: look, albeit he is tiny at first glance, at the same time, what a brave, fearless example! He is probably very strong, if he is ready to take on an elephant...<sup>14</sup>*

The fable serves to remove strain by portraying the situation in a less serious way. At the same time, the "rival" is downgraded, while Russia is elevated.

Another line of argumentation emphasised by the Russian media is that Latvia insists not only on moral recognition of the Soviet occupation in the form of an apology, but also seeks material claims:

*The President of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga has convoked lawyers and historians "to sum up the evidence on the damage inflicted on Latvia by communist terror," in order to obtain compensation from Russia through an international court.*<sup>15</sup>

The Russian media consider raising such historical accounts an "unfriendly attitude," though the image of Latvia as a whole is not emphasised and Latvia's claims are portrayed as coming from the "political elite".<sup>16</sup> Herein a mirror image is fully applied, as Russia is also making its calculations:

*Recently the Accounts Chamber of Russia declared that it had identified financial and material claims to the Baltic States exceeding USD 3 billion. These claims emerged in connection with the disintegration of the USSR, and are being specified by the information and public relations service of the Accounts Chamber. According to the auditors, in*

<sup>13</sup> Elena Shesterina, "Pribaltiskie strany budut dobivatsya ot Moskvyy "kompensatsiy za okupatsiyu" cherez Evrosoyuz," 22 October 2004.

<sup>14</sup> N.A., "Kakoi otvazhnyi ekzemplyar!" *Literaturnaya gazeta*, No. 5, 9 February 2005, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> "Latviya podast v sud na Rossiyyu," *Ekho Moskvyy*, 14 October 2004; *Izvestiya*, 15 October 2004.

<sup>16</sup> Gennady Leonov, "Rossiya – baltiya: kto komu dolzhen i skol'ko," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 13 October 2004.

*the intergovernmental agreements signed between the RSFSR and the Baltic States, the legal status of property that belongs to one party, but is situated on the territory of the other is not defined. Besides, issues of mutual recognition of property rights and receiving of compensation by Russia for the property of the USSR that remained on the territory of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia are not solved.*<sup>17</sup>

*Over three billion dollars. The auditors of the Accounts Chamber named this amount after examining issues of debt of the Baltic States. For the first time after the Baltic States left the Soviet Union, Russia has tried to calculate the money that the state has lost as a result of the partition of the USSR.*<sup>18</sup>

The Russian press offers another counterargument by citing public opinion polls. According to the Russian media, while speaking of “occupation” and calculating losses for the Soviet era, the inhabitants of Latvia allegedly believe that life during the Soviet era was better. Here, the ruling elites, who are making claims on Russia, are divorced from the people, who recall the Soviet era with nostalgia. Even the article is entitled “It is time for Latvians to sing: “How good it was to live in the Soviet state.”<sup>19</sup>

## **Territorial Claims**

In 2005, a first attempt at reaching agreement on a Latvian-Russian border treaty was unsuccessful when Latvia sought to adopt a unilateral interpretive declaration referring to the 1920 Peace Treaty between Latvia and Soviet Russia. Insofar as Latvia lost territory to Russia since the 1920 peace treaty, the Russian media portrayed Latvia’s attempts to invoke the 1920 agreement as an attempt by Latvia to preserve the possibility of raising territorial or financial claims in the future:

*Trying to appease Moscow Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis stated that Latvia “does not even hint at territorial claims.” But these words do not seem to convince Russians. Kalvitis explains the position of Russia as an “inferiority complex.” “Russia is resentful of the foreign policy successes of Latvia, as our country is in the centre of international attention.”<sup>20</sup>*

The theme of possible territorial claims evokes Russian journalistic sarcasm and even mention of possible military action by Latvia. However, the most expressive phrase used during the debate belongs to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who noted:

<sup>17</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenko, “Kak osvoboditelei sdelali okkupantami,” *Krasnaya zvezda*, 14 October 2004, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksei Malkov, “Chrezvychainoe proisshestvie,” *NTV*, 3 November 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Elena Morozova, “Latysham pora pet’: kak khorosho v stranoi sovetskoj bylo zhit’,” *Pravda*, 21 September 2004.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

*We will not negotiate on the platform of any territorial claims. They will get not Pitalovo district, but dead donkey ears.*<sup>21</sup>

This phrase caused a new wave of discussions in Latvia which were later reflected in the Russian media as well.

## **Victory Day vs. Second Occupation**

*Victory day is holy.*<sup>22</sup>

It is possible to track how Russian media attention towards Latvia and the images used by the media evolved in the context of coverage of Victory Day. Victory Day received far more attention in 2005 than in the previous several years. In 2002-2004, the Russian media did not devote much coverage to the issue and often merely noted that Victory Day is not officially celebrated in Latvia. Thus, in 2002 only one brief story in RTR TV noted how Victory Day was marked in Latvia, recounting a meeting in defence of veterans' rights without even mentioning the number of participants. The report even remarked on the positive attitude of the Latvian authorities, who permitted veterans free public transportation for the day.

In 2003 again only one story was devoted to Latvia on radio station "Mayak," which noted that despite the official Latvian interpretation of history, some inhabitants of Latvia continued to consider May 9 a holiday. Here, the report noted that the majority of those considering it a holiday were Russian-speakers and stressed the broad scope of the celebrations, which are portrayed as expanding every year:

*Many have war medals on their chests, some are in Soviet Army uniforms. And though 9 May is a working day in Latvia, this festive day is celebrated by thousands of people there.*<sup>23</sup>

In the list of events and concerts, the report highlighted several core actors: the Russian-oriented opposition party For Human Rights in a United Latvia, the Latvian-Russian association and the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Latvia.

2004 saw an increase in the number of reports, which touched on a broader array of topics, including citizenship, education reform, the "abandonment" of veterans, and the rewriting of history:

*Every year on 9 May children from the local school come to the cemetery with flowers, every year one can hear the words of gratitude of survivors near the soldiers' tombs. People promise that despite the border*

<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Maksimov, "Prezident pozdravil "Komsomolku," *Tribuna*, 24 May 2005, No. 89, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Vyacheslav Tetekin, "Razve nevedomo verkovnomu?" *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, No. 60-61, 8 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Elena Kachaeva, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 9 May 2003, 20:00.

*that divided us, no politicians will succeed in erasing from the people's memory the names of Soviet warriors who fell on Latvian soil.*<sup>24</sup>

In 2002-2004 occasional reports also appeared on vandalism in cemeteries in Latvia as well. However, Russian media interest in Latvia regarding Victory Day grew remarkably in 2005 and was not limited to the period around May, but stretched for months. Due to this increased attention, coverage in 2005 is treated separately.

## **Victory Day in 2005**

For Russia, victory in the "Great Patriotic War" marked not only the end of war, but the liberation of people in Russia and elsewhere. The Latvian authorities deny this axiom, which evokes Russian journalistic attempts to refute Latvian interpretations of events. Victory Day in Latvia emerges as a Russian media topic long before May, and many of the main "news" items are connected to differences in the perception of history. By 2005 a number of topics related to Victory Day crystallised in the media.

The first topic, actively discussed in December 2004 and January 2005, concerned the visit of the President of Latvia to Victory Day celebrations in Moscow. While the presidents of Lithuania and Estonia opted not to attend, the president of Latvia decided to participate and simultaneously inform Western partners about Latvian history and the Latvian perception of the end of World War II. A second topic concerns "declarations," of which several attracted the attention of the Russian media simultaneously. The President of Latvia made one declaration clarifying that May 9 is not a day to be celebrated in Latvia. The Latvian parliament adopted a declaration condemning the Soviet occupation and interpreting May 9 as a victory of the occupation army. Moreover, as noted above, the Latvian government adopted a unilateral declaration to the Latvian-Russian border agreement. The border agreement is a third topic, which was accompanied by the interpretation that Latvia sought to press territorial claims for the Abrene/Pitalovo district in Russia. Finally, the term "occupation" became a topic, especially in the context of U.S. President George W. Bush's visit to Rīga on the eve of May 9, 2005.

Let us now turn to the way in which "Victory" is constructed in the Russian media. Victory itself is often called "holy," this is an axiom that does not require proof, and any re-examination of the facts or reinterpretation is impermissible. When discussing Latvian attempts to put forth alternative facts or interpretations in various declarations, the Russian media employs a strategy of refutation by either ignoring Latvian arguments altogether or casting doubt on them through the use of irony and phrases such as "as if," "a sort of," "every bit as" (*yakoby, vrode kak, slovno*). The construction of denial can be reduced to several lines of argumentation, only some of which

<sup>24</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, "Lezhat v zemle chuzhoi... Geroi voiny do kontsa ostalsya veren pavshim tovarishcham," *Tribuna*, 8 May 2004, p. 6.

are directly connected to history. The primary strategies include direct or indirect mention of the Nazi plan “Ost” and the threat to Latvia posed by the victory of the German side, accusing Latvia of facilitating the rebirth of fascism, and accusing Latvia of lacking democracy (e.g., the education reform, citizenship, etc.).

The Russian media use the whole spectrum of discursive techniques and strategies of argumentation during this period to define “them.” The primary embodiment of this process is Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga:

*Why doesn't Mrs. Freiberga put on a uniform of a “Waffen SS” soldier during her visit to Moscow? After all, according to her, this is the uniform of people who simply defended Latvia from Russians. She will not look bad with a swastika on her sleeve with a background of, for example, the presidents of Germany, Israel, and Russia.*<sup>25</sup>

Here, exaggeration is applied as a strategy of argumentation. One culmination of Russian media coverage concerning Victory Day in Latvia came when excerpts from Vīķe-Freiberga’s interview to the Latvian television channel LNT were relayed to a Russian audience. The coverage of the Russian television station RTR merits detailed citation and analysis:

*Moderator: Today the parliament of Latvia confirmed the foreign policy course of the country. A resolution supported the efforts of Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga to attain recognition from the world community of the occupation of Latvia in 1940. At the same time, deputies of the Latvian Saeima indirectly also signed onto the subsequent statements of Vīķe-Freiberga, which shocked the entire Russian-speaking population of the country. The topic is continued by Ekaterina Zorina.*

*Reporting by Ekaterina Zorina*

*Correspondent: The statement of the President of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, made in a broadcast on one of the largest television stations in the country, has had the effect of a bomb explosion. The discussion in the studio concerned Russian-Latvian relations. The Latvian president decided to give her own evaluation of the events of World War II.*

*Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, the President of Latvia: “Of course we will neither convince, nor change the consciousness of those aging Russians who on May 9 will put a vobla [dried fish] on a newspaper, drink vodka and sing chastushki [folk songs], as well as recall how they heroically conquered the Baltic.”*

*Correspondent: Evidently, wanting to underline to whom she was speaking, Mrs. Vīķe-Freiberga said the words “vodka,” “chastushki,” and*

<sup>25</sup> Andrei Dobrov, “Glavnaya tema,” *Telekanal “3 kanal,”* 28 April 2005, 19:30.

*“vobla” in Russian. Veterans of the Great Patriotic War who liberated Latvia from fascists considered such a statement by the head of state to be insulting, to say the least.*

*Vladimir Tarnovsky, veteran of the Great Patriotic War: You see what was said in our regard? That we conquered the Baltic. We did not conquer, but liberated the Baltic people from elimination and slavery.*

*Correspondent: The President of Latvia, who is planning to come to Moscow on May 9, made such an openly anti-Russian expression. In contrast to the heads of Estonia and Lithuania, the head of Latvia has already announced that she will take part in the events planned for the 60th anniversary of the victory, but has also made clear why. She plans to explain to world leaders that in the Latvian interpretation May 1945 became the beginning of the Soviet occupation. The details are laid out in the book “The History of Latvia: the 20th Century.” The publication was presented by a circle of official representatives. For example, the authors claim that the concentration camp at Salaspils, where the Nazis carried out experiments on children, and more than 100,000 people were tortured to death, was only an expanded police prison.*

*Tatyana Zhdanok, deputy of the European Parliament: The Chancellor of Germany is in the first row of anti-fascist demonstrations, but here, during 15 years of independence, not a single official has been to the Salaspils concentration camp, to the place where the concentration camp was, but where there is now a memorial. Not once on the 8th or 9th of May were they at the monument to the liberators from fascism.*

*Correspondent: The Russian Foreign Ministry commented on the statements of Latvian politicians thus (quotation): “We are led to conclude that the trend towards historical revanchism, as before, is actively supported in Latvia, including at a high governmental level.” Latvian deputies supported the activities of their president. Today the parliament has adopted a resolution in support of the external policy carried out by Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga.<sup>26</sup>*

The narrative uses military terminology in comparing the impact of the president’s statement with a bomb explosion. The narrative identifies who was shocked by the phrase and implies that many in Latvia were not. The division between “us” and “them” is drawn according to linguistic criteria, as “we” Russian-speakers are shocked and “they,” those speaking in the Latvian language, are not. “They” are first and foremost the Latvian parliament together with the president, and thus, the “authorities.” The narrative

<sup>26</sup> Mikhail Antonov, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 3 February 2005, 20:00, 23:00.

progresses from the reporter's assessment of the president to that of the state. This report demonstrates how one phrase is chosen and becomes a central part of the portrayal of Latvia as trying to prove the occupation of the country in 1940.

The counterargument used by the veteran stresses the “black and white” nature of the issue, denying occupation and reiterating liberation and the struggle against fascism. The expression of the president itself is called anti-Russian, as being aimed against the people of Russia (*rossiyane*). In the end the opinion of the Russian side is provided, strengthened by the repetition of the text of the studio correspondent, who identifies the parliamentary decision supporting the president with support for the two lines of argumentation suggested in the narrative – the impossibility of changing the behaviour of veterans (*vodka, vobla, chastushki*) – a new scandal, and reference to an earlier scandal, the book *History of Latvia in the 20th Century*.

### March 16 or the “Revival of Fascism”

*March 16 is the day of remembrance in the republic of Latvian soldiers when people unofficially celebrate the anniversary of the first combat of the voluntary Latvian “Waffen SS” legion.<sup>27</sup>*

*The “nostalgic” march of collaborationists of fascism, the fascist show.<sup>28</sup>*

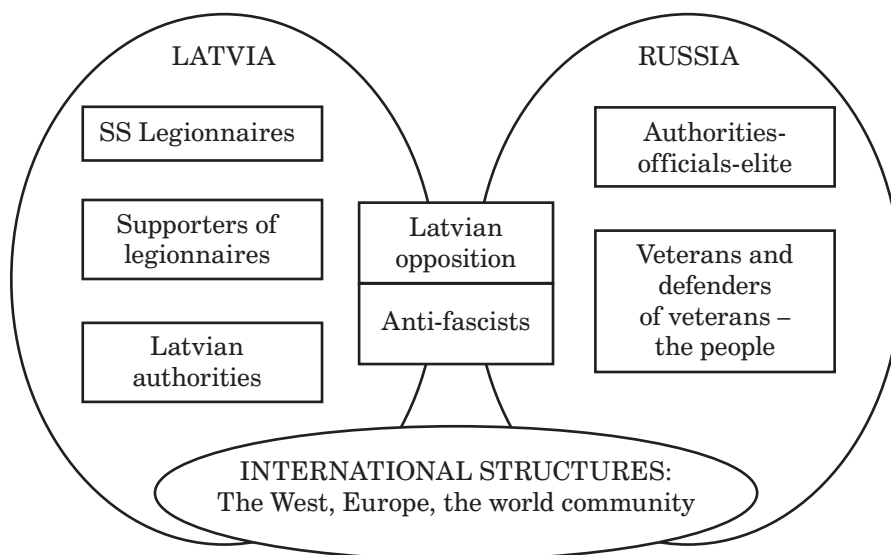


Diagram 1

<sup>27</sup> Vladislav Andreyev, “Segodnya,” *Telekanal “NTV,”* 16 March 2002, 16:00.

<sup>28</sup> N.A., “Melkie radosti latviskoi nevsty,” *Moskovsky komsomolets,* 16 March 2005, p. 3.



The theme of Latvia commemorating March 16 can only partially be connected to the calendar. This label includes events connected to “rewriting history,” “interpretation of the past,” “revival of fascism,” and “neo-fascism,” the ideology of the *new* state. The Russian media discuss the commemorations not only during the month of March., but throughout the entire year.

Several groups are constructed in media reports. These groups are connected not only with the Legion, but with the representation of this theme in newspapers and broadcasts. The diagram demonstrates the division of the major “actors” that feature in these materials.

Three main poles are portrayed – Latvia, Russia, and international structures. The Russian position is presented as homogeneous, without any internal contradictions, conflict, or debate. Official opinion (e.g., the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) completely matches the representation of the opinions of various unofficial groups (e.g., actions near the embassies, open letters to the newspapers), and the only difference is how the same opinion is expressed or argued. Street actions reject logical arguments and offer “argumentation from a position of strength.”

MFA of the Russian Federation	Actions (In Russia)
<p><i>Former SS soldiers say that they were fighting for the independence of Latvia. But the Russian MFA reminds that the activities of the Latvian SS legion were recognised as criminal during the Nuremberg trial.<sup>29</sup></i></p> <p><i>Nevertheless, the Russian authorities continue to insist on the unacceptability of such activities. The deputies of the State Duma have already stated today that they will approach the leadership of European organisations on this issue.<sup>30</sup></i></p> <p><i>Traditionally, the MFA of the Russian Federation reacts harshly to “the heroisation of fascism in Latvia and its supporters among the local population.”<sup>31</sup></i></p>	<p><i>On Wednesday under the windows of the Latvian embassy in Moscow one could hear shouts of “Our MiGs will land in Rīga” and “You will see a new Nuremberg.” In this way, members of the youth organisation “For the Motherland!” expressed their protest against the procession of Latvian SS legionnaires taking place at the same time in Rīga and Liepāja. Young “Rogozinites” came to the protest in Soviet-era military uniforms with party flags and banners saying “Fascism will not be tolerated” in their hands.<sup>32</sup></i></p>

The Russian media reproduce discourse from the Latvian media on possible provocations, which are expected every year. Information is transmitted on the level of gossip or myth. This image appears to be beneficial for Russia and appears in several publications at once, as well as is widespread in many TV channels:

<sup>29</sup> Danuta Dembovskaya, “Bez kommentarijev,” *Vremya novostei*, 17 March 2004, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Ol’ga Kokorekina, “Vechernie novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 16 March 2004, 18:00.

<sup>31</sup> Polina Elksne, Kirill Reznik-Martov, “Legionery SS ulozhatsya v polchasa,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 50, 16 March 2005, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> N.A., “Nashi MIGi syadut v Rige,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 51, 17 March 2005, p. 2.

*Long before March 16 rumours started to spread in Rīga that provocations might be organised on this day. In particular, the Latvian newspaper “Vakara Zinas”[Evening News] reported that Russian National-Bolsheviks are recruiting young people in Moscow and St. Petersburg for a free trip to Latvia where the boys and girls will have the chance to spill paint and throw rotten eggs at the legionnaires.<sup>33</sup>*

*Chairman of the Association of National Partisans of Latvia Nikolay Romanovskis said in an interview to the newspaper “MK”: “March 16 is a holy day for everybody who cherishes the memory of their fathers, brothers and fallen combat comrades. However, in order to avoid provocations from forces hostile to Latvia, the Association of National Partisans took a decision not to participate in the organised procession, but to pay tribute to the legionnaires in church services and at the memorial in Lestene.”<sup>34</sup>*

*“Latvian politicians were not able to explain objectively the history of the legionnaires. Therefore we are perceived as SS soldiers.” Besides “Russian special services would definitely use the procession for their own purposes,” he added.<sup>35</sup>*

Similar discussions about “provocations” took place in 2002, 2003, 2004, while real clashes take place in only 2005. These clashes will be examined further in greater detail.

The Russian media portray international structures as being heterogeneous, with the three main stances represented by the European Union, NATO and the European Court of Human Rights. However, here it is worth specifying the mythical meaning of the term “the West” in Russia’s media, which is often thought to have influence on Latvia. Among the designations used are “Europe” and the “international community”:

*Under the pressure of international public opinion the Latvian Saeima was recently forced to exclude March 16 from the list of official state dates.<sup>36</sup>*

One can discern two roles of international structures – passive and active. The passive role of international structures consists of indirectly influencing Latvia. For example, in 2002 the procession was banned and NATO is portrayed as the restraining force. Bizarre as it may seem, here, NATO assumes the role of defending Russia from “assaults from Latvia”:

<sup>33</sup> Ol’ga Denisova, “Legionery SS otmarshirovali svoe na kladbishche,” *Kommersant’*, 17 March 2004, p. 11, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 16 March 2004, 20:00, “Vesti,” *Radiostantsiya “Radio Rossii,”* 16 March 2004, 22:00, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 16 March 2004, 22:00.

<sup>34</sup> Abik Elkin, “Marsh-Brosok na ES,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 17 March 2004, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Vladimir Vodo, “Fashizm v Latvii ne proidet,” *Kommersant’*, 2 March 2002, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, “Yubileinye pominki,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 17 March 2003, EV.

*To avoid international embarrassment, they decided not to hold the procession of legionnaires in the capital of Latvia this year: politicians are worried that it might cause a stir before the NATO summit where the fate of Latvia will be decided – entry into the North Atlantic Alliance.<sup>37</sup>*

*Not only in Russia, but also in Europe people are against carrying out processions in honour of Nazi units. And the city authorities of Rīga have banned public actions this year. Nevertheless several hundred people came out on the streets. Incidents could not be avoided.<sup>38</sup>*

*All the measures which were carried out before by the Latvian legionnaires, particularly the street procession and laying flowers at the monument to the Motherland and Freedom in the centre of Rīga, have always created a considerable stir both in Latvia and in the world. Despite the frantic attempts of former legionnaires to explain that legally they were not soldiers in the Waffen SS, they are considered SS soldiers. Here reference is made to a declaration published in the USA in 1950. The declaration says the “the Baltic legions of the SS should be considered special units” and they should not be considered entities hostile to the US government. However, the Secretary General of NATO George Robertson and the head of the US delegation to the North Atlantic Alliance Nicholas Burns both recently visited Rīga and clearly indicated the impossibility of meeting the veterans of the Latvian legion.”<sup>39</sup>*

*Such a harsh pursuit of Nazis in Latvia will continue right up to November, when the NATO Prague summit takes place. There the issue of the next enlargement of the alliance will be decided. In Rīga they recognise that at this historic moment Latvia should have the image of a decent democratic state, but piety towards the EU is so great that they even started talking in the Saeima about the possibility of electing to parliament even such beasts of burden as graduates of Russian schools.<sup>40</sup>*

The Russian media also foresee an active role for international organisations, often suggesting that certain action MUST take place with regard to Latvia. Often, however, the desired “action” is unspecified.

The most difficult of the three poles to construct is Latvia. Russian media find an internal conflict, a chasm in Latvian society between two groups, and take the side of one particular group. Two of the groups marked in the diagram – the “opposition” and the “anti-fascists” – are

<sup>37</sup> Natal'ya Vasilyeva, “Novosti,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 16.03.2002, 15:00.

<sup>38</sup> Sergey Brilev, “Protiv provedeniya shestvii v chest' natsistskikh chastei vystupayut ne tol'ko v Rossii, no v Evrope,” *Telekanal “RTR,”* 16 March 2002, 20:00.

<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Vodo, “Fashizm v Latvii ne proidet,” *Kommersant*, 2 March 2002, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Sergey Lukovnikova, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 16 March 2002, 14:00.

growing closer in Russian media portrayals, and it is often difficult to define clear borders between the groups. Along with the actors in Russia, these groups in Latvia are portrayed as “US.” “THEY” are the SS legionnaires who participate in the processions, church services, visit graveyards and engage in other activities, as well as those who support them, and the Latvian ruling elite:

*Among official representatives, only deputies of the national union “For Fatherland and Freedom” could be noticed at the event. Member of parliament Juris Dobelis stated to journalists that Latvians should “not be ashamed” of remembrance day of the legionnaires, but representative of the party Aigars Kimenis said that legionnaires are the “honour of the people.”<sup>41</sup>*

Table 1

**Semiotic construction of the group marked “THEY”**

<b>Legionnaires</b>	<b>Supporters of Legionnaires</b>
Veterans of the Latvian SS legion	Young supporters of legionnaires from radical Latvian organisations
Former SS combatants	Young “Nazis” ( <i>natsiki</i> )
Combatants of the Hitler legion	Members of parliament from right wing parties
Surviving legionnaires of the voluntary Latvian SS legion	Ideological successors to the Nazis
Latvian association of national soldiers	Legionnaire sympathisers
Nationalists	
Former collaborators of the Nazis, currently ordinary pensioners	

The Latvian authorities acquired the most striking characteristics in media portrayal in 2005, when the style of presentation of events and sub-themes became sharper and marked by numerous metaphors. For example,

Table 2

<b>The Position of Official Latvia</b>	<b>The Position of Official Russia</b>
<i>Official Rīga simply paternally takes care of former SS combatants and “partisans” who, according to recently adopted amendments to labour legislation, will receive a considerable increase in pensions.</i>	<i>Russia, of course, does not maintain silence. Also now, during the session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, we raised the issue of the unacceptability of praising Nazi collaborators’ in the Baltic States and the discrimination of the non-titular population. However, how many messages, statements, and notes there have been from our side! An end to this “war of words” is not in sight.</i>

<sup>41</sup> Aleksandr Ushakov, “Latyshkie legionery otkazalis’ ot marsha,” *Kommersant*, 18 March 2002, p. 8.

the situation of legionnaires and the official position of “Rīga” and “Moscow” are described in one of the articles (see Table 2).<sup>42</sup>

It is now appropriate to examine portrayal of the events in 2005 in greater detail. In most cases, the events are viewed through the discourse of the “60th Anniversary of Victory.” That year Latvia saw both a procession of people commemorating the legion, and a counter-protest by people in striped prisoners’ uniforms obstruct the path of those walking to the Freedom monument. *Rossiskaya gazeta* describes the fray that ensued:

*Participants of the procession in honour of the Latvian “Waffen SS” legion and people dressed in the attire of prisoners of Nazi camps. A fight started when the opponents of the Nazis stood in the way of the procession of about two hundred SS combatants shouting “Fascism will not go through!” and “Death to fascists!”*<sup>43</sup>

Table 3

**Portrayal of the Events of March 16, 2005 in Latvia**

<b>Permitted Meeting</b>	<b>Banned Meeting</b>
Gang ( <i>sborische</i> ) of fascists  Afterwards SS veterans were replaced by their descendants	Anti-fascists  “Motherland” Association, member of the United Congress of Russian Communities of Latvia.  About 30 people were detained, among them many active members of the Headquarters for the Defence of Russian Schools

*- I am a survivor of the siege of Leningrad, so I have my own accounts to settle. My ancestors died in Leningrad, but these guys, who not quite exterminated, were fighting on the Leningrad and Volkhov fronts. Therefore we Leningraders have a particular attitude towards them.*

*Correspondent: Many youth who are on holiday now lent the event a particular heat.*

*- They destroyed our relatives, all these fascists. And we must answer before our great grandfathers.*<sup>44</sup>

The Russian media use military terminology and metaphors, comparing the controversy to a battlefield with trenches, and current disagreements add to those of the past. Physical and verbal aggression is the order of the day, and the stance of the Russian MFA also becomes more militant:

*The MFA of the Russian Federation has characterised the procession in Rīga of former SS combatants [esesovtsev] and representatives of*

<sup>42</sup> Nikolay Erofeev, “Yubileinoe vozvrashchenie “Waffen SS,”” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, No. 50, 16 March 2005, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Nadezhda Sorokina, “Nazad v proshloe – skandal,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, No. 52, 17 March 2005, EV.

<sup>44</sup> Natal’ya Vasilyeva, “Vremya,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 16 March 2005, 21:00.

*nationalist radical organisations as “immoral and unacceptable.” “This is particularly cynical as it takes place with the consent of the authorities, who, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the great victory, are seeking support in European capitals for Rīga’s course on the reconsideration of the results of the WWII and the judgment of the Nuremberg tribunal that declared the SS a criminal organisation,” they believe in the Russian MFA. “Only through perverse logic can one explain a situation in which the legionnaires march in the centre of the Latvian capital, but the police use force against anti-fascists.”<sup>45</sup>*

It should be noted that the number of reports on the 16 March events increased significantly in 2005 and only a part thereof were devoted to either activities near the Freedom monument or this day’s events in Rīga. The reports also elaborate on the state of relations between Latvia and Russia, which are characterised as being in a “Cold phase,”<sup>46</sup> a term reminiscent of the Cold War. It should also be noted that Estonia and Lithuania are often lumped together with Latvia regarding the celebrations in honour of Victory Day in Moscow.

To some extent, provocations are connected to Latvia’s EU and NATO accession:

*Several years in a row the day of remembrance of the Latvian legion was celebrated in Latvia at an official level. The world community was shocked. When it was still preparing to join the European Union, the leadership of Latvia became afraid about the image of the state and 16 March was crossed from the list of remembrance dates, but they did not stop celebrating it. Today the procession takes place with the permission of Rīga’s authorities and on the territory of a united Europe. Protests of veterans who fought alongside the anti-Hitler coalition were not heard.<sup>47</sup>*

Comparisons between the status of Soviet veterans and former legionnaires in present day Latvia are also a constant topic. This theme, which falls outside of the historical chronology, will be examined below.

## **Trials against Veterans**

During the period under investigation several trials took place in Latvia that were broadly reflected in the Russian media. Often, the whole chronology of cases was mentioned, thereby creating a sort of spiral. Newspapers, radio, and TV linked all the cases and connected them with Latvia’s “re-writing of history.”

<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Vodo, “Fashizm proshel,” *Kommersant*, 17 March 2005, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> Vladimir Semiryaga, “Kholodnuyu voynu ne predlagat,” *Rossiya*, No. 9, 17 March 2005, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ekaterina Zorina, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 16 March 2005, 18:00.

The Russian media constructed the image of veterans in Latvia with precision, and that image remained constant with regard to the “main heroes” of the reports and the imagined community of Soviet army veterans. Reports covered not only financial problems, but also “moral” concerns:

*... the bitter life of war veterans in a strange land among those who just recently were compatriots, but now are indifferent, cruel neighbours who call them occupants, war criminals, “non-persons” [nelyudi] not only behind their backs, but directly in their faces.*<sup>48</sup>

While there were several cases against “party activists,” let us examine portrayal of the Kononov case.

### The Kononov Case

Portrayal of this theme is characterised by the language of war and military actions, as well as the use of figurative language. Moreover, the composition of the reports is standard and is repeated over and over, leading to the same outcome.

*A 79-year-old first category disabled person who reached Rezekne with difficulty and with his own money announced to journalists before the start of the session: “I am not guilty of anything. If the case is considered and analysed in a legally objective manner, it will be my victory. But from a political point of view, anything can happen. But I am ready for a long struggle.”*<sup>49</sup>

*Kononov adopted Russian citizenship and gave up Latvian citizenship two years ago, but is not hurrying to move to Russia, although the Russian embassy has proposed this several times. That is a last resort, says the former partisan. While I have my strength and the opportunity, I have to fight. In my own land.*<sup>50</sup>

In an interview Kononov himself calls his battle a struggle for historical truth. These quotations appear in all the reports, and he claims himself that “*All legal, political, and historical truth is on my side.*”<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the actions of the Latvian side are portrayed as being “politically motivated.”<sup>52</sup> Latvia, it is claimed, is on the war path, and the whole case is represented as completely political, an “invention of the authorities.”<sup>53</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Viktor Alksnis, “Stol’ko slov o lyubvi k veteranam,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 19 January 2002, p. 3

<sup>49</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, “Mertvyi protsess,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 23 May 2002, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Andrey Medvedev, “V Latvii prodolzhaetsya sud nad latviskim partizanom V. Kononovym,” *Telekanal “RTR,”* 2 June 2002, 20:00.

<sup>51</sup> Natal’ya Vasilyeva, “Vechernie Novosti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 26 April 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Lora Stadnitskaya, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 24 April 2004.

<sup>53</sup> Nikolay Golikov, “Bespredel’noe pravosudie,” *Voенno-promyshlennyy kur’er*, No. 18, 19 May 2004.

Reporting on such cases portrays two opposing sides, two hostile groups, each with a clear monolithic point of view:

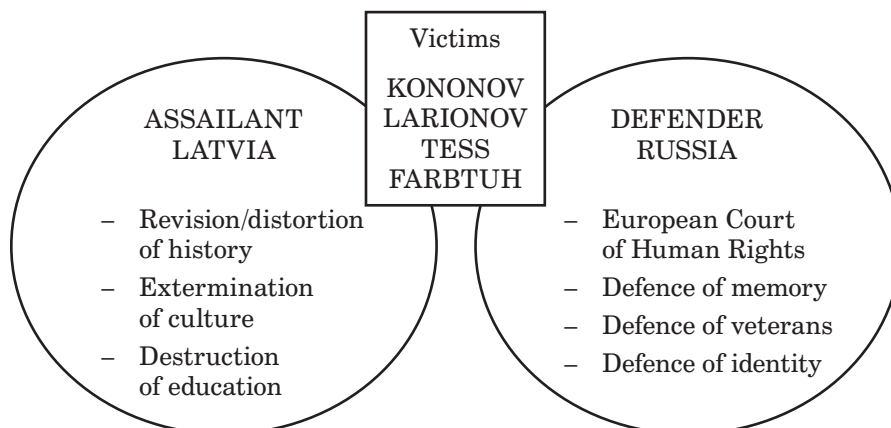


Diagram 2

The attacking side is represented by the Latvian authorities, the Prosecutor General’s Office, and other state institutions. The attacking side is impersonal and personification is practically absent. In the reports, journalists portray two Latvias: an *official Latvia*, a state apparatus that creates and implements the ideology, and an *unofficial Latvia*, represented by the residents of Latvia, some of whom sympathise with victims, while others support the ruling elite. Here, various sub-topics rather frequently appear about developments in Latvia, such as extermination of culture (through the language and history) and destruction of education (through language).

The image of Russia as the defender is constructed with reference to the Great Patriotic War. In the media reports, it was not Russia that chose the time and place for this battle, just as in the Great Patriotic War, as Russia was a victim. A discourse of victimhood is strengthened by the fact that Kononov adopted Russian citizenship. While Russia often “requests,” these “requests” often shade into “demands”:

*The main human rights official of the Russian Federation Oleg Mironov applied to the President of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga with a request to “transfer under the jurisdiction of Russia the former partisan Vasily Kononov,” who is repeatedly accused by the Latvia General Prosecutor of war crimes.*<sup>54</sup>

Russia as the defender is often portrayed as the “future” or “potential” defender, which creates an image of Russia as stable and reliable:

*Our compatriots who live abroad must be sure that Russia is ready to come to their assistance.*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Yuri Krok, “Mironov prosit za Kononova,” *Inostranets*, 28 May 2002, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ivan Poddubnyi, ““Demokraticeskaya” Latvija prodolzhaet presledovat’ Vasiliya Kononova,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 28 May 2002, p. 7.



Russia's passivity when its assistance is needed is a source of conflict within Russia, generating discussions about how it should react:

*We asked the governor of Kemerov province Aman Tuleyev, who has several times spoken in defence of the old partisan, to comment on the situation. Here are his words:*

*"This is a real swinishness. No, this is swinishness squared! How long can they torture an old man who gave his youth to the struggle against fascism?! Rīga shamelessly tries to revise the results of Nuremberg. But Russia, one of the participants in those proceedings, keeps silent. Have we forgotten the heroes of the past war, the fact that with our blood we have richly fertilised the soil of the countries of Western Europe for their freedom?!"<sup>56</sup>*

Occasionally, journalists voice a rather critical attitude to the help of Russia. In some media reports, the populism of the authorities is constructed. This is used for the voice of internal opposition:

*Studio correspondent: I stress that, according to the veteran himself, Russia has not even paid for Kononov's attorney and this attorney was hired not by our side, but the Latvian side. Here, one can of course recall the words of Putin about helping our compatriots abroad, about the budget allocated for this purpose, but what is the sense of that. Apparently, all the money was spent on Pal Palich (Pavel Pavlovich) Borodin. There is no money left for other compatriots. Today, when we reached Kononov by phone, he confirmed in tears that now he has money neither for medicine, nor for an attorney. Probably the only thing that one can do in this situation is simply to collect money and send it to Rīga. That is what the employees of our TV Company did and we invite everybody who does not count too much on our MFA to do the same. In the immediate future we will open an account in the name of Vasily Kononov and everybody who wishes will be able to help him personally.<sup>57</sup>*

However, several months later, the Russian authorities are taking a more active position. The President of Russia supports Kononov and this advocacy is expressed through presents and personal telegrams, of which the text is published for the whole country to read.

## **A Present from the President**

The Russian embassy in Latvia arranged a reception in honour of Kononov, and "all of Russia" celebrated his birthday with presents from the President himself. For several days in a row, Kononov appeared in the broadcasts of nation-wide TV channels in Russia before receiving the presents, receiving the presents, after receiving the presents:

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Sergey Nadezhdin, "V sude nebol'shogo Latviiskogo gorodka Elgava prodolzhaetsya rassmotrenie dela byvshego sotrudnika MGB Nikolaya Larionova," *Telekanal "3 kanal,"* 10 September 2002, 19:10.

*Vladimir Putin congratulated Vasily Kononov, the resident of Latvia, citizen of Russia, and veteran-antifascist who is being pursued by Latvian law enforcement, on his 80th birthday. "Your selfless struggle against the violation of human rights in Latvia and attempts to rewrite history evoke sincere support in Russian society," it is noted in the greeting of the head of state.*<sup>58</sup>

A dialogue between Putin and Kononov is conducted through the media. In an ORT report, Kononov replies to Putin:

*Vladimir Vladimirovich, first of all – thank you. Secondly, I wish that all is well with his health. I wish that all goes well in his big and responsible work.*<sup>59</sup>

*Vasily Kononov plans to continue his combat, which has lasted for more than 60 years, without arms, only through legal methods. And, of course, he very much counts on Russia's help.*<sup>60</sup>

In parallel to these relations within Russia and between Russia and Latvia, the reports construct another relationship – that between Russia and the West:

*Something else is surprising: there is no reaction from the West, which is preparing to open widely its embrace to a country which pursues veterans-liberators and whitewashes the accessories of executioners. But maybe in satiated and graceful Europe they have also forgotten Oradur, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Bergen-Belsen?! Or were the acts of heroism of the soldiers of the countries-liberators – the USSR, England, the USA – just ancient history? Or do the parades of former SS combatants from the Latvian legion seem to them to be theatrical processions that can be ignored?*<sup>61</sup>

“Europe” and the “West” are portrayed here as defenders, which are passive. These remarks can be considered accusations. Thus, for example, the discourse of Europe is bolstered by mentioning Latvia's forthcoming accession to the EU, which is referred to by both journalists and representatives of the Russian MFA. Here, the violation of veterans' rights, decolonisation, and occupation is also discussed. But veterans are portrayed as combatants who “were fighting for the destiny of every European.”<sup>62</sup>

Here, portrayal of the actions of the Russian youth movement *Nashi* merits attention. *Nashi* members gathered near the building of the Latvian embassy to engage in “defensive action”:

<sup>58</sup> Maksim Mironov, “Pozdravlenie cherez granitsu,” *Trud*, 4 January 2003, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Natal'ya Vasilyeva, “Vechernie novosti,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 4 January 2003, 18:00.

<sup>60</sup> Vera Kuzmyna, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 30 April 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Aman Tuleyev cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Lora Stadnytskaya, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 24 April 2004.

*Ambiguous phrases could be heard that “we are peaceful people, but our armoured train is parked on a sidetrack,” but Latvia is “little country that one can hardly see on a globe.”<sup>63</sup>*

The same article noted that not all methods of struggle are good:

*A symbolic “present” was given to the Latvian authorities – a ball of wire with the fascist cross inside. But nothing was said about the fact that the veteran Kononov was invited to reside in a country where unruly fascistic [fashistvuyushchie] youngsters, ignored by the attention of the “Idushchie” (Marching Together), destroy everything in their way.<sup>64</sup>*

Such a view, however, cannot be considered the prevailing one. The majority of national TV channels that reported on this event gave it a positive twist. In the context of this research, the most interesting comment came from one of the youngsters who explained his participation in the action:

*Correspondent: The organisers of the action are absolutely convinced that Vasily Makarovich is not guilty of anything.*

*Olga Sidorova, member of the organization MARCHING TOGETHER: a sufficient number of us watch news and in general know a lot about history. Therefore I can say with full confidence that he is not guilty.*

*Pavel Tarakanov: I believe that it [Kononov’s trial] was organised by people who sympathise with Hitler, by those with a pro-fascist orientation. Because other people are not capable of organising a trial against a person who was fighting against fascism.*

*Correspondent: Despite the loud slogans and solemn speeches in support of the veteran, it looks like the majority of people present understood little about what was going on and played the role solely of masses.<sup>65</sup>*

## Creating the Image of Victims

*Hitler would have liked such a sentence, Ella Panfilova has also stated.<sup>66</sup>*

In addition to reports on trials, stories about Latvia “honouring” SS combatants are presented, and these stories are generally about concrete individuals. The stories generally pay much attention to various military artefacts. Thus, Latvia is portrayed as honouring the uniform of the SS, while outlawing that of veterans of the Soviet Army. This stance is reinforced by the regular portrayal of various trials in the media. The most notable cases, apart from that of Kononov, are depicted in Table 4.

<sup>63</sup> Natal’ya Galimova, “”Idushchie” naekhali na posol’stvo, *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 14 June 2002, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Yana Zotova, “24,” *Telekanal “REN TV,”* 13 June 2002, 14:30.

<sup>66</sup> Danuta Dembovskaya, *Vremya novosti*, 6 May 2004.

Table 4

## The Image of Victims

The Nikolay Tess Case	The Mikhail Farbtukh Case	The Nikolay Larionov Case
<p>Journalists discuss the criminal charges of genocide against Tess. Links are drawn between the Tess, Larionov and Farbtukh cases. As background to the cases, Sergey Yastrbzhemsky and Konstantin Kosachev comment on the situation of Russians in the Baltic states.<sup>67</sup> Strasbourg is a solution to the problem, represents hope. Russian politicians lay the blame on European officials who are indifferent to rights violations:</p> <p><i>The Russian MFA accused the Latvian authorities of violating international norms and trying innocent people for political gain. The reason for such a sharp statement became the case of a former official of the Ministry of State Security of the USSR Nikolay Tess, whom Latvian authorities intend to judge on charges of genocide.</i><sup>68</sup></p> <p><i>State Secretary of the Latvian MFA Maris Riekstins stated in response that he considers the reproaches of Russia on the violation of international norms by Latvia for pursuing innocent people for political gain another attempt by Russia to “impose on the world its distorted understanding” and to interfere in the internal affairs of Latvia. “This is another attempt to ‘heat up old soup.’ We have already repeatedly said that in Latvia the court system is depoliticised and all sentences are based on evidence and facts,” announced Mr. Riekstins. According to him, the Latvian court system is equally strict towards any crime and particularly towards crimes without a Statute of limitations.</i><sup>69</sup></p>	<p>In the case of Farbtukh against Latvia, the European Court of Human Rights finds Latvia guilty of inhumane treatment. The case is presented as a precedent, as the beginning. This “victory” is portrayed as Russia’s victory. Farbtukh himself notes:</p> <p><i>It is just the beginning and finally this arbitrariness must be put to an end.</i><sup>70</sup></p> <p>The sentence of the Latvian court was not considered in the European courts, and this is reported in Russia:</p> <p><i>Former militia official of the Ministry of State Security of Latvia Mikhail Farbtukh was convicted for allegedly participating in the deportations of 1949.</i><sup>71</sup></p> <p><i>Today in the European Court of Human Rights they expect the review of several similar cases. Veterans believe that this is the only way they will be able to stop arbitrariness on the part of the Latvian authorities.</i><sup>72</sup></p> <p><i>The whole uneasy history of Latvia was reflected in the fate of Mikhail Vladimirovich that the young state wants to rewrite ardently. But the victims of this rewriting become honest people whose merits are now called crimes.</i><sup>73</sup></p>	<p><i>In the court of the small Latvian town of Jelgava, the case of former official of the Ministry of State Security Nikolay Larionov continues to be reviewed. He is accused of genocide against the Latvian people. According to the prosecutors, former militia official Larionov took part in mass repressions. Because of him 500 persons, 60 of whom died, were exiled from Latvia in 1949.</i><sup>74</sup></p> <p><i>The Russian MFA believes that the prosecution of the pensioner is in conflict with international legal norms. Moreover, the statement of the Russian MFA also points to the moral side of a trial against an elderly person whose condition is becoming worse every day.</i><sup>75</sup></p> <p><i>The beginning of another trial in this Baltic State coincided with the discussion in the monitoring committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of the state of affairs in Latvia in the area of human rights and national minorities. The Latvian MFA reported on the allegedly “positive assessment” by the deputies of the efforts by the Latvian authorities in this field. In reality everything is exactly the opposite.</i><sup>76</sup></p>

## Veterans as Victims

Here, the victim image goes beyond individual veterans being tried in Latvian courts. Russian media reports construct the image of a “non-personalised”, “non-personified” veteran who served in the Red Army and now lives in Latvia facing total “injustice” and “undeserved humiliation.” The discursive strategy of painting reality in stark black and white shades is employed here. Thus, for, example, the readers of *Moskovsky komsomolets* are told that SS legionnaires will celebrate Victory Day. The report reinforced perceptions of a stark difference in status and in the financial situation of the soldiers of different armies. The following definitions are offered in the article<sup>77</sup>:

Table 5

THEY	WE
Fascists SS combatants Latvian neo-fascism Latvia – part of the 3rd Reich <i>Heroisation</i> Those in love with the 3rd Reich Hitler’s executioners and their Baltic assistants	Liberators Veterans Front fighters

*It might seem to them that their insane sentences make People’s commissar Beria, Minister of state security Abakumov, and maybe Stalin himself writhe, there are people who take too long to comprehend, but it might just be time to check the calendar.*<sup>78</sup>

While those on trial contribute to constructing the image, so do invited experts who did not participate in the fighting. One example of an expert opinion was that of an opposition Latvian deputy:

*“Right wing deputies believe that Latvia was not liberated, but occupied in 1944. And therefore they do not want to grant privileges to Soviet veterans,” announced deputy chairman of the Concord faction Andrey Klementyev.*<sup>79</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Nil Ushakov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak – 24,”* 9 November 2004, 16:38.

<sup>68</sup> Aleksandr Ushakov, “Rossiya razogrevaet stary sup,” *Kommersant’*, 15 July 2002, p. 7 EV.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Ekaterina Zorina, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 2 December 2004, 20:00.

<sup>71</sup> Ruslan Bystrpov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 2 December 2004, 18:30, 20:00.

<sup>72</sup> Ekaterina Zorina, “Vesti,” *Telekanal “Rossiya,”* 2 December 2004, 20:00.

<sup>73</sup> Danuta Dembovskaya, “Shest’ tysyach evro za dva goda tyurmy,” 21 March 2004.

<sup>74</sup> Natal’ya L’vova, “Glavnaya tema,” *Telekanal “3 kanal,”* 10 September 2002, 19:10.

<sup>75</sup> Rostislav Murzagulov, “V Latvii vozobnovilos’ sudebnoe slushan’e po delu byvshego sotrudnika KGB N. Larionova,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 16 September 2002, 09:00.

<sup>76</sup> Aleksei Lyaschenko, “Latviya prodolzhaet “okhotu na vednym,”” *Krasnaya zvezda,* 17 September 2002, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Abik Elkin, “Hende-Hoch, antifashisty!” *Moskovsky komsomolets,* 8 May 2004.

<sup>78</sup> Nikolay Golikov, “Nezrimyi boi,” *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur’er,* No. 48, 15 December 2004, p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> Kseniya Sterzhanova, “Novosti,” *Gudok,* 27 November 2004, p. 8.

Aleksandr Kazakov, a citizen of Russia who was expelled from Latvia for fomenting unrest against the education reform, described the situation in Latvia:

*From the moment of the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia, a state mythology was consistently built up according to which Latvia was occupied by Russians in 1944. This mythology required the demonisation of our soldiers in endless trails against war veterans.*<sup>80</sup>

*At the same time, if you watch TV, you certainly saw our SS legionnaires. Now, alongside them are the so-called national partisans. In previous times they were called "forest brethren." This state mythology of occupation was professionally and purposefully rooted in the consciousness of the Latvian people by so-called Western Latvians. Now they simply rule the country. The President of Latvia is an émigré, and ministers, leaders of key factions of the Saeima are all Western Latvians who went through the quality school of the "cold war" in youth organisations, the ideology of which was built on revanchism and Russophobia. These people have a very powerful lobby in the United States and now they rule the country, so to say, shards of the "cold war."*<sup>81</sup>

Such an understanding of history is also revealed in other themes, providing a particular topicality to the second part of the researched period, namely 2004 and 2005. However, to begin, let us examine one of the calendar events.

## The Latvian Riflemen

*The authorities did not touch the calling card of Soviet Rīga, the monument to the Latvian Red riflemen. The signs on the pedestal were changed. Now this is a monument to the Latvian combatants in World War I and for the first Latvian republic. But almost all Rīgans now call it the "Riflemen's monument" despite 12 years of independence.*<sup>82</sup>

One of the main strategies used in reports on the topic of the Latvian riflemen is to unify the image through denial. This technique of argumentation does not mention the sources and subscribers of other viewpoints that are being refuted in the reports. One such "myth that is collapsing" offered by *Moskovskaya pravda* is that of the stance of the riflemen towards Latvian independence.

*The investigation had another purpose. Each of those shot dead in Butovo was accused of the same thing: "...entered a counter-revolutionary*

<sup>80</sup> Natal'ya Evteeva, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak,"* 13 October 2004, 15:00.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Andrey Medvedev, "Reveno," *Telekanal "RTR,"* 20 February 2002.

*nationalistic Latvian organisation existing in the societal system of b of the Latvian riflemen and prepared the armed overthrow of Soviet power, organizing terror acts against leaders of All-Russia Communist Party (B) and Soviet power with the goal of dividing a part of the territory of the USSR in order to create a "Greater Latvia."*

*It is hard to imagine the facial expression of the president of Latvia Karlis Ulmanis (died in 1942 in Krasnovodskaya exile) if he had learned then about such fantastical intentions of his compatriots.<sup>83</sup>*

The main genre of writing about the Red Riflemen is essays, whether in print media or television, and all created a stereotypical image of Latvian riflemen as unusually cruel and disciplined soldiers:

*At the beginning of the revolution these regiments retained some discipline and even a well known monarchical feeling. They got infected with Bolshevism later, but because they retreated from the Germans in February 1918 beyond the borders of their homeland, they became the most ardent defenders of the Soviet government, remaining the most disciplined units of the Red Army. They became the bodyguards of Lenin in the Kremlin and the executors of the most terroristic orders of Trotsky.<sup>84</sup>*

*Until now historians cannot comprehend how quiet and decent Latvia could produce the Latvian Red riflemen. Let us list the main "merits" of these combatants, who behind their backs, were simply called bandits. During the days of the October uprising the Latvian riflemen did not allow the units of the Northern front to move to Petrograd, which contributed in no small manner to the victory of the revolution in the capital. From November 22 the riflemen participated in the suppression of counter-revolutionary revolts in Petrograd, guarding the Headquarters of the revolution, the Smolny institute, but then the Kremlin. In January 1918 they suppressed the revolt of the Polish Corp of general Doubor-Musnicky in Belarus, and took part in the battle with Kaledin. The Latvian rifleman division under the command of Vacietis overpowered the left socialists' revolt in Moscow and the anti-Bolshevik uprising in Yaroslavl in 1918, the anti-Soviet rebellions in Murom, Ribinsk, Kaluga, Saratov, and Novgorod. Mountains of corpses remained behind them everywhere.<sup>85</sup>*

The Latvian riflemen topic is beyond standard historical chronology, but connects "Latvians" to the power that subsequently "occupied" Latvia.

<sup>83</sup> Vidvud Shtraus, "Poezd Trotskogo na Butovskom poligone," *Moskovskaya Pravda*, 1 December 2004, p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> Lolly Zamoisky, "Obmanuvshie smert'," *Rossiia*, No. 32, 5 August 2004.

<sup>85</sup> Viktor Sokolov, "Naslednitsa latyshkikh strelkov," *Voенno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, No. 9, 16 March 2005, p. 1.

## All Quiet on the Eastern Front

In the period under review, the front line returned to the newspapers and television screens. Instead of bullets and artillery, the “combatants” “shot” articles, broadcasts and signals which “blew up” emotions. The target was not the Latvian elite, to which journalists and the “heroes” of the news reports frequently refer, but the inhabitants of Russia – readers, listeners, and viewers.

Russia’s media went into a defensive position to protect a certain interpretation of history, a collective consciousness. To wit: the media did not allow the construction of a position different from its usual point of view not only on its own territory, but also on foreign territory. Journalists reflected this stance as a defence against attacks coming from an unfriendly country.

Analysis of four years of media coverage allowed the clarification of painful historical points. In general, these were events of the 20th century – the role of the Latvian Red Riflemen in establishing Soviet power, the role of Latvian soldiers in SS operations, the role of the Soviet army in the “liberation” of Latvia, as well as contemporary Latvia, where “history is being rewritten.”

The most sensitive period is linked with the Second World War – was it “liberation” or “occupation”? In the Russian media itself, there is no question, as “liberation” is an axiom that requires no proof. The Russian media construct the “wrong” perception of events by stressing certain kinds of information and keeping silent about other aspects, using a black and white approach, and avoiding all shades of grey.

In the time period under review, the Russian media divided Latvia into “compatriots” who argue, resist and do not accept the “new,” i.e., renewed Latvia’s history. At the same time, this group is portrayed as being particularly threatened by the Latvian side. In fact, it is stressed that it is precisely because of this group that any retreat in the “information war” is impermissible.

The media constructed an enemy image in line with the best traditions, using various techniques of argumentation. Thus, thorough research on the images that appeared in the press and TV and radio broadcasts would require years. This chapter includes an analysis of the main lines of history that could be observed during the period in question, widely employing quotations for illustrative purposes. The quotations help understand the strategies and techniques, both intentional and unintentional, that are used by Russian journalists.



# Latvian Culture in Russia's Media

Kristīne Doroņenkova

*“Cultural expansion is more fearful than any political propaganda”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

This chapter analyses how the Russian media portrayed contemporary Latvian culture from 2002 through mid-2005. The Baltic States were part of the Soviet Union *de jure* for 50 years, but *de facto* all three states retained a “foreign touch” and were considered by many Russians to be “our abroad.” Culture distinguished the Baltic States from the core of the Soviet empire, both attracting and alienating Russians from the Baltic States. The Baltic as a “window to Europe” is still widely cited in the Russian media even today.<sup>2</sup> To intellectual Russians, the Baltic States are not just a window, but a bridge between Russia and Europe, constituting “our Europe.” This frame of reference and language inherently recognises the Baltic States as a separate entity within wider Europe.

It is no overstatement to claim that Latvia has been the most popular section of the “window to Europe” for two-and-a-half centuries. The Soviet period merely consolidated this perception, popularised previously existing symbols and created new symbols, such as the Baltic Sea resort Jūrmala, the popular song festival “Jūrmala,” the “Dzintari” concert hall, Rīga, composer Raimonds Pauls, singer Laima Vaikule, and more. All are well known among common Russians and evoke nostalgic memories of the Soviet past. A more critical tone can be seen when the media link culture, history and politics. For example, a positive message about a bilateral cooperation programme signed for two years between the Latvian and Russian Ministries of Culture swiftly became negative as the Russian media began to cover the reform of minority education in Latvia, with some commentators even proposing a cultural embargo against Latvia and comparing Latvia to fascist Germany in the 1930s and South Africa under apartheid.<sup>3</sup>

During the time period in review, rarely a day went by in the Russian media without some reference to Latvian culture, with the exception of a period of just over a month in 2003. One can provisionally divide the coverage into two main groups: 1) reports related to Latvia's or Latvian culture, and

<sup>1</sup> *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 14 March 2002.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Ekaterina Shergova, “Yurmala ne teryayet svoey privilekatelnosti dlya rossiskikh turistov,” *Telekanal “3 Kanal,” GOROD*, 15 December 2004, 18:15.

<sup>3</sup> “Kogda muzi pomalkivayut,” *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 21 January 2004.

2) reports on Russia's culture and Russian culture in Latvia. Surprisingly, the former is more common. There is a tendency to discuss Russia's culture in Latvia in the context of certain, mostly annual events, for example, the music festival "New Wave." Despite the patronage of Jūrmala municipality and its international status, the event is essentially a Russian cultural event on the territory of Latvia. On the other hand, reports on Latvian culture are rarely tied to regular events, but reflect particular exhibitions or performances on tour or *ad hoc* news.

Another finding that runs against conventional wisdom is the predominantly positive tone of coverage of cultural issues, particularly on performances by Latvian theatre groups in Russia or exhibitions of Latvian artists in Russia. This does not exclude some criticism, arrogant patronising, irony or other negative expressions. The tone of coverage must be filtered through the broader political and historical context at the time. A series of articles that speculated on the possible collapse of Turaida Castle in Latvia or covered restoration work on an Orthodox church in Latgale serve as useful examples. Both appeared in a historical and political context not favouring Latvia in the eyes of the Russian public. Journalists frequently referred to the Soviet period as a time when Latvian architectural monuments were restored and preserved.<sup>4</sup>

There is a curious tendency in positive reports on Latvian culture: authors seek to find a link between Latvian and Russian culture, almost as if the former were a product of the latter. On the one hand, this might be explained by the desire to reflect Latvian culture as a derivative subset of the culture of the big neighbour, which is often referred to as a source of inspiration. This approach reflects a certain patronising attitude. On the other hand, sometimes the drawing of parallels or providing a familiar Russian frame of reference could also facilitate conveying information to the Russian public. These alternative explanations seem to apply on different occasions.

For example, coverage of an exhibition in St. Petersburg on the eve of the city's 300th anniversary by a Latvian artist of works devoted to the last Russian tsar and his family was generally positive. In discussing the uniqueness of the miniature sculptures of each member of the family, the journalist referred to "one of the sources – old traditional Russian *lubok*, with its picturesque rendering and humour."<sup>5</sup> Another example is referring to names that are well known to the Russian public in reports on Latvian artists. A Russian reader might better remember a Latvian-born film cameraman if his work were presented in reference to his cooperation with world famous Russian movie director Sergei Eisenstein. Parallels are a convenient tool that can be used to serve different purposes.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., "Turaidskomū zamku ugrāzhayut opolzni," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak,"* 8 February 2002.

<sup>5</sup> "Latvisky master P. Hudobchenko sovmeshaet starie traditsii i novye tehnologii v lepke skulpturnikh miniatyur," *TV ORT,* 7 April 2002.

## Latvian Traditions (and the Lack Thereof)

Traditions are an important part of any nation's cultural heritage. The way one celebrates festivities, pays tribute to forefathers, and observes commemorative occasions all contributes to creating the overall image of a country and its people. The Russian media are silent or disinterested on this dimension of Latvia. Christmas, perhaps, is an exception, though reference to Christmas often has political overtones in light of the fact that Russia and Latvia celebrate Christmas on different days.<sup>6</sup> The Russian media follow closely the annual discussions in Latvia on whether or not to grant official holiday status to Orthodox Christmas. Similarly, in late February, the media actively discuss whether Latvia will revive commemoration of Women's Day on March 8. While Russian commentators often criticise Latvia for not granting holiday status to Orthodox Christmas, there is little mention of the traditions themselves. Reporting is generally confined to statements such as "former Soviet republics" quietly celebrating Catholic Christmas,<sup>7</sup> "Riga looks very touching before Catholic Christmas," and the "municipality and the populace of Riga prepare for the holidays with particular love and thoughtfulness."<sup>8</sup>

Līgo, the midsummer celebration, is the most widely celebrated occasion in Latvia. This national holiday was forbidden in Soviet times, as it was viewed as an expression of nationalistic sentiment. Regardless of the regime in power, Latvians have always celebrated Līgo. Despite its importance to Latvians, the Russian media rarely report on Līgo.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Latvian opera, ballet and theatre, which belong to universal culture, Latvian midsummer celebrations are unique, and have been elevated to the level of the main national holiday.<sup>10</sup> Despite the paucity of coverage, there was no reference to historical or political issues, a feature more common in reports covering celebration of more neutral festivities, like the Shrovetide carnival.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Yevgeny Vostrukhov, "Ukrali Rozhdestvo: Latvisky seim v ocherednoi raz otkazalsya priznat' pravoslavnoe Rozhdestvo gosudarstvennym prazdnikom," *Gudok*, 30 December 2004, p. 12; "Kabinet ministrov Latvii obsudil vozmozhnost' predat' pravoslavnomu rozhdestvu statusa vykhodnogo dnya," *MA, Novosti*, 6 January 2003, 22:00.

<sup>7</sup> Tatyana Ilyina, "V Rige Rozhdestvo prinyato otmechat' ne shumnymi narodnymi gulyanyami, a v tikhom semeinom krugu," *Segodnya, Telekanal "NTV"*, 25 December 2004, 08:00.

<sup>8</sup> Natalya Antopova, "Neprekritaya nagota staroi Rigi," *Rossiya*, 6 February 2003, pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. "V Latvii proshlo prazdnovanie drevnego yazicheskogo prazdnika Yanov den'," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak-24" Novosti*, 23 June 2003, 16:40; Aleksey Sukhanov, "Segodnya," *Telekanal "NTV"*, 24 June 2004, 15:00; Evgeny Agoshkov, "Novosti," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 24 June 2004, 12:00.

<sup>10</sup> Myriad festival occasions are celebrated in Europe during the warm summer months, e.g., Notting Hill Carnival in London, Munich Festival in Germany, etc., but none are as important in the national culture as Līgo. This is perhaps also the only national "pagan" festival in Europe.

<sup>11</sup> Zhanna Agalakova, "Maslenichnaya nedelya v Latvii: komentarii rukovoditelya folklornoy gruppi "Skandinieki" Helmii Stalte," *Telekanal "ORT"*, 24 February 2003, 14:00.

Reporting on traditional Latvian art was more common and the Russian audience was kept informed about exhibitions of Latvian ceramics in Russia and in Latvia near the “famous St. Peter’s Church” in Rīga.<sup>12</sup> An exhibition of floral design on the eve of New Year’s festivities<sup>13</sup> and 123-metre long amber beads made in the traditional Latvian manner also merited media coverage.<sup>14</sup> Here, reporting was neutral, with no reference to politics or history.

Medieval Latvian traditions were also reported to Russians in annual coverage of the Festival of Medieval Times in Cēsis, leaving a comprehensive impression about both the festival and traditions in medieval Latvia.<sup>15</sup> Medieval musical traditions also earned coverage through a story on the International Medieval Music Festival in the internal yard of the Dom Cathedral.<sup>16</sup> Reporting on Latvian national cuisine emphasised the image of Latvia as a warm and “delicious” country that has both unique and common features.<sup>17</sup> Latvian bread, “well known far beyond the boundaries of the republic,”<sup>18</sup> is part of Latvia’s image. Nostalgia characterised reports on “Rīga Black Balsam,” popular in Soviet times.<sup>19</sup>

## Religion in Latvia: Orthodoxy on the March

Religion is another common topic for the Russian media. According to official Latvian data and sociological surveys, the Orthodox Church is the third largest confession in Latvia. However, Russian media reports regularly question this fact and suggest that the Orthodox community is larger. According to one report, Orthodox believers became the largest religious community in Latvia, which came as a surprise to the Republic that “traditionally considers itself Protestant.”<sup>20</sup> According to another report, there are “considerably more” Orthodox than Catholics and Lutherans in

<sup>12</sup> Natalya Tingayeva, “V Rige tserkvi Svyatogo Petra prokhodit vystavka original’nikh izdeli iz keramiki,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 24 October 2004, 10:00

<sup>13</sup> Oksana Rostovtseva, “V Latvii v dni novodnikh prazdnikov sostoyalas vystavka tsvetochnogo dizaina,” *Novosti,* 3 January 2003, 10:00.

<sup>14</sup> Mariya Abalkina, “V Latvii izgotovleni yantarnie busi dlinnoi 123 metra,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 17 August 2003, 19:00.

<sup>15</sup> Matvey Glebov, “Letit strela iz arbaleta,” *Moskovskaya pravda,* 4 July 2002, p. 7; “V Latviskom Tsesisskom zamke nachalsya festival “Srednevekove,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak-24,”* 14 June 2003, 19:00; Oksana Himich, “Srednevekovaya mozaika,” *Moskovsky komsomolets,* 12 June 2003, p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ol’ga Kokorekina, “V Latvii prokhodit mezhdunarodni festival srednekovoi muziki,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 22 June 2002, 15:00.

<sup>17</sup> Anatoly Gendin, “Putra na utro. Sekreti Latviiskoi kukhni,” *Izvestiya,* 30 April 2002, p. 9.

<sup>18</sup> Rustam Suleimanhil, “Pekari Latvii gotovyatsya k Novomu godu,” *Telekanal “ORT,”* 6 December 2002, 12:00.

<sup>19</sup> Natalya Antipova, “Neprekritaya nagota staroi Rigi,” *Rossiya,* 6 February 2003, pp. 28-29.

<sup>20</sup> “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak-24,”* 1 December 2004, 07:15.

<sup>21</sup> Yevgeny Vostrukhov, “Ukrali Rozhdestvo: Latviski seim v ocherednoi raz otkazalsya priznat’ pravoslavnoe Rozhdesvo gosudarstvennim prazdnikom,” *Gudok,* 30 December 2004, p. 12.

Latvia.<sup>21</sup> Claims about the size of Latvia's Orthodox community usually serve as a point of departure for discussing the issue of recognising Orthodox Christmas as an official holiday.

Russia's media report with some enthusiasm on the role of the Orthodox Church as a link between Latvia and Russia, particularly when mentioning the number of Latvians currently being baptised into Orthodoxy "despite the bad times."<sup>22</sup> The fact that interwar Latvian Orthodox priest Jānis Pommers became the only canonised Latvian makes this link even closer.<sup>23</sup> Pommers was known as a defender of Russian schools, which was apparently not the only reason for his canonisation, but sufficient for consumption by the Russian audience, especially in the context of discussions about minority education reform in Latvia. Russian Patriarch Alexei II even noted the impossibility of paying a visit to Latvia unless the problems of Russian language were resolved.<sup>24</sup> In 2004 the Russian Orthodox Church was even said to be "supporting the efforts of Russian diplomats in defence of the interests of the Russian-speaking populace."<sup>25</sup> Interestingly enough, though the "language problems" had still not been "resolved," this did not prevent the Patriarch from visiting Latvia two years later.

Despite occasional politicisation of religion, reports on Latvia hosting Orthodox religious relics portrayed it as a land of religious diversity and harmony. An article devoted to the hosting of the Tikhvin Icon of the Saintly God Mother in Rīga went so far as to claim that the "people of different nationalities and political beliefs that came to pay their tribute to the icon sensed a unity hitherto unfamiliar to them – we are Orthodox."<sup>26</sup> While claims about high Latvian officials identifying with Orthodoxy are clearly exaggerated, the message of Latvia as a country friendly to Orthodoxy was clear. What is more, Russian media have contributed to creating the image of Latvia as a country that extends full support to Old-Believers, a religious group that split off from Orthodoxy and sought refuge in Latvia from persecution in Russia proper in the 17th century.<sup>27</sup>

In a story on an Orthodox Church in Daugavpils, "a religious building with no comparison in the world,"<sup>28</sup> the author not only provides information on the building, but also an odd interpretation of Latvian history. For example, the author refers to Latvian territory as part of Russia before German knights arrived in the 12th century and to the period of the 1920s not as the period of Latvia as an independent state, but as a time "after civil war [in Russia]." At the same time, the Russian media also reported favourably on the recent renovation of the Christ Birth Orthodox Cathedral in Rīga, which had been converted to a planetarium during the

<sup>22</sup> "Spasennoe tvorenie Rastrelli," *Gudok*, 8 May 2004.

<sup>23</sup> "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 1 March 2002, 6:20.

<sup>24</sup> "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Ekho Moskvy"*, 30 March 2004, 11:30.

<sup>25</sup> Oleg Nedumov, "Patriarkh zastupilsya za sootchestvennikov," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 7 April 2004, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, "Blagodat' nad Baltiskoi zeml'oy," *Gudok*, 10 July 2004, p.12.

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Taranov, "Goryachie novosti," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 16 July 2002, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, "Khram kocheval za voiskom," *Tribuna*, 19 April 2002, p. 12.

Soviet years.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the Russian media particularly like the Dome Cathedral and St. Peter's Church in old Rīga.<sup>30</sup>

## Popular Art and Nostalgia for the Common Past

Nostalgia towards former republics and territories is still quite strong in Russia. Indeed, according to sociological surveys held in 2006, 68% of Russians regret the disintegration of the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> Regret is strongest among the elderly (83%) and considerably lower among youth (44%) who have few or no memories of living in the Soviet Union. Nostalgia is linked not only to the loss of superpower status, but also with vivid cultural memories, particularly those brought into each home by means of television or the film industry.

More than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several Latvian cultural figures who made their names during the Soviet period remained very familiar to the Russian public. If modern Latvian theatre had to be newly discovered by Russian audiences, several Latvian musicians known from the 1970s and 1980s are not only remembered, but still appreciated in Russia. A story about jubilee concerts by famous Latvian composer and jazz pianist Raimonds Pauls in April 2002 referred to "Concerts in Moscow – the nights of nostalgia after the melodies of youth."<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Pauls is considered to be "the most famous Latvian within the former Soviet Union."<sup>33</sup> The concerts, held in the largest and most prestigious concert hall in the State Kremlin Palace, were widely covered, and with few exceptions, all reports referred to the Soviet past, when Pauls experienced the peak of his popularity and earned the title of "Maestro." The media used various adulatory labels in reference to the Soviet period of Pauls' work, but largely ignored new work with young Latvian singers who also participated in the concert.<sup>34</sup> It seems that for many elderly Russians, Raimonds Pauls is the image of a lost past that came back for several evenings. Indeed, as one newspaper wrote: "Everything worked out. The Maestro is back."<sup>35</sup>

For many Russians Laima Vaikule stands next to Raimonds Pauls as a symbol of Latvia. Interestingly, while her 50th birthday passed virtually

<sup>29</sup> "V Rige nachalas' blagotvoritel'naya aktsiya "Rozhdestvensky svet"," *Radiostantsiya Radio Rossii*, 9 January 2003, 20:00.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., "V Rige na vremya rozhdestvenskikh prazdnikov otkrylsya dlya poseshcheniya Domsy sobor," *Russky kuryer*, 24 December 2004, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Valery Fedorov, "Russians' attitudes towards reintegration 15 years after the collapse of the USSR," December 8, 2006, <http://www.eurasianhome.org/xml/t/expert.xml?lang=ru&nic=expert&pid=889>, last accessed on 12 December 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Raimonds Pauls, *Izvestiya*, 19 April 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Yolanta Kachaeva, "Raimond Pauls: Ya znayu gryaz' i uspek," *Trud*, 11 September 2003, p. 25.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Yuri Yarotsky, "Starinnie chasi esche idut," *Kommersant'*, 22 April 2002, p. 21 EV or Maksim Kononenko, "Shest' tysyach chelovek na bek-vokale," *Gazeta*, 22 April 2002, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> Maksim Kononenko, "Shest' tysyach chelovek na bek-vokale," *Gazeta*, 22 April 2002, p. 14.

unnoticed in Latvia, Russia's media devoted considerable attention to it. Vaikule's professional career during the Soviet era was of greater interest than her current activities, as she was "the most stylish singer of the Soviet Union" and "our foreign singer."<sup>36</sup> She symbolises the "famous Baltic style" of Soviet-era Jūrmala, where she began her career. For a Russian audience, she is not a Latvian singer, but "our singer" from Latvia, "our foreign singer," whose Latvian origins may be apparent in her accent and appearance. Vaikule's name is frequently mentioned in Russia's media and she is a frequent guest on Russian television. These appearances contribute to the popularisation of Latvia's image, as every time she is mentioned, so is her link to Latvia.<sup>37</sup>

Without exaggeration, the Latvian actress Vija Artmane symbolises an entire epoch not only for Latvian spectators, but for television viewers and cinema goers throughout the former Soviet Union. That is why her 75th birthday was noticed not only in Latvia, but also in Russia, where she was presented and honoured with several awards for her contribution to the development of cinematography.<sup>38</sup> The coverage of Artmane's anniversary provided an occasion for referring to the Soviet past, but also for bringing up other political and social issues. Only on rare occasions did reports focus exclusively on Artmane's professional work or private life.<sup>39</sup> More often, the media sought to blame the "nationalistic Latvian state" for "being hostile" to the actress, allegedly because "she was friendly to Russia." This "hostility," in turn, is portrayed as having resulted in severe health problems.<sup>40</sup>

Artmane is not the only Latvian actor that left a deep impression on the Russian public. According to one opinion poll, Latvian actor Ivars Kalniņš "was declared as the most attractive actor in Russia in 2002."<sup>41</sup> While Kalniņš' popularity hails from the Soviet period, he is still in demand

<sup>36</sup> "Vaikule provela prazdnechny kontsert v "Rossiya"," *Kommersant'*, 12 March 2004; interview with Vaikule, *Rodnaya gazeta*, 26 March 2004; "Vaikule 50 let: Snezhnaya koroleva," *Kultura*, 1 April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., Vasily Samotokhin, "Laima znachit – "Schastye," *Granitsa Rossii*, 29 September 2003, p. 16; Marina Eratova, "Laima Vaikule: pet' ya ne khotela, a stala pevitsey," *Sel'skaya zhizn'*, No. 94, 2 December 2004, p. 15; Anna Veligzhanina, "Laima Vaikule: samye dorigie sobaki zhivut u menya!," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 11 April 2003, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Lidiya Andreyeva, "Ne koroleva ya, a derevenskaya. U Viji Artmane – yubiley," *Kultura*, No. 32, 19 August 2004, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> See e.g. Dmitry Mel'man, "Snezhnaya koroleva. Vija Artmane: "Ya govorila svoemu muzhu; tebe nuzhno zhenit'sya na bufetchetse, a ne na aktrise"," *Moskovsky konsomlets*, 21 August 2004, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., "My vas lyubim, Viya!," *Tribuna*, 21 August 2004, p. 6; Evgeny Agoshkov, "Novosti," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 21 August 2004, 12:00; Vera Serebrovskaya, "Sobytiya," *Telekanal "TV-Centr."* 21 August 2004, 12:00; Mariya Dubova, "Viya Artmane: "Mnogoe ne nraivit'sya, chto ya lyublyu Rossiyu,"" *Novye izvestiya*, 27 August 2004, pp. 1,17; Marina Eratova, "Narodnaya artistka SSSR Vija Artmane: aktrisu khotyat videt' tol'ko schatslivoy...," *Sel'skaya zhizn'*, No. 1-2, 13 January 2005, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Karen Markaryan, "Ivar Kalnin'sh ne schitaet seks na storone izmenoi," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 4 March 2003, p. 21.

among Russian film makers. He is often interviewed by the Russian media, and these interviews indirectly inform the Russian audience about past and present day cultural life in Latvia. The death of Dzintra Ritenberg, “one of the most beautiful actresses of Soviet cinematography,”<sup>42</sup> was also reported in the Russian media. While Russians might know few young Latvian actors, the Russian media continue to pay tribute to Latvian actors of the Soviet era.

Several younger Latvian cultural figures have also made an imprint in the Russian media, and foremost among them is the Latvian pop group “Brain Storm.” As one Russian journalist wrote, “Brainstorm is one of the few groups from the countries of the former USSR that managed to achieve popularity not only in Eastern but also in Western Europe.”<sup>43</sup> “Brainstorm” often performs in Russia and draws media attention. Soon after their first successful appearance on the international stage in 2001 during the Eurovision song contest, Brain Storm conquered the Russian public with the hit “My Star” and other popular compositions.<sup>44</sup> Gunārs Kalniņš is another ‘new generation’ singer who attracted the Russian media.<sup>45</sup> He was not entirely new to a Russian audience, who saw him in his childhood days in the popular music band “Dzeguzīte” that became well known in the Soviet Union in the mid-1980s. Reports on the young musicians from “Brain Storm” or former “Dzeguzīte” singers cannot draw parallels with Soviet culture or invoke nostalgia, as they are part of contemporary Latvian popular culture.

## Latvian Theatre, Opera and Music: Surprisingly Good

The Russian media comment frequently and overwhelmingly favourably on performances by theatre troupes from Latvia, the Latvian National Opera and Latvian musicians. Occasionally, reporting contains direct or indirect commentary on Latvian foreign policy, ethnic relations, minority policy, and history.

Latvian opera was rediscovered by Russian spectators in spring 2003, when the theatre toured the Russian capital for the first time in 23 years. Since then Latvian opera and ballet performances take place regularly on the stages of Russian theatres. The quality of the performances and acting is well covered in the Russian media. The first visit was reflected in the media as something of a test of Latvian theatre after it had gone through

<sup>42</sup> Matvey Glebov, “Krasota po-Rizhski: Umerla Dzidra Ritenberg,” *Izvestiya*, 11 March 2003, p. 13; Pavel Sigalov, “Umerla vdova komunista,” *Kommersant*, 12 March 2003, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Svyatoslav Biryulin, “Shkolnye druz’ya: Den’ rozhdeniya kluba “B2” otmetili vystuplenyem latviskoy gruppy “Brainstorm,” *Vremya novosti*, 20 October 2003, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Ulyana Kalashnikova, “Triumf obmansskov: “V hit-paradakh “Brainstorm” golosoval za sebya sam,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 7 November 2004; see also “Nashestviye,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 13 August 2004, 14:08.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. Yekaterina Makarova, “Pribaltiisky “kukushonok” stal zvezdoy,” *Ogonek*, No. 14, 7 April 2005, p. 62.



difficult times in the post-Soviet years.<sup>46</sup> Leaving aside the political context, the Latvian National Opera earned praise for its singing and aesthetics.<sup>47</sup> Opera could be the only art form where Russians seem to accept Latvia's dominance and admit that there is much to learn from their smaller neighbour. It is worth adding that Russian media also pay tribute to Latvian ballet dancers well known from the "joint past."<sup>48</sup>

After Latvia joined the European Union, Russian commentators rendered the annual Latvian International Opera Festival in Rīga a component of West European culture overnight. Opera and ballet are used to illustrate not only the divergence between Russians and Latvians within Latvia, but also between different historical epochs. In Russian media reports, ballet is associated with the Soviet past and attended mostly by Russians in Latvia, while opera is alleged to have received the status of a state art.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, some Russian media directly attach the responsibility for such division to Latvians with comments such as "some civil servants in Latvia try to divide music into "our" and "alien" categories and preach slogans such as: "We have no need for alien genius!"<sup>50</sup> Fortunately, there are counterbalancing first hand opinions by Russian artists working with Latvian theatres, who contribute significantly to diluting the image of Latvia as a country with total cultural separation between the two communities. For example, they note that Latvians are common spectators of performances in Rīga's Russian Drama Theatre.<sup>51</sup>

According to one report, the sets and costumes in modern Latvian theatres are "elegant," "full of style" and "fineness." The Latvian National Opera is "one of the best examples of European theatre," while the New Rīga Theatre is "one of the most fashionable theatres in Europe."<sup>52</sup> The comparison of Latvia's "Dailes" Theatre to Moscow's Artistic Academic Theatre<sup>53</sup> is probably the best compliment any foreign theatre could ever receive from a Russian theatre director. The same director expressed high praise about Latvian actors prepared in the Academy of Culture in Rīga. Russians could "learn something" from the Latvian Drama Theatre and Opera for their

<sup>46</sup> Natalya Zimyanina, "Alcina pomanit i ne barosit," *Vremya MN*, 17 May 2003.

<sup>47</sup> Sergey Biryukov, "Aida iz Rigi," *Trud*, 20 May 2003, p. 3; "Gastroli Latviiskoy operi v Bolshom teatre: kommentarii direktorov teatrov," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak-24"*, 28 May 2003, 13:25; Andrey Hripin, "Opera iz Latvii – okno v Evropu," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 2 June 2003; Dmitry Cilikin, "Pikovaya dama vyigrala," *Vedomosti*, 22 March 2005, p. A8.

<sup>48</sup> Ilya Okunev, "Ya khochu tantsevat' 100 let," *Moskovskaya pravda*, 17 January 2005, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> "Zakonchilsya Rizhskii operny festival," *Izvestiya*, 19 June 2004

<sup>50</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, "Chaikovsky v Koknese," *Gudok*, 12 January 2005, EV.

<sup>51</sup> "Rezhiser Trostenyatsky – Rīga pokoryaet raz i navsegda," *Izvestiya*, 30 April 2004.

<sup>52</sup> Pavel Sigalov, "Revizor v obshchepite," *Kommersant'*, 14 November 2003, p. 30; See also *Novye izvestiya*, 29 January 2004, *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 29 January 2004, *Rodnaya gazeta*, 13 February 2004, *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 13 April 2004, *Izvestiya*, 20 February 2004.

<sup>53</sup> "Rezhiser Trostenatsky "Rīga pokoryaet raz i navsegda," *Izvestiya*, 30 April 2002.

unique approach to classics, Gogol or Verdi.<sup>54</sup> Russia's media have taken a particular liking to Alvis Hermanis, the director of the New Rīga Theatre.<sup>55</sup> His rendition of Gogol's "Reviser," with the plot and setting transferred from the 19th century to the 1960s-1970's Soviet Union, earned high praise. After Latvia's Valmiera's Theatre performed a play by famous Latvian writer Rūdolfs Blaumanis in the Russian city of Novgorod, Russians "discovered" Blaumanis and an additional performance was scheduled.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the Theatre of Opera and Ballet of the Russian city of Perm staged Handel's famous opera "Alcina" after being inspired by the performance of the Latvian National Opera. The author of the report acknowledges that Rīga's performance was much better in all regards.<sup>57</sup>

A journalist interviewing the director of Rīga's Russian Drama Theatre was quite astonished to hear that Latvians attend performances as often as Russians and that Latvian actors often play major parts on the stage of the Russian Drama Theatre.<sup>58</sup> Despite allegations of "Russophobia" from time to time in the Russian media, Latvian theatres often stage Russian classics such as Gogol and Chekhov and the director of Latvia's "Dailes" theatre has noted that Latvians like Russian classic literature very much,<sup>59</sup> thereby breaking another stereotype.

While many Latvian theatres and artists individually earned praise in the Russian media, some media coverage also included negative interpretations of Latvian policy. For example, after paying tribute to the director of one of Moscow's theatres for his new performance, *Literaturnaya gazeta* went on to mention his past post in Latvia as director of the Theatre of Young Spectators, where both Latvian and Russian troupes used to work. The theatre was closed in the 1990s, and the director "experienced the full degree of unpopularity and Baltic negativism towards the word "internationalism".<sup>60</sup> The newspaper suggests that the director was forced to leave Latvia if he wanted to continue his work.

A similar tone could be sensed during Latvia's NATO accession when Rīga's Theatre of Russian Drama was due to stage a performance of Chekhov's "Seagull" in Moscow. Reviews contained both criticism and

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Marina Shimadina, "Agafya v Zastekolye: "Zhenit'ba Gogolya v postanovke pizhskogo teatra "Dailes"," *Kommersant*, 20 December 2003, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Marina Davidova, "Dno zasteklili," *Izvestiya*, 20 February 2004, p. 10. Roman Dolzhansky, "Ledovy tvorets "Led" Vladimira Sorokina instsenirovan v Germanii," *Kommersant*, 26 January 2005, p. 22; Gleb Sitkovsky, "Starik i Moyva. 'Dolgaya zhizn' v Vene," *Gazeta*, 27 May 2005, p. 25; Roman Dolzhansky, "Obshchaya starost'," *Kommersant*, 30 May 2005, p. 21 EV.

<sup>56</sup> Matvey Glebov, "Khroniki," *Izvestiya*, 23 April 2002, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Gyulara Sadih-zade, "Zamahnulis na Gendelya. V Peterburge proshli gastrolī Permskogo teatra operi i baleta," *Gazeta*, 26 January 2005, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Marina Pereleshnaya, "Direktor Rizhskogo teatra russkoi dramy Eduard Tsehoval o problemakh i tvorcheskikh planakh," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak-24,"* 17 October 2003, 13:35.

<sup>59</sup> "Novosti kul'turi," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak,"* 18 December 2003, 18:38.

<sup>60</sup> Ol'ga Galahova, "Turgenev po-estonski," *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 18 February 2004, p. 10.

praise, but the latter had less to do with the performance, and more to do with the existence of a Russian Theatre troupe in Latvia as such. It was “the oldest foreign Russian-speaking troupe” and the actors were “people who on the territory of a sovereign state preach drama requested by few and in a language required by no one.”<sup>61</sup> The theatre of the “sovereign state” that has “pompously joined NATO”<sup>62</sup> was able to make a respectable staging of Chekhov’s play, but political discourse overshadowed coverage of the performance. However, at about the same time, there were also very positive reports about performances staged in Riga by the Theatre of Russian Drama and the Latvian National Opera,<sup>63</sup> wherein the Latvian National Opera building was referred to as one of the most beautiful opera buildings in the world with a wonderful choir and orchestra. The talent of Latvian opera singers was also noted.<sup>64</sup>

The Russian media gave high praise to Latvian organ player Iveta Apkalna’s “professionalism” when she performed at the opening of an International contest of organ players in Moscow without mentioning her background or the ongoing educational reforms in Latvia that occasioned so much vitriolic comment in Russia (see the chapter by Dmitrijs Petrenko).<sup>65</sup> The same is true for performances by Latvian violin player Davids Geringas, the “favourite pupil of Mstislav Rostropovich,” whose concerts became “one of the finest events of the opening season.”<sup>66</sup> Another politically unbiased report was devoted to violin player from Latvia Elīna Bukša, whose talent was praised without reference to, for example, Latvia’s attempts to rewrite history, – a story popular in the Russian media at that time.<sup>67</sup>

While the Russian media regularly cover Latvian theatre, opera, and music performances, modern Latvian literature and poetry is largely ignored. Occasionally, the Russian media comment on Latvian writers writing in Russian. For example, one reviewer called Imants Auziņš, who had done numerous translations of Russian poets, a “wonderful Latvian poet.”<sup>68</sup> Another reviewer of a couple of poems, essays and stories written by various Latvian authors claimed they provided a “broad panorama of the current literature of our recent neighbour in the Union’s “communal apartment.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Yelena Yampol’skaya, “Leto nad trupami,” *Russky kuryer*, 6 April 2004, p. 10; Irina Tosunyan, “Zakoldovanie ‘Chaikoi’,” *Literaturnaya gazeta*, 14 April 2004, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Yelena Yampol’skaya, “Leto nad trupami,” *Russky kuryer*, 6 April 2004, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Radiostantsiya Ekho Moskvy*, 10 April 2004, *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 13 April 2004.

<sup>64</sup> Aleksey Parin, “Pestrota bez ozareny,” *Kultura*, No. 36, 16 September 2004, p. 11.

<sup>65</sup> “Prelyudiya k sezonu,” *Novie izvestiya*, 1 September 2004, p. 10.

<sup>66</sup> Yelena Al’chenko, “Revolutsiya ot Geringasa,” *Tribuna*, 28 September 2002, p. 3; Yuliya Usova, “Bashmet ustupil “Solistov” na odin vecher: Zavtra v Moskve proidet unikal’ny koncert,” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 28 September 2002, p. 7.

<sup>67</sup> Arkady Petrov, “...Vmeste – tselaya strana!”, *Kultura*, No 21, 2 June 2005, p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Oleg Torchinsky, “Ya mir uslyshal, kak blaguyu vest,” *Moskovskaya pravda*, 16 November 2004, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Viktor Shirokov, “Koleso obozreniya,” *Literaturnaya gazeta*, No. 49, 8 December 2004, p. 7.

## Latvian Film and Television: Not as Good as Ours

If Latvian theatre in general earned positive reviews in the Russian media, the same cannot be said about the Latvian film and television industry. Admittedly, until recently the Latvian film industry was woefully underfunded and in a rather pitiful state, much the same as in all the former non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union. The scanty output of Rīga's film studio did not go unnoticed by the Russian media, which was wont to contrast it either with the Soviet past or with contemporary Russia. Thus, the "Russian film industry is working, while Rīga's film studio is lying idle" or "today Rīga's film studio is a dead kingdom" producing a couple of movies a year.<sup>70</sup> The main message here is that "the legendary film studio" that worked productively during the Soviet era is lying idle in the sovereign present.

Occasionally, the contrast between Latvian and Russian film is used by the Russian media to assert Russia's cultural superiority: "The Russian film festival in the capital of Latvia is an inspiration for the populace of the sovereign state."<sup>71</sup> Other illustrative examples of a patronising attitude include statements such as the "cultural life of the country would be poorer without Russian films" or "Russian cinematography in present day Latvia [...] is an essential cultural background."<sup>72</sup> Interestingly enough, while the film festival became an annual event, only in 2005, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of Victory Day, did veterans receive free tickets.<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, this largesse was noted by Russian media, particularly on the backdrop of a sea of reports and articles on how "inhumanely" the Latvian authorities treat Soviet veterans. Notwithstanding its limited capabilities, the Latvian film industry is still able to participate in film festivals in Russia presenting new movies.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, some Russian specialists have expressed appreciation for the new generation of Latvian actors: "we do not have a joint film industry with Latvia any longer, but this does not mean that good actors cannot be known by their names and appearances."<sup>75</sup>

While Russian commentators are not particularly impressed by Latvian cinema production, they nevertheless admit the strength and professionalism of the Latvian school of documentary film and photography. Indeed the talent of Latvian documentary film makers has also been recognised through awards received in Russia.<sup>76</sup> The Russian media also commend the Latvian school of photography in general and the photographer Gunārs

<sup>70</sup> "Festival v Rīgē zavershilsya," *Novie izvestiya*, 29 March 2004; Vita Mach, "Kadr odin, rubl'-dva," *Delovaya khronika*, 10 December 2002, p. EV.

<sup>71</sup> "Festival v Rīgē zavershilsja," *Novie izvestiya*, 29 March 2004.

<sup>72</sup> *Kommersant'*, 30 April 2004.

<sup>73</sup> "Vesti," *Radiostantsiya "Radio Rossii"*, 4 March 2005, 7:30; "Novost' dnya," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 10 March 2005, p. 25.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Leonid Vasilyev, "Nika" raspravlyayet krylya," *Trud*, 26 February 2003, p. 5.

<sup>75</sup> Roman Dolzhansky, "Latyshskie strasti," *Kommersant'*, 19 December 2003, p. 32.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., Anna Fedotova, "Gran-pri telekinoforuma "Vmeste" dostalsya Latviskim teledokumentalistam," *Telekanal "Ren TV"*, 16 September 2002, 17:30.

Binde in particular, who even under social realism did not praise socialism,<sup>77</sup> but demonstrated flawless relations between form and colour with a deep comprehension of his subject matter.<sup>78</sup> Another photographer who earned praise from the Russian mass media was Roberts Johansons, whose personal exhibition in Moscow was referred to as one of the most stylish in recent times.<sup>79</sup>

Not surprisingly, the Russian media also find that Russian television compares very favourably with Latvian television. Russian TV programmes are widely viewed in Latvia, and many people not only enjoy entertainment from Russia, but receive most of their information about current and global affairs from Russian news broadcasts. Thus, the festival called “Days of Russian Television in Latvia” is quite popular. The Russian media portrayed the Days as a remarkable event for Latvians “who got an opportunity to meet and come into contact with Russian TV stars.”<sup>80</sup> As one journalist put it with a hint of nostalgia, “we used to live in one country and amicably watch one central television.”<sup>81</sup>

The image of Latvia as a country lacking television professionals was reinforced by discussion surrounding a new morning programme in the Russian language on a Latvian channel. The programme invited a well-known journalist from Russia to act as co-presenter, as the producers were unwilling “to suffer with local television staff who have limited experience and some problems with the [Russian] language.”<sup>82</sup> According to Russian news reports, an additional benefit to inviting a journalist from Russia was the opportunity to receive news “from TV presenters known from the Soviet era.”<sup>83</sup> It should be mentioned that due to low ratings this programme was closed about five months after it was launched.<sup>84</sup> In fact, the appearance of a “well-known journalist” from Russia did not help the “suffering” of local television, though some of the media blamed Latvian authorities who could not tolerate “the only Russian speaking show on Latvian television.”<sup>85</sup>

On the other hand, Latvian actors from various generations are frequently invited to play both supporting and leading roles in Russian movies and TV series.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, some Russian journalists found that certain

<sup>77</sup> N.A., “Art-Kur’yer,” *Moskovskaya pravda*, 14 July 2004, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> N.A., “Priglasitel’ny bilet,” *Argumenty i fakti, Prilozheniye “Moskva,”* 14 July 2004, p. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Sergey Safonov, “Prismotris’ k khudozhnikam. Neizvestnie portreti Roberta Johansona,” *Gazeta*, 31 March 2005, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> “Dni Rossiskogo televideniya v Latvii,” *ORT*, 24 April 2002.

<sup>81</sup> “Dni televideniya v Latvii,” *REN-TV*, 23 April 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, “Molchanov na eksport,” *Tribuna*, 13 August 2004, p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Aleksandr Orlov, “Vremya bol’shoy stirki. V novom telesezone zriteli rasproschayutsya so mnogimi starimi znakomimi,” *Novie izvestiya*, 13 August 2004, p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> Ruslan Bystrov, “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak-24,”* 17 January 2005, 17:00.

<sup>85</sup> N.A., “Telenovosti,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, No 11, 20 January 2005, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> See, e.g., Masha Davtyan, “Starik Hottabich ugodil v set’. V roli internet-dzhina snyalsya sam Sharikov,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 16 October 2004, p. 3.

Russian-language Latvian television productions would be worth showing in Russia as well. For example, commenting on a Latvian-made production entitled “Rīga Balsam on the Russian Soul,” one journalist noted that “it will be a pity if our TV spectators will not have an opportunity to test ‘Balsam’.”<sup>87</sup>

### **“New Wave”: The Present is a Well-Forgotten Past**

No other cultural event in Latvia receives the amount of media coverage as the annual “New Wave” pop festival held in the seaside resort of Jūrmala. The festival was and remains primarily a Russian cultural event with marginal Latvian and international participation. While ostensibly of recent pedigree, the festival can trace its roots to a very similar festival called “Jūrmala” that took place regularly in the 1980s. Russian journalists often stress the element of revival, portraying the festival as “our return to Jūrmala.” However, discussions of the “return” occasionally include note of how “we” were “forced” to leave Jūrmala. Some journalists attribute the blame for the interruption to Latvian national consciousness and Latvians thinking “they will get along without us.”<sup>88</sup>

Every year the festival is marked by scandal, soul-searching among Latvian officials about whether to attend, and disagreements among the organisers. The impression that Russian organisers consider the song contest their event even though it takes place on the territory of another sovereign country was bolstered when numerous Latvian journalists working in both the Latvian and Russian languages were not granted accreditation.<sup>89</sup> Despite the Latvian location of the “New Wave” festival, the festival is dominated by Russian basics.<sup>90</sup> Some commentators even go so far as to claim that “New Wave” is almost the only cultural link between Latvia and Russia.<sup>91</sup>

### **Symbols of Cultural Presence**

While “New Wave” has become a symbol of Russia’s cultural presence in Latvia, another such symbol is the Moscow Cultural and Business Centre in Rīga – better known as Moscow House. The land and the building were acquired in 2002 by the Moscow City government and the renovations were rushed to meet a spring 2004 deadline. A chain of similar centres exists in other cities of the world. Apart from their declared cultural or business role, these are symbols of Moscow’s soft power. Indeed, Russian commentators

<sup>87</sup> Boris Gordon, “Rizhsky Bal’zam,” *Ogonek*, 5 May 2003, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> Tamara Martynova, “Golosa iz bezmolvstviya,” *Vesti*, 23 May 2002, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Anna Novitskaya, “Rossiisky show-biznes gonit volnu v Latvii,” *Novaya gazeta*, 22 July 2004, p. EV.

<sup>90</sup> See Konstantin Bakanov, “Pesenny non-stop,” *Novie izvestiya*, 28 July 2004, p. 5; Ol’ga Tarakanova, Nikolay Mishinsky, “Yurmalu nakrolo “Volnoi,” *Tribuna*, 28 July 2004, p. 8; Kirill Pazhitnov, “Puteshestvie iz “Chikago” v Yurmalu,” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 5 August 2003, p. 16.

<sup>91</sup> Anna Pomazova, “Pervy kanal izmenyaet “kontseptsiyu”? Konstantin Ernst “zashchischaet” favoritov teleefira...,” *Russky kuryer*, 6 August 2004, p. EV.

have referred to Moscow House as “the embassy of Moscow on the banks of the Daugava” from which one can clearly see railways “leading from Rīga to Russia,” where one can hear “Russian sounds of Karelian granite” representing Russian national culture in Latvia.<sup>92</sup> It is important to bear in mind that Moscow House appeared from the East at around the same time as the European Union and NATO “arrived” from the West.

Interestingly, Russian media coverage started months before the centre was actually opened. The first event on the eve of opening of the House was the Victory Day celebration. Subsequently, Moscow House became the locale for the annual celebration of Victory Day.<sup>93</sup> The opening was positively reflected in the Russian media and Moscow House was portrayed as a future centre of Russian culture in Latvia. In the context of complicated bilateral relations, the Centre was portrayed as an example of cooperation.<sup>94</sup> Despite the significance attributed to Moscow House on the eve of its opening, the Russian media virtually ignored it for several months until it hosted the United Congress of Russian Communities in Latvia, a would-be umbrella group for Latvia’s Russians.<sup>95</sup> Moscow House then became the subject of journalistic tributes: “Moscow House in Rīga promotes relief from stereotypes and promotes relations between Russians and Latvians” and “Moscow House demolishes the stereotypes of Latvian Russophobes and therefore is dangerous for Latvian ethno-radicals.”<sup>96</sup>

The Russian media devoted considerable angry attention to discussing the fate of another symbol of a Russian cultural presence in Latvia, the halt in broadcasting of *Russian Radio* in Latvia in 2002. While at issue was a commercial radio station providing entertainment that had violated Latvian broadcasting provisions, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs became actively involved in the case connecting the closure of the station with the alleged “suppression of the rights of national minorities.” The culmination of the story was a statement by the head of the station: “It is not without reason that Latvian functionaries are afraid – cultural expansion is more fearful than any political propaganda.”<sup>97</sup> Another example of this “fear” was a wildly covered “persecution of Russian dolls” when Rīga’s municipality considered the possibility of banning the sale of these traditional Russian souvenirs. Albeit the ban was never enacted, it received wide coverage in the Russian media.<sup>98</sup> This assertion provides some insight into the role of culture in Latvian-Russian relations. In the case of Russia, cultural expansion

<sup>92</sup> “Dom Moskvy v Rige,” *Gudok*, 5 February 2004, p. 6

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., “Vesti,” *Radiostantsiya “Radio Rossii,”* 23 February 2005, 12:00.

<sup>94</sup> Anna Averina, “Sobytiya,” *Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”* 8 April 2004, 14:00.

<sup>95</sup> Oleg Meshkov, “S’ezd nepobezhdennykh,” *Slovo*, No. 38, 8 October 2004, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Yelena Stepanova, “Gde zhivet zhudovishche? O dome Moskvy v stolitse Latvii,” *Vechernaya Moskva*, 8 October 2004, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 14 March 2002.

<sup>98</sup> See, e.g., “Bez komentarijev,” *ITAR-TASS, Vremya novostei*, 21 April 2005, p. 12; “Ekho,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvy,”* 15 April 2005, 14:00; “Novosti,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 15 April 2005, 11:45; Yelena Morozova, “Pul’s planeti,” *Pravda*, No. 53, 20 May 2005, p. 3.

(e.g., in the form of “New Wave,” the Moscow House, or media broadcasts from Russia) is indeed a form of political propaganda. Culture rarely comes “by itself,” but brings with it the contested past and present, history and politics.

Latvia occasionally has a symbolic presence in Russia as well, providing an opportunity to observe the reaction of the Russian media to a Latvian cultural “invasion.” The garden of Rīga in Moscow or Rīga’s Days in Moscow are good examples of a Latvian symbolic presence. The Rīga Days were not widely covered, but the few reports on an exhibition of contemporary Latvian artists were overwhelmingly positive. These reports also referred to a past when “for Russia, the Baltic republics substituted for the ‘abroad’”<sup>99</sup> and masterpieces by Latvian weavers and sculptors were a sign of good taste and a touch of chic under socialist realism. The role of the exhibitions was to provide “lost acknowledgment.”<sup>100</sup>

## Latvian Song and Dance Festival vs. Eurovision Song Contest

Since the end of the 19th century, the song and dance festival that takes place in Latvia every four years is one of the most important events in the cultural calendar reflecting traditions from every part of the country. Despite its cultural value and significance, the festival merits only passing reference in the Russian media on one occasion, as opposed to the extended coverage given to “New Wave” or the Eurovision Song Contest that took place in Rīga that same year. By way of explanation, one Russian journalist claimed that “all songs on the central stages of the festival are in the Latvian language and musicians and dancers give preference to the national traditions of the core nation.”<sup>101</sup> The lack of interest may also be explained by a general lack of awareness about any foreign folklore, which was evident in the meagre coverage of the Days of Latvian Culture as well.<sup>102</sup>

In contrast, the Eurovision song contest drew far more elaborate coverage in Russia. Maria Naumova, a Latvian singer of Russian origin who won the festival in 2002, attracted considerable attention in the Russian media. Reports claimed that “the victory of Naumova is a victory for all Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Baltic States,” called her “Our Masha”<sup>103</sup> (*Nasha Masha*) and noted that “though the victory went to Latvia, a Russian won nonetheless.”<sup>104</sup> Russian commentators detected an additional link to Russia, claiming that a Russian composer accidentally discovered Naumova, then “handed” her over to Raimonds Pauls, who made her popular in Latvia.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Vladislav Flerkovsky, “Novosti kul’tury,” *Telekanal Kul’tura*, 31 May 2002, 00:00.

<sup>100</sup> Ol’ga Kabanova, “Svobodno sotkannoye iskusstvo,” *Izvestiya*, 5 June 2002, p. 8.

<sup>101</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, “Vse v odin golos,” *Tribuna*, 2 July 2003, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> N.A. “Latyshskaya kultura v Moskve,” *Vechernaya Moskva*, 15 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>103</sup> Aleksandr Bratersky, “Masha, da ne nasha,” *Izvestiya*, 27 May 2002, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> Irina Mihailina, “Kakaya pesnya bez skandala,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 27 May 2002, EV.



Despite Russian interest in her, Naumova herself disappointed expectations when she noted that she did not aspire to perform on the Russian musical stage.<sup>106</sup>

While some of the coverage was positive, sarcasm was also evident in some reports. For example, one commentator indicated that there was “pleasing news for Russian patriots – agrarian Latvia will go bankrupt in organising a European song contest next year.”<sup>107</sup> Indeed, before the song contest the Russian media were replete with stories about possible cancellation of the festival due to the financial difficulties experienced by the Latvian organisers.<sup>108</sup> When the song contest took place, Russian media were generally positive towards the organisers and paid more attention to the performance of Russia’s entry.<sup>109</sup> However, there was a touch of arrogance in reports claiming that the arrival of the Russian pop-group TATU was “a big event for the capital of Latvia.”<sup>110</sup> The wildly politicised imagination of some Russian journalists was evident in speculation that the Latvian authorities would only allow a citizen to represent the country and that the song performed had to be written by a citizen of Latvia.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

The image of Latvian culture presented in the Russian media is quite diverse and extends beyond references to Raimonds Pauls, Laima Vaikule and the “New Wave” festival in Jūrmala to include contemporary Latvian theatre, opera, classical and pop music and more. One finding is that Russian media coverage of Latvian culture is more common than Latvian media coverage of Russian culture. However, it does bear mentioning that the Latvian media market is divided into Russian and Latvian language outlets, and

<sup>105</sup> Artur Gasparyan, “Masha, da ne nasha...”, *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 27 May 2002, p.1, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Matvey Glebov, “Mariya Naumova, pobeditelnitsa konkursa “Evrovideniye-2002”: pust’ Alla Borisovna zaglyanet na moi sait,” *Izvestiya*, 12 August 2002, p. 3 EV.

<sup>107</sup> Sergey Asharin, “Maksim Galkin podsuzival Izrail’u,” *Mir novostei*, 28 May 2002, p. 25.

<sup>108</sup> See, e.g., N.A. “Finansovie problemy Rigi stavyat pod ugrozu sriva mezhdunarodny festival sovremennoy muziki “Evrovidenie,”” *Ezhednevnie novosti. Posmoskovye*, 31 January 2003, p. 3; N.A., “Mezhdunarodny festival sovremennoi muziki “Evrovidenie” mozhet byt otmenyen Latviyei iz-za finansovikh problem,” “Vesti,” *Radio Rossii* 31 January 2003, 14:27; Yelena Bugaiskaya, “Evrovideniya ne budet?,” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 31 January 2003, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> Abik Elkin, “Evrovidenie startuyet na kosmodrome,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 20 May 2003, p. 2; Kseniya Larina, “Organizatori konkursa “Evrovidenie” pridumali original’noe vizual’noye reshenie glavnoi sceni koncertnogo zala,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvy”* 20 May 2003, 10:27; Ekaterina Andreyeva, “Simbolicheskoe znachenie dizaina konkursnoi sceni: Latviya – eto planeta, gde izpolnyayutsya mehti,” *Telekanal “1 kanal,”* 24 May 2003, 21:00.

<sup>110</sup> “Priезд gruppi “Tatu” stal bolshym sobytiem dlya Latvii,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvi,”* 20 May 2003, 13:20.

<sup>111</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, ““Tatu” v tsentre... uspekha ili skandala?,” *Tribuna*, 23 May 2003, p. 4.

that the former covers Russian cultural life more often than the latter. To put it simply: they are more interested in us than we are in them, at least if one looks through the prism of the media.

The image of Latvian culture is mixed with both positive and negative messages, though reporting on theatre and opera are generally positive. Latvian celebrities who made their names in the Soviet era, such as Raimonds Pauls and Laima Vaikule, are far more frequent guests in broadcasts and articles than younger Latvian artists. Often, reference to Pauls and Vaikule carries associations and memories of Soviet Latvia – presently a foreign country requiring Russians to obtain a visa to visit. It is striking how little attention is paid to Latvian traditions, particularly the song and dance festivals. While this lack of attention might reflect a general Russian lack of interest in traditional cultural production, it also might reflect perceptions that those “national” traditions carried the seeds of “nationalism,” which then redounded to the disadvantage of Russians in Latvia and the rupture of ties between Latvia and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

# Russia's Media on Latvian Accession to the EU and NATO

Toms Rostoks

## Introduction

This chapter analyses how Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO has been portrayed in Russia's media. The research covers the period from January 2002 until May 2005 and reflects news and analyses from newspapers, radio and television. The main aim of this chapter is to detect whether there has been change in the way Latvia's accession to these organisations has been covered over time in Russia's media. There is plenty of evidence that Russia opposed Latvia's EU and NATO membership, but how was this reflected in Russia's media? What is the approximate ratio between positive and negative views expressed over Latvia's accession? Some observers in Latvia have argued that Russia has come to accept Latvia's accession, but has this trend been expressed in Russia's media? The first two parts of this chapter address methodological issues and general observations, the third deals with Latvia's accession to NATO, while the fourth covers Latvia's accession to the EU.

## Methodology

Latvia certainly is not the focal point of attention in Russia's media. However, when Russia's media paid attention to Latvia during the period in review, accession to the EU and NATO was one of the dominant themes. As a consequence, the amount of information available for analysis is enormous. Thus, instead of examining all the media coverage for the period in review, the research focuses on the most decisive moments of Latvia's integration in the EU and NATO.

The analysis was divided into the following sections:

1. A baseline for analysis was provided by analysing coverage of Latvia's accession and membership in the EU and NATO in the first and last 10 days of the time period under investigation (21-31 January 2002 and 21-31 May 2005).
2. Analysis of Russian media coverage of Latvia's NATO membership proceeded as follows. First, Latvia's accession to NATO was analysed by examining how Russia's media covered the Prague summit, where Latvia and a number of other Central and East European countries were invited to become members of the alliance (15-30 November 2002). Second, the analysis focuses on how Latvia's actual accession to the

alliance was covered in early spring 2004 (22 March – 8 April 2004). Third, the analysis looks again at how Russia's media covered Latvia's NATO membership one year after accession (25 March – 8 April).

3. Four periods were chosen for analysis regarding Latvia's EU membership. First, the analysis examines Russian media coverage of Latvian accession in the context of the December 2002 Copenhagen summit, when Latvia and nine other candidate countries were invited to join (5-20 December 2002). Second, the analysis investigates Russian media coverage of the referendum on Latvia's EU accession (13-27 September, 2003). Third comes an overview of coverage during Latvia's entry into the EU (23 April – 11 May 2004). Fourth is an investigation of how Russia's media covered Latvia one year after its accession to the EU (27 April – 6 May 2005).

Although the research covers only a small part of the three and a half year period for which a full media archive is available, it concentrates on periods when the most important events regarding Latvia's EU and NATO membership took place. These events evoked intense commentary in Russia's media.

## General Observations

A few general observations are necessary to set the context for this research. First, Russia's media found NATO enlargement more interesting and important than EU enlargement. This was reflected both by the significantly higher number of news items and opinions devoted to NATO, as well as the more emotional tone of the coverage.

Second, Kaliningrad was by far the most widely covered issue regarding EU enlargement. Although developments around this enclave/exclave are not the focus here, it should be noted that the relative importance of Kaliningrad (as seen through the prism of Russia's media) has been much higher than the accession of any of the candidate countries or any other issue related to EU enlargement. As a consequence, Lithuania emerges as an actor of key importance in the context of EU enlargement. This comes as no surprise, because in this case EU enlargement directly affected the everyday lives of almost 1 million Russian citizens living in Kaliningrad. From a Russian perspective, the accession of Latvia to the EU did not generate as serious a problem as that of Lithuania.

Third, it should be noted that most of the media stories dealt with below involved a whole group of countries, as Latvia did not enter the EU and NATO alone. The only specifically Latvian event of major importance included in the analysis was the referendum on EU accession held in Latvia in September 2003. But even in this case, the Latvian referendum was preceded by a similar vote a week earlier in Estonia, so the two referenda somehow became blended together in Russian coverage. That Latvian accession to the EU and NATO was covered as a group activity generates some drawbacks for analysis. Latvia cannot be analysed as an individual case, but one must first try to understand Russia's stance towards EU and

NATO enlargement in general before seeking to ascertain whether Latvia is portrayed as a special case.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Image of Latvia's NATO Membership in Russia's Media**

Few would disagree that Russia's attitude towards NATO enlargement has been rather negative, and this attitude has largely been shared by government officials and Russia's media. However, it would be an exaggeration to argue that all media commentary has been negative. Most of the news regarding NATO enlargement and Latvia's accession to NATO has been neutral, but it is different when it comes to opinion pieces, interviews and analyses regarding Latvia's accession to NATO. Therefore it would be fair to argue that on balance Latvia's accession to NATO has been portrayed in a negative light in Russia's mass media.

It would also be a mistake to assume that coverage of Latvia's accession to NATO has been one-dimensional because there are many stories, symbols and images embedded in news materials and analyses. Media coverage reflected a wide diversity of views on Russia, Latvia, NATO, the implications of enlargement and the transformation of the alliance. Moreover, the views of a wide range of actors are presented in Russia's media regarding NATO enlargement. Before turning to an analysis of Latvia's image in the context of the Prague summit and enlargement in spring 2004, it is worth describing the case of the Audriņi radar station in Eastern Latvia in greater detail, as this story demonstrates the complexity of the issue and the multiplicity of actors involved.

### **The Audriņi Radar Station**

At the beginning of 2002, the Latvian government's intention to build a military radar station in Audriņi, a small village in the eastern part of Latvia, erupted into the news in both Latvia and Russia. The local population protested against the government's plans, but the situation was further complicated by the statements of Latvian Minister of Defence Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis. According to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Kristovskis accused local activists of acting on behalf of Moscow and called them "psychos."<sup>2</sup> The same article claimed that the protests were unprecedented and reflected broader dissatisfaction with the Latvian government's NATO bid. Relying on highly dubious data provided by an anti-NATO NGO in Latvia called the "Power of Reason," the newspaper even claimed that one third of the population of Latvia was against joining NATO, while the share of those sceptical of

<sup>1</sup> While Russia's media did not pay that much attention to Latvian NATO accession as a separate case, the same was not true for the Baltic States as a whole, insofar as this meant that the alliance would expand into the territory of the former Soviet Union.

<sup>2</sup> Vyacheslav Elin, "Mif o "Russkoi ugroze" vnov' stal dominiruyushchim v vyskazivaniyakh Latviskikh politikov," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 19 January 2002, p. 3.

NATO reached 87%.<sup>3</sup> *Krasnaya zvezda* created the perception of a large scale protest not only against a particular radar station, but also against Latvia's NATO membership as such. Other newspapers noted that a network of Russian-speaking NGOs in Latvia called the Latvian Coordination Council of Social Organisations had stepped up to support the protesters of Audriņi village.<sup>4</sup>

The Audriņi story was picked up by other Russian media and interpreted differently. One interpretation held that, until the beginning of 2002, Latvia's prospects for membership in NATO had been very vague and that the Audriņi affair was the first concrete sign for Russia of NATO's eastward expansion after the first post-Cold War enlargement.<sup>5</sup> The Audriņi case also showed the linkage between Russia's media and NATO sceptics in Latvia. Russia's media claimed to defend the interests of Russian-speakers in Latvia, but in this case, the Russian TV channel ORT played a key role in informing and mobilising people in Audriņi and its surroundings. ORT claimed to be the first to inform the local population about the Latvian government's plans to erect a radar station in the village.<sup>6</sup>

Coverage of the Audriņi case created the image of a gap between the Latvian government and society. The Russian media pointed out that NATO membership might be too costly for Latvia and that it would deal a heavy blow to the country's economic and social situation. Vladimir Taranov wrote in *Parlamentskaya gazeta* that approximately one half of Latvia's population was sceptical about NATO membership and that defence expenses related to Latvia's NATO membership were estimated to grow by 100 million lats each year, the bulk of which was to go towards expensive military equipment imported from the United States. This figure was contrasted with the number of abortions in Latvia in an attempt to demonstrate the damaging impact of high military expenditures on the social fabric of society.<sup>7</sup>

## The Prague Summit: November 2002

In November 2002 the NATO summit in Prague adopted a decision to invite seven candidate countries, Latvia among them, to join the alliance. This event was widely reported in Russia's mass media. While the majority of articles covering the event were neutral and informative, analyses and opinion pieces were rather negative. The Russian media presented a wide variety of opinions regarding the outcome of the summit, and some were even critical about Russia's policy towards NATO enlargement. The range of actors whose views were presented included Latvian officials such as

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Nikolay Myshinsky, "Zachem krestyaninu radar," *Tribuna*, 23 January 2002, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Elena Kochaeva, "Zhiteli vostochnoi chasti Latvii protestuyut protiv vozvedeniya v etoi chasti strany radara," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 18 January 2002, 09:00.

<sup>6</sup> Olga Kokorekina, "Zhiteli Latvii vystupayut protiv ustanovki natovskoi radiolokatsionnoi stantsii," *Telekanal ORT*, 25 January 2002, 18:00.

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Taranov, "Chlenstvo v NATO dolgo stoit," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 24 January 2002, p. 7.

the Prime Minister Einārs Repše, Latvian ambassador in Russia Normans Penke, president of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, state secretary of the Latvian Ministry of Defence Edgars Rinkēvičs and others. Even the mayor of the Latvian city of Ventspils Aivars Lembergs was cited in Russian newspaper *Gudok* as being against Latvian NATO membership.<sup>8</sup>

On the Russian side, of course, officials such as Sergey Yastrzhembsky, Sergei Shishkarev and Konstantin Kosachev were widely cited, as were political scientists Vyacheslav Nikonov, Ivan Safronchuk, Andrei Kokoshkin and military experts Alexander Ivashov, Yuri Baluevsky, Valentin Varennikov. The leader of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation Gennady Zyuganov was probably the most critical voice regarding NATO enlargement in November 2002. However, the harshest standpoint vis-à-vis the Baltic States was taken by leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. A very significant role was also played by journalists, who were often very critical regarding NATO enlargement.

Overall, the image of NATO in Russia's media was not very positive, not least because, as Sergey Yastrzhembsky argued, NATO is not well-suited for facing the threats of the modern world, such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, violent nationalism, etc.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence, many commentators voiced incomprehension about the need to enlarge NATO, which was portrayed as an ineffective alliance. Political scientist Vyacheslav Nikonov argued that enlargement was NATO's strategic mistake, as increasing the number of members would weaken the alliance.<sup>10</sup> Similar language was used by Russian journalist Yevgeny Grigoryev, who wrote that NATO was becoming "hypertrophied."<sup>11</sup>

Russia's media frequently noted that NATO was very different from what it used to be at the end of the Cold War. This has two meanings. First, NATO as a defensive alliance is not as credible as it was before. Second, new member states were probably going to be disappointed, because the alliance they were joining would be very different from the one to which they applied.<sup>12</sup> The image of a changing alliance allows journalists to suggest that applicant countries are naïve. One journalist wrote that the applicant countries were joining an alliance that is qualitatively different from what it used to be, but candidate countries have not noticed.<sup>13</sup> Some Russian experts

<sup>8</sup> "Novosti," *Gudok*, 27 November 2002, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Evgenij Revenko, "Strany Baltii – v spiske 7 pretendentov na chlenstvo v NATO," *Telekanal RTR, Vesti nedeli*, 17 November 2002, 20:00.

<sup>10</sup> Lyuba Shary, "Kogo eshcho primut v NATO? Vozmozhno Ukrainu. No eshcho ne skoro," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 19 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Evgeny Grigoryev, "NATO vse dal'she dvizhetsya na vostok. No Putin uzhe ne sprashivaet "A zachem?," khotya voprosi ostayutsya," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 November 2002, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> "Sobytiya," "Vilmars Heninsh: eshcho vperedu predstoit mnogo raboti, chtobi dostich' tekh standartov, kotorie ot nas trebuet NATO," *Telekanal "TV-Tsentr"*, 21 November 2002.

<sup>13</sup> A. Minayev, "Sammit NATO: Anglisky prem'er zaranee predupredil, chto ne syadyet rjadam s Kuchmoi. Prishlos' menyat' alfavit...," *Novaya gazeta*, 25 November 2002.

argued that the main benefits of NATO membership for new member states would be psychological, rather than real.<sup>14</sup>

A very different view emerges from stories about NATO enlargement when views of the Russian military establishment are included. Here, NATO appears as a malicious and evil organisation posing a real military threat to Russia.<sup>15</sup> This view is shared by Gennady Zyuganov, who argues that from the military-strategic point of view, NATO creates a grave military threat to Russia.<sup>16</sup> NATO enlargement is a threat, because the distance between NATO member states and strategically important military and civilian objects in Russia is significantly reduced.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, NATO thus emerges as a “global military monster” whose primary purpose is to ensure world dominance and the oppression of non-Western civilisations, and enlargement is a means for ensuring this global dominance.<sup>18</sup> Others see NATO as a U.S. instrument for extracting financial resources from poor Central and East European countries. According to this view, candidate countries have to rebuild their military during NATO enlargement, and this means that they have to buy expensive military equipment from the U.S. In short, NATO enlargement is a racket.<sup>19</sup>

The image of Russia created in Russia’s media was a mixed one. On the one hand, the official view was that Russia could not hold back sovereign nation states that had decided to apply for NATO membership. At the same time, Russia was presented as the voice of reason claiming that NATO enlargement is irrelevant, because it would not increase security in Europe. Moreover, it may decrease Russia’s security, unless four new member states in the alliance (the Baltic States and Slovenia) joined the modified Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE).<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, it was well-known that Russia was against NATO enlargement, and therefore the fact that three former republics of the Soviet Union would join the alliance was seen as a major defeat by some reporters and experts. One newspaper wrote that Russia was “defeated again” and this time the defeat was especially painful because the three Baltic republics would join NATO.<sup>21</sup> The

<sup>14</sup> N.A., “Po mneniyu Ivana Safronchuka, armii Latvii, Litvy i Estonii ne vnesut sushchesvennogo vklada v mirovuyu bor’bu s terrorizmom,” *Radiostantsiya “Radio Rossii,”* interview, 21 November 2002, 18:10.

<sup>15</sup> Ivan Safronov, interview with Leonid Ivashov, “Dlya Rossii NATO – eto moshchny element voennoi ugrozy,” *Kommersant’*, 21 November 2002, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> G. A. Zyuganov, “Seryoznaya ugroza interventsii,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 23 November 2002, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Dmitry Litovkin, Natal’ya Ratiani, “Obraz vraga,” *Izvestiya*, 23 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Igor’ Kortchenko, “NATO priobretayet novoe kachestvo,” *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 29 November 2002, pp. 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> N.A., “Reket dlya byvshego sotslagerya,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 29 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Aleksandr Yakovenko, “Ofitsial’noe mnenie,” *Argumenti i fakti*, 27 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Evgeny Grigoryev, “NATO vse dal’she dvizhetsya na vostok. No Putin uzhe ne sprashivaet “A zachem?”, khotya voprosy ostayutsya,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 November 2002, p. 2.



loudest critics were Gennady Zyuganov and experts from Russia's military establishment, who blamed Putin's administration for not doing enough to stop NATO's expansion. In an interview, Leonid Ivashov argued that Russia had missed an opportunity to use its influence to stop NATO enlargement.<sup>22</sup>

However, the image of a defeated Russia is not prevalent in Russia's media. It is balanced by an image of Russia as a country whose importance as a partner for NATO is much greater than the process of enlargement. The Russian press wrote that although Vladimir Putin was not physically present in Prague, his presence could be felt anyway, because Russia had become a more important partner for the U.S. and NATO after the terrorist attacks of September 11.<sup>23</sup> In other words, a country's importance for the alliance should not be measured in terms of membership, and Russia is an important ally even if it doesn't have a prospect of membership. Besides, it was argued that Russia would exact "revenge" against the Baltic States, as these countries were trying to escape from Russia, but might meet again within the NATO framework. Moreover, Russia's voice might turn out to be louder and more relevant than all the voices of new member states combined.<sup>24</sup>

Latvia's image in Russia's mass media is predominantly negative, but this image has several variations. First, Latvia was depicted as a corrupt state that did not meet the accession criteria and thus, did not deserve to become a NATO member.<sup>25</sup> The media frequently mention that the Russian minority is oppressed in Latvia, and this would prevent Latvia from gaining NATO membership. However, opinions on the issue of the Russian minority diverged. One opinion was that Latvia would be pressed hard by NATO to solve the problems of Russian-speakers after enlargement.<sup>26</sup> Another opinion was that nothing was going to change and that the conditions of Russian-speakers were unlikely to improve after Latvia's accession.<sup>27</sup>

Second, Latvia was depicted as a country whose military forces were very weak and unable to defend Latvia.<sup>28</sup> Third, there was a rather powerful image that Latvia and the other Baltic states would be unable to bear the financial burdens of NATO membership. Russia's media argued that the financial burdens of NATO membership would have a very serious negative impact on the socio-economic conditions of a large part of the population.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Igor' Kortchenko, "NATO priobretat novoe kachestvo," *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, 29 November 2002, pp. 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> Melor Sturua, "Amerike ne nado NATO?," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 23 November 2002, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenko, "Baltiskaya eiforiya," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 28 November 2002, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Aleksei Smirnov, "Ati-bati, Balti – v NATO," *Novie izvestiya*, 22 November 2002, pp. 1-6.

<sup>26</sup> N.A., "Rossiya nadeetsya, chto posle prisoedineniya k ES i NATO v Latvii budut soblyudat' prava natsionalnikh men'shinstv," *Radiostantsiya "Ekho Moskvy"*, 22 November 2002, 13:30.

<sup>27</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenko, "Baltiskaya eiforiya," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 28 November 2002, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, "Prazhsky bal dlya zolushki...," *Gudok*, 26 November 2002, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

It was also typical that generalisations drawn from one applicant country were readily applied also to other countries. Examples from Lithuania's military expenditures were readily applied to other candidate countries.<sup>30</sup>

Fourth, Latvia was portrayed as a naïve country that did not fully understand the true intentions of its Western partners. Some commentators held that Latvia might be admitted to NATO only because of its strategic location. The logic of this argument was very straightforward. NATO was interested in gaining access to Latvia's military infrastructure, thus, it did not matter whether Latvia was ready to join the alliance or not. NATO's strategic interests were more important.<sup>31</sup> While Latvia thought that Western countries were genuine partners and that it was joining an alliance of countries with similar values, Latvia's only importance was its strategic location. Essentially, some in Russia saw NATO enlargement as a mutually beneficial exchange of alliance membership for military bases.<sup>32</sup> This is a very telling image, because Russia is depicted as being smarter than Latvia.

### **NATO Enlargement (Spring 2004) and Its Aftermath (Spring 2005)**

Discussion about NATO enlargement in Russia's media in spring 2004 was qualitatively different from that in November 2002 about the outcome of the Prague summit. This time the debate revolved around practical manifestations of NATO's enlargement, of which the most visible was patrolling of Baltic airspace by NATO fighter jets. The other issue brought up with remarkable frequency was adherence of the Baltic States and Slovenia to the CFE treaty. Discussions about NATO's intentions were not as prominent as they were one and a half years before. Moreover, the media also discussed the impact of NATO membership on the behaviour of new member states.

The people given the opportunity to express their views in Russia's media were largely the same. Latvia was represented in the discussions by Defence Minister Atis Slakteris, Ambassador to NATO Imants Lieģis, Foreign Ministry State Secretary Normans Penke, General Raimonds Graube and Foreign Minister Rihards Pīks. Despite the relatively large number of Latvian officials whose views appeared in Russia's media, their views were clearly a small minority compared to the number of opinions voiced by Russian officials and experts. Russia was represented by such government officials and politicians as Andrei Kokoshkin, Sergei Lavrov, Yuri Baluevsky, Alexander Yakovenko, Mihail Margelov, Konstantin Kosachev, Alexander Grushko, Vladimir Chizhov, Dmitri Rogozin and

<sup>30</sup> N.A., "Reket dlya byvshego sotslagerya," *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 29 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Valentin Varennikov, "Rossiya v kol'tse," *Argumenti i fakti*, 27 November 2002, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenko, "Baltiskaya eiforiya," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 28 November 2002, p. 3.

Gennady Zyuganov. Political scientists and military experts were represented by Leonid Ivashov, Ivan Safranchuk, Oleg Bogomolov, Konstantin Simonov and Igor Panarin.

The presence of NATO fighter jets in Baltic airspace was certainly not the foremost of Russia's concerns, but together with the radar built on Latvian territory, it was the most visible sign of Baltic NATO membership, therefore it was widely covered by Russia's mass media. The Kremlin's attitude towards NATO enlargement in spring 2004 was either neutral or slightly negative, but the arrival of NATO fighter jets in the Baltic States was considered a threat to Russia's security. Some argued that this step did not reflect the spirit of cooperation and mutual reciprocity that Russia and NATO had lately developed.<sup>33</sup> Some experts referred to NATO enlargement as "one of the greatest mistakes in the history of the Western countries." The actual day of NATO enlargement was even called "X hour."<sup>34</sup> Some voices in the military establishment went so far as to call for shooting down every NATO airplane that accidentally crossed the Russian border.<sup>35</sup> Some Russian commentators argued that after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russian planes had not committed a single breach of Baltic airspace, but that NATO airplanes breached Russia's airspace almost every month.<sup>36</sup> What is more, Russian commentators noted again that Latvia would have to pay around USD 8 million every year to cover expenses related to patrolling of its airspace, and this was portrayed as a lot of money for a small country such as Latvia.<sup>37</sup>

Russian media discourse also contained more hostile views. For example, one military expert argued that NATO enlargement was like cancer and that Russia's national security was in grave danger.<sup>38</sup> Another article argued that NATO was actually preparing to attack Russia.<sup>39</sup> The Russian State Duma called upon President Vladimir Putin to discuss the issue of NATO enlargement in the next meeting of the National Security Council.<sup>40</sup> Some experts noticed that Vladimir Putin had started to pay more attention to Russia's military. This was interpreted as a sign of nervousness possibly caused by NATO expansion.<sup>41</sup> Some journalists argued that the growing unease about NATO enlargement had been stimulated artificially, that the image of an external enemy was being used for promoting patriotism in Russia.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Garin Petr, "Novosti", *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 23 March 2004, 19:00.

<sup>34</sup> N.A., "Etot den", *Radiostantsiya "Ekho Moskvu"*, 25 March 2004, 16:11.

<sup>35</sup> Mariya Dmitrieva, "Sshibat' da ne rassusoluvat'. Samoleti NATO letayut vdol' granits Rossii," *Rossiya*, No. 12, 1 April 2004, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Larisa Verbitskaya, "Dobroe utro," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 02 April 2004, 06:06.

<sup>37</sup> Al'ga Kokorekina, "Vechernie novosti," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 29 March 2004, 18:00, 21:00.

<sup>38</sup> Leonid Ivashov, "Rakovaya opuhol' NATO razrastaetsya," *Voенно-promyshlenny kur'er*, 24 March 2004, pp. 1-7.

<sup>39</sup> Vyacheslav Tetekin, "Smelie shagi v kusti," *Sovetskaya Rossiya* No. 45, 6 April 2004, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Vitaly Buzuyev, "24", *Telekanal "REN-TV"*, 29 March 2004, 19:30.

<sup>41</sup> Vyacheslav Tetekin, "Brosok cherez krasnyu chertu," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 27 March 2004, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Andrei Rodionov, "Ekho," *Radiostantsiya "Ekho Moskvu"*, 29 March 2004, 13:00.

Some reports created the impression that it would be a lot easier for Russia to accept NATO enlargement were it not for the fact that the Baltic States and Slovenia had not adhered to the CFE treaty. This was the reason why Russia worried about NATO enlargement, and this gave a firm basis for some sceptics to argue that it had been NATO strategy to create a “grey zone” next to Russia’s border with no limits on the number of troops and military equipment concentrated in the Baltic States (Slovenia was only a minor concern). Thus, the issue of extending the CFE treaty to the three Baltic States became a question of key importance in Russian media discourse about NATO enlargement in spring 2004. This concern was most clearly articulated by Russian government officials Alexander Yakovenko and Konstantin Kosachev. In an interview, Yakovenko voiced the Kremlin’s concerns about the latest round of NATO enlargement because there was a whole range of unsettled issues in the relations of countries such as Latvia and Estonia with Moscow. The most pressing issues were the alleged discrimination against the Russian-speaking population in both countries and the fact that the Baltic States and Slovenia were not part of the CFE treaty.<sup>43</sup> In an interview, Kosachev presented a very detailed account of Russia’s concerns that the Baltic States and Slovenia were not party to the CFE treaty. He drew the conclusion that it was in NATO’s interests to preserve uncertainty with regard to the arrangement of conventional armed forces in Europe. Therefore, Russia should be worried not about NATO enlargement as such, but rather about its possible consequences with regard to the placement of armed forces in the four new NATO member states.<sup>44</sup>

One year after Latvia’s accession to the alliance, in spring 2005, Latvia’s NATO membership did not receive much attention in Russia’s media, because there were other, more pressing issues on the agenda, such as the border issue and Latvia’s unilateral declaration in April, different interpretations of history, the “resurgence of fascism” in Latvia and more. However, when Latvian NATO membership was mentioned, most of the coverage was negative, because NATO was still seen as an unfriendly alliance. Consequently, because spring 2005 was one of the lowest points in bilateral relations between Latvia and Russia, Latvia’s NATO membership was portrayed in a negative light. Latvia was depicted as a country unable to meet its obligations to the alliance.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Russia’s media portrayed Latvia as a country building military bases that could only be used against Russia. Thus, Latvia appeared as a hypocritical country that was profiting from Russian transit through its ports, but at the same time building military bases that were likely to be used against Russia.<sup>46</sup> Latvian Transport Minister Ainārs Šlesers was the only positively evaluated figure in Latvian politics, because

<sup>43</sup> N.A., “Informatsionnaya programma,” *Radiostantsiya “Ekho Moskvy,”* 29 March 2004, 18:00.

<sup>44</sup> N.A., “Skandali dnja,” *Radiostantsiya “Govorit Moskva,”* 29 March 2004, 19:50.

<sup>45</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenko, “God v semje NATO,” *Krasnaya zvezda,* No. 56, 05 April 2005, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Viktor Sokolov, “Konechno, protiv Rossii,” *Voенno-promyshlenny kur’er,* No. 11, 30 March 2005, p. 2.

during a press conference he stated that he was against building military bases in Latvia.<sup>47</sup> Apart from this one ray of light in Latvian politics, Latvia's image did not improve after one year in NATO.

In spring 2004 Latvia's image was not so different than in fall 2002. Latvia was still portrayed as a small, poor and unfriendly country not ready for NATO membership. Russia's media frequently mentioned that the size of Latvia's armed forces was very small and expressed doubts about Latvia's ability to sustain its NATO membership financially, anticipating that NATO membership would adversely affect Latvia's social spending.<sup>48</sup> In sum, Latvia was one of the few countries that arguably was not prepared to become a member of the alliance, but was accepted by NATO for reasons unknown to Russia, generating some security concerns.

Russia, on the other hand, was portrayed as a country whose security interests were not taken into account during the process of NATO enlargement. NATO was portrayed as an unresponsive, hypocritical actor which advanced its hidden interests behind a mask of fake willingness to establish a genuine collaborative partnership with Russia. Interestingly, Russia's image emerges as a foil to NATO's hypocritical behaviour. While NATO enlargement was an example of the "old" pattern of behaviour characteristic of the Cold War, Russia was a progressive power trying to build a Europe without new dividing lines. While NATO enlargement was a security threat beyond Russia's ability to control, Russia was seen as too big and too important not to be taken into account or to be subjugated by Western powers. What really emerges from the analysis is the image of a Russia that is morally superior to its partners or opponents in the West. Russia is certainly portrayed as morally superior to Latvia – a small, poor and unfriendly country that discriminates against its Russian-speaking population. Latvia's "unfriendliness" further came to light in spring 2005 amid speculation that Latvia was using its recent NATO membership to boost its claim to the Abrene district that had been part of Latvia before World War II and had subsequently become part of Russia after the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>49</sup> However, this moral superiority could not fully alleviate Russia's security concerns regarding Latvia's accession to NATO.

## **The Image of Latvia's EU Membership in Russia's Media**

### **The Copenhagen Summit: December 2002**

Russia's media scarcely covered the Copenhagen summit, and news reports mentioned Latvia primarily as one of a number of countries scheduled to join the EU on the 1 May 2004. One reason the Copenhagen summit was not widely covered in Russia's media was that the NATO summit in

<sup>47</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, "Protiv natovskikh baz," *Gudok*, 25 March 2005, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Otdel' mezhdunarodnoi zhizni, "NATO u nashikh granits," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 1 April 2004, pp. 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> Ivan Demidov, "Russky vzglyad," *Telekanal 3*, 29 May 2005, 15:25.

Prague had taken place three weeks earlier, and Russia's media were still writing about NATO enlargement. EU enlargement was simply not yet on the agenda.

However, this does not mean that the possibility of Latvia's EU membership was not discussed in late 2002. Latvia's candidacy was characterised as premature due to the Latvian economy's lack of competitiveness and the very high number of non-citizens. Moreover, Latvians were portrayed as sceptical regarding the country's EU membership, even more sceptical than Russians living in Latvia.<sup>50</sup>

The Copenhagen summit was covered in Russia's media largely in terms of difficult issues such as the last-minute deal between Germany and Poland and the issue of scheduling the date of the beginning of Turkey's accession negotiations. Russian commentators also noted that this enlargement round would not add much to the EU in terms of economic power.<sup>51</sup> Russia was present in Copenhagen indirectly, as Italy's Silvio Berlusconi stated that the future of the EU is unthinkable without Russia's participation.<sup>52</sup> This suggested that despite the importance of enlargement, there were other issues such as establishing a working partnership between the EU and Russia that were perhaps more important than the enlargement process.

The image of Latvia in Russia's media in the context of the Copenhagen summit was marked by two issues. First, Russian commentators acknowledged that Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania had managed to achieve remarkable results during accession negotiations.<sup>53</sup> Second, commentators noted that Latvia had serious problems with regard to its Russian-speaking minority.<sup>54</sup> In sum, coverage of the Copenhagen summit was insufficient to create a detailed image of Latvia, Russia and the EU.

### **Latvia's Accession Referendum: September 2003**

If Latvia was hardly noticed by Russia's media in the context of the Copenhagen summit, Latvia's accession referendum was a very different case. As mentioned before, this referendum was the only event included in the analysis where Latvia was not part of a larger group of countries. In the case of the referendum, a wide variety of officials, experts, politicians and also ordinary people participated in creating Latvia's image in Russia's media. Russia was represented by Vladimir Chizhov, Boris Malahov and Dmitry Rogozin. The European Union was represented by enlargement commissioner Günter Verhoigen. Vladimir Petrovsky was the voice of Russian

<sup>50</sup> Vladimir Gur'ev, "Ne v vostorge ot popadaniya v "desyatku," *Kontinent*, 27 November 2002, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Yuri Yershov, "Bazar istoricheskogo masshtaba," *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 14 December 2002, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenkov, "Evrosoyuz razbuhayet," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 17 December 2002, p. 3.

<sup>53</sup> Arkadiush Sarna, "'Tretyi put'" vymoshchen blagimi namereniyami," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 16 December 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenkov, "Evrosoyuz razbuhayet," *Krasnaya zvezda*, 17 December 2002, p. 3.

experts. Latvian officials and politicians were represented by President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, Ambassador to Russia Normans Penke, Minister of Agriculture Mārtiņš Roze, Prime Minister Einārs Repše, Russian NGO activist Igors Pimenovs, First Secretary in the Embassy in Russia Argita Daudze and Foreign Ministry spokesperson Atis Lots. One newspaper article featured an interview with two Latvian “experts” Aivars Straume and Viktors Dinēvičs. Moreover, Russia’s media appeared to be interested in portraying the opinions of ordinary people living in Latvia about the accession referendum.

The case of the accession referendum is interesting because Latvia was widely represented by its government officials and politicians who were mostly positive about Latvia’s accession to the EU. What is more, Russian officials did not have negative views about EU enlargement. However, they pointed out that the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities should be resolved before Latvia’s accession. Russian commentators raised this issue whenever Latvia acceded to a new regional organisation and, in this case, frequently stressed that the EU must now assume the responsibility of defending the rights of Russian-speakers living in the Baltic States.<sup>55</sup> A similar tactic could be seen in the case of NATO enlargement, when Russia tried to use the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in September 2003 to influence Latvia with regard to alleged discrimination against Russian-speakers. While Russian commentators viewed the situation of Russian-speakers as problematic, Latvia’s EU integration as such was not. This does not mean that coverage of the accession referendum in Latvia was positive. The role of EU enlargement commissioner Günter Verhoigen was a separate issue, as he was seen as an EU official visiting Latvia to scare the local population into the EU by arguing that Latvia would become a Third World country in the event of a vote against accession.<sup>56</sup>

The referendum on Latvia’s integration in the EU marked the first time in the chosen sample that a Russian media outlet gave a platform for the expression of views by Latvians who were not officials. The extreme nationalist Russian newspaper *Zavtra* chose as Latvian experts two Eurosceptical individuals, historian Aivars Straume and former politician Viktors Dinēvičs, who are never portrayed as experts by the Latvian media. Interestingly, the interview was several times longer than other interviews with Latvian and Russian officials or experts. Straume declared that Latvia would become a colony of the EU, while Dinēvičs argued that for him, the Soviet Union was a better choice than the EU.<sup>57</sup> These views were more pessimistic than that of Russian political scientist Vladimir Petrovsky, who argued that Latvia’s accession to the EU was in Russia’s interests. Nevertheless, Petrovsky was sceptical regarding Latvia’s preparedness for EU membership because its

<sup>55</sup> Aleksei Lyashchenkov, “Baltisky uzels,” *Krasnaya zvezda*, 12 September 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Vladimir Taranov, “Kommisiya ES pugaet Latviyu,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 13 September 2003, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Evgeny Antonov, “Referendum v otchel’no vzyatoi strane. Ili golosuy – ne golosuy, vse ravno poluchesh... ES,” *Zavtra*, 18 September 2003, p. 6.

economy was rather weak and its restructuring was not completed yet.<sup>58</sup> Latvia was also portrayed as a country whose EU membership would not immediately lead to becoming part of the Schengen agreement and adopting the single currency. Unemployment was also mentioned as a problem Latvia would likely face after integration.<sup>59</sup>

Russian journalists covered Latvia's EU accession referendum in a rather negative way due to the exclusion of non-citizens from this important vote. Russian commentators claimed that a quarter of Latvia's population was non-citizens, and this cast doubt on the legitimacy of the referendum. The participation of non-citizens could have made a big difference, as in Daugavpils, Latvia's second largest city with a majority Russian-speaking population, a majority voted against EU accession. Russian commentators noticed that voting took place along ethnic lines.<sup>60</sup>

Another theme picked up by journalists was that the Baltic States together would bring almost a million Russians into the EU, many of whom were utterly disappointed by how they were treated by their respective national governments.<sup>61</sup> Russia's media were divided over whether the situation of Russian-speakers in Latvia would improve after accession. One view was represented by Russian-speaking NGO activist Igor Pimenov, who argued that Russian-speakers in Latvia would be taken into account only if Latvia became an EU member state.<sup>62</sup> Claiming that Latvia's accession would not solve the problem of non-citizens and discrimination against Russian-speakers, others urged ethnic Russians in Latvia to vote against Latvia's accession to the EU.<sup>63</sup> Some news reports noted that Latvia (along with Estonia) had a rapidly growing economy,<sup>64</sup> and that the accession referendum was a nation-wide festivity,<sup>65</sup> but this kind of coverage was the exception.

### **EU Enlargement (Spring 2004) and Its Aftermath (Spring 2005)**

Russia's media covered Latvia's entry into the EU in detail. A broad range of opinions by officials, politicians, experts and activists were present

<sup>58</sup> Kolosov, "Vstuplenie stran Baltii v ES: kommentarii politologa Vladimira Petrovskogo," *Telekanal "TV-Tsentr,"* 16 September 2003, 00:10.

<sup>59</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanov, "Poslednyi otshchet," *Ekspert Severo-Zapad,* 29 September 2003, pp. 28-29.

<sup>60</sup> N.A., "Latviya lishila prava golosa tret' svoego naseleniya," *Rossiya,* 22 September 2003, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> Yulius Stross, "Latviya i Estoniya privedut s soboi v ES million russkikh," *Kommersant'*, 17 September 2003, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Vladimir Vodo, "2/3 Latvii vstupilii v Evropu. Ostal'nie poidut tuda za kompaniyu," *Kommersant'*, 22 September 2003, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> Samir Shahbaz, "Bol'shinstvo obshchestvennikh organizatsii russkoyazichnikh grazhdan Latvii prizyvali golosovat' protiv vstupleniya v ES, tak kak ono ne budet sposobstvovat' resheniyu politicheskikh problem," *Telekanal "TV-Tsentr,"* 20 September 2003, 14:00.

<sup>64</sup> Aleksei Strogina, "Dom, kotory stroit Evropa. Ukrepit li Evrosoyuz prinyatie v ego ryadi Estonii i Latvii?," *Rossiskie vesti,* 24 September 2003, p. 13.

<sup>65</sup> Kirill Pozdnyakov, "Dlya osveshcheniya referendum v Latviyu priblyli okolo 300 zhurnalistov," *Telekanal "NTV,"* 21 September 2003, 12:00.



in media discourse. Russian officials in the discussion included Dmitry Rogozin, Mihail Margelov, Pavel Medvedev and Sergei Lavrov. Europe was represented by (Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner) Gil Robles and Hans Pottering, while the range of Latvian officials, politicians and activists included Naturalisation Board head Eiženija Aldermane, MEP Tatyana Ždanoka, Naturalisation Board official Lolita Danga, nationalist youth activist Raivis Dzintars, extremist publisher Aivars Garda, anti-minority school reform activist Aleksandr Kazakov, Latvian TV producer Brigita Rozenbrika, Latvian EU commissioner Sandra Kalniete and president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga. Latvian economic experts were represented by head of the Institute of Economics Raita Karnīte, while experts from the Russian side were Alexander Pikayev and Sergei Markov. Ordinary Latvians were interviewed and asked about their opinions regarding Latvia's accession to the EU.

Russia's media discussed Latvia's accession to the EU in several contexts. First, commentators widely discussed the issue of alleged discrimination against the Russian-speaking population and the problem of non-citizens. Along with the Kaliningrad transit issue, alleged discrimination against Russian-speakers in Latvia (and Estonia) was the issue that reportedly was the most salient in Moscow's relations with the EU.<sup>66</sup> Some even claimed that this problem might become the defining issue of Russia's relations with the EU.<sup>67</sup> Others were of a different opinion, claiming that European politicians in Brussels were adopting double standards with regard to the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. Alexander Pikayev was not of the opinion that Latvia's EU membership would lead to substantial changes in this respect.<sup>68</sup> However, there were reports in Russia's media about European politicians ready and willing to criticise Latvia, with Alvaro Gil Robles being the most notable example.<sup>69</sup>

Russian commentators expressed concern about the potential impact of new member states on EU policy towards Russia. Along with the other Baltic States and Poland, Latvia was named as being pro-American and non-democratic.<sup>70</sup> As the best way to overcome the impact of the Baltic States and Poland on EU foreign relations, Russian political scientist Sergei Markov suggested building warm relations with big member states of the EU who supposedly shared Russia's strategic interests.<sup>71</sup> In many ways, this vision of Russia sharing important interests with large EU member states has been visible in EU-Russia relations. Because of this commonality of interests, Russia did not need to be overly concerned about the potential impact of

<sup>66</sup> Sergei Trusevich, Oksana Ushakova, "Rasshirenie ES – problema dlya Rossii," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 24 September 2003, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> N.A., "V svyazi s rasshireniem Evrosoyuza," *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 07 May 2004, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Vladimir Averin, "Panorama," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak-24"*, 22 April 2004, 12:15.

<sup>69</sup> Maksim Egorov, "Latviya podarit ES svoikh negrazhdan," *Trud*, 23 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Andrei Svjytenko, "Otkrytaya studiya," *Radiostantsiya "Radio Rossii"*, 27 April 2004, 18:14.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

smaller EU member states on the common foreign policy.

Russian commentators also discussed the impact of EU enlargement on Russia. With the completion of the 2004 enlargement, the terms of trade between accession countries and Russia would change, but the media contained various opinions regarding the impact of these changes. Some argued that Russia's losses would amount to USD 150-300 million, while others claimed that Russia would gain from alterations of the trade regime.<sup>72</sup> Commentators discussed the visa issue in the context of EU enlargement, but news about an increase in visa prices<sup>73</sup> were balanced by the prospect of establishing a visa free regime or at least visa facilitation for certain social groups in Russia.<sup>74</sup>

With regard to Latvia, some reports noted that prices would grow after integration in the EU. Latvian economist Raita Karnīte was quoted as saying that a modest increase in prices was expected,<sup>75</sup> but other sources claimed that prices in Latvia would rise considerably.<sup>76</sup> Commentators also claimed that some medicines from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine were going to vanish from drug stores, as they would not meet high EU standards.<sup>77</sup> Russia's media also noted that many Latvians panicked and started to buy basic foodstuffs such as salt, sugar and flour, fearing both an increase in prices and unavailability after accession.<sup>78</sup> Some commentators also noticed that many Latvians were preparing to leave their country in search for a better life and job opportunities in other EU member states that had opened their labour markets.<sup>79</sup>

Russian media reports stressed that not all social groups in Latvia would benefit from EU membership, with beneficiaries including students, bureaucrats and (some) businesspeople. However, reports claimed that other groups would have to deal with the adverse effects of EU membership, such as increasing prices, and that the number of eurosceptics increased considerably with EU enlargement.<sup>80</sup> Last, but not least, it was acknowledged that the number of applications for Latvian citizenship increased considerably prior to Latvia's EU membership due to differing legal rights between citizens and non-citizens.<sup>81</sup>

Overall, the Russian media portrayed the EU as taking up responsibility for dealing with the discrimination against Russian-speakers in Latvia.

<sup>72</sup> Kirill Privalov, "Rossiya na globuse Evropy," *Itogi*, No. 17 (411), 27 April 2004, pp. 38-42.

<sup>73</sup> Tatyana Seiranyan, "Shengen obyazivaet," *Gazeta*, 06 May 2004, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Andrei Svyatenko, "Otkrytaya studiya," *Radiostantsiya "Radio Rossii"*, 27 April 2004, 18:14.

<sup>75</sup> Danuta Dembovskaja, "Nazad v SSSR," *Vremya novostei*, 28 April 2004, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> N.A., "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 01 May 2004, 07:00.

<sup>77</sup> Abik Elkin, "Khor evromal'chikov," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 30 April 2004, p. 4.

<sup>78</sup> N.A., "Lichnyi prazdnik v maske i kaske," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, No. 59, 06 May 2004, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Evgeny Agoshkov, "Novosti," *Telekanal "1 kanal"*, 30 April 2004, 12:00.

<sup>80</sup> Natal'ya Evseyeva, "Novosti," *Radiostantsiya "Mayak"*, 30 April 2004, 18:00.

<sup>81</sup> Gleb Pyanin, "Vesti," *Telekanal "Rossiya"*, 29 April 2004, 23:00.

However, with few exceptions, the EU was not seen as very responsive with regard to Russia's allegations about Latvia's discriminatory policy against Russians. Russia's media seized upon instances when European politicians were critical against Latvia, but this criticism did not result in concrete steps by the Latvian authorities to improve the situation of Russian-speakers. Although the EU as a whole was portrayed as unresponsive to Russian concerns, some of its biggest member states were portrayed as Russia's allies that shared important strategic interests with Russia. Therefore the results of the French referendum were readily interpreted as a no-vote against "mechanical" enlargement of the EU, against the inclusion of member states (most notably, Latvia) where the rights of hundreds of thousands were not observed and where former Nazi war veterans were "marching in the streets."<sup>82</sup>

In general, with the possible exception of Kaliningrad, Russian media discourse did not portray EU enlargement as something negative for Russia. Only minor adverse effects, such as increases in visa prices and inconveniences related to readjustment to the new trading regime with new member states, were expected. This was in stark contrast to media coverage of NATO enlargement, which was seen as adversely affecting Russia's interests.

The most important features of Latvia's image in Russia's media are that Latvia was ill-prepared for EU membership. As a consequence, it would take its problems, such as a large proportion of non-citizens, into the EU. While some media reports acknowledged that Latvia achieved what it had desired and that accession was a national holiday with many festivities, for the most part, media reports noted that membership was problematic. Increasing prices, the inability to integrate most Russian-speakers, a ban on certain kinds of medicines, the arrogant attitude of the older member states of the EU and the fact that many people in Latvia were waiting for the opening of foreign labour markets were the main drawbacks of EU membership used in Russia's media to shape Latvia's image.

## Conclusions

Russia's media treated NATO enlargement as far more important than EU enlargement. First, coverage of NATO enlargement was more emotional.<sup>83</sup> Second, far more articles covered NATO enlargement. Third, even in periods selected to analyse EU enlargement, articles on NATO enlargement predominated. It should come as no surprise that the image of Latvia in Russia's media in the context of NATO enlargement was mostly negative. Moreover, this image did not change over time and was as negative in spring 2005 as it was at the beginning of 2002 because the alliance itself has been viewed negatively in Russia and there were no significant fluctuations in Latvian-Russian relations in the period between January 2002 and

<sup>82</sup> Maksim Yusin, "Frantsuzi skazali "nyet" bezdumnomu rasshireniyu Evrosoyuza," *Izvestiya*, 31 May 2005, p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps, with the exception of Kaliningrad issue, but this may be of more interest to those who would like to investigate Lithuania's image in Russia's mass media.

May 2005. In fact, the spring of 2005 probably represented a low point in Latvian-Russian relations, and this was reflected in Russian media coverage of Latvia.

Representatives of Russia's military establishment expressed the most negative views about Latvia's NATO membership. Government officials and politicians, with the notable exceptions of Gennady Zyuganov and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, were less negative. It would be fair to say that representatives of this group were concerned about NATO enlargement and its effect on Russia's security and the situation of Russian-speakers in Latvia. The third and least negative group were political scientists, who were least opposed to NATO enlargement as such, but still somewhat negative with regard to Latvia's NATO accession. Journalists form the fourth group, and, although this group is far from being coherent, on balance it was more negative than those political scientists who participated in the construction of Latvia's image in Russia's media.

Russia's media portrayed Latvia's accession to the EU in a less negative manner, though some of the same factors that adversely affected Latvia's image in the context of NATO integration were also present. While EU enlargement did not raise any military concerns in Russia, the image of discrimination against non-citizens and Russian-speakers in general largely shaped the somewhat negative image of Latvia in both cases (NATO and EU). In sum, this issue is probably the major driving force behind the negative image of Latvia in Russia's mass media and spills over into the portrayal of almost every aspect of Latvian-Russian relations. Thus, one could even argue that there is no independent image of Latvian EU and NATO membership, as the more powerful image Russian-speakers being oppressed overwhelms all other topics.

# The Latvian Economy – the Offshore Next Door

Nils Muižnieks

## Introduction

This chapter examines the way Russia's media portrayed the Latvian economy, Russian-Latvian economic relations and the business environment in Latvia from the beginning of 2002 through mid-2005. This chapter will not cover directly treatment of economic issues pertaining to EU enlargement (see Toms Rostoks' chapter above), though Latvia clearly became a more attractive place for investment and tourism from Russia as EU accession approached and after it took place.

Two topics dominated the coverage – Ventspils port and the banking system, particularly Parex Bank. Here, the focus will not be on Russian-Latvian energy relations and the volume of banking conducted *per se*, as these are topics treated elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> but on how these topics were used to define Latvia for a Russian audience. A third topic treated below, that of Latvia as a tourist destination, did not receive the same volume of media coverage as Ventspils or Latvian banks, but provides useful insight into the persistence of nostalgia about Latvia in general and Rīga and Jūrmala in particular. Moreover, tourism entails everyday contact between people from Russia and Latvia, providing a platform for discussions about the nature of these interactions.

Several other aspects of the Latvian economy garnered attention in Russia's media as well, such as the gas market, the development of Rīga-Moscow economic ties, the activities of Latvian construction companies in Russia and vice versa, and others. However, coverage of these topics was sporadic or not instrumental in defining Latvia for Russia's media consumers.

The context of the media coverage should be kept in mind. The period 2002 to mid-2005 witnessed the very rapid growth of the Latvian economy and the emergence of new business opportunities with Latvia's entry into the European Union and NATO. At the same time, Russia's economic relations with all of its neighbours in the "post-Soviet space" were undergoing

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<sup>1</sup> See Vyacheslav Dombrovsky and Alf Vanags, "Latvian-Russian Economic Relations," and Andris Sprūds, "Latvian-Russian Energy Relations: Between Economics and Politics," both in Nils Muižnieks, ed., *Latvian-Russian Relations: Domestic and International Dimensions* (Rīga: Academic Press of the University of Latvia, 2006), pp. 98-109 and 110-118, respectively.

“economisation” at this time, with Russia assertively defending its economic interests and trying to secure control of the energy infrastructure in transit countries. Booming hydrocarbon prices had not only filled Russian state coffers and injected the Russian political elite with a new sense of self-confidence, they had also generated a growing middle class and a large number of tycoons. While the tycoons viewed Latvia as a convenient place to keep their money or invest, the middle class rediscovered Latvia as a tourist destination.

The tonality of coverage varied greatly depending on the topic. Journalists and experts covering Ventspils recalled the former role of the port in Russia’s oil export economy, noted with resentment the high tariffs the Latvian side long demanded, but commented with deep satisfaction the turning of the tables with the redirection of oil transport to the Russian port of Primorsk. Treatment of Latvian banks and tourism, on the other hand, portrayed Latvia in an overwhelming positive light, as a great place to keep one’s money, invest, and visit.

### **The Latvian Economy: Booming (Unfortunately)**

A few pieces provided coverage of the Latvian economy in general, though often the three Baltic States were portrayed as a single unit. The portrait painted was often contradictory, as were the emotions expressed by Russian commentators. The rapid growth of the Baltic economies evoked amazement, jealousy and sometimes even outrage. At the same time, some commentators could draw satisfaction by pointing to the decline of once mighty industries and brands from Soviet-era Latvia or persistent social problems.

Several Russian commentators used the term “Baltic Tigers”<sup>2</sup> to characterise the Baltic economies, as they were experiencing “a rate of economic growth unbelievable in the current situation.”<sup>3</sup> The “Flourishing Baltic”<sup>4</sup> had the “highest rate of economic growth among the 10 future members of the EU.” This success required explanation: some of the reasons were not linked to anything in particular the Balts did, rather “the Baltic countries were able to use their God-given advantages,” which included a “beneficial geopolitical position with access to the Baltic” and “cadres and technological potential.” At the same time, it had to be admitted that the Balts had implemented “relatively fast and radical market reforms.”<sup>5</sup>

While some commentators merely dryly noted Baltic success, others used it to voice resentment at Latvia’s treatment of Russians or to note the

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Skripov, “Pryzhok ‘Baltiiskikh tigrov,’” *Ekspert Severo-Zapad*, No. 19, (128), 26 May 2003, pp. 14-15; Aleksandr Bezlepkin, “Poslednee zapadnoe preduprezhdenie,” *Izvestiya*, 22 July 2003, p. 5. Aleksandr Bezlepkin, “‘Baltiiskie tigri’ prygnuli v mire,” *Izvestiya*, 27 June 2003, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandr Bezlepkin, “‘Baltiiskie tigri’ prygnuli v mire,” *Izvestiya*, 27 June 2003, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> David Fairlamb, “Prosvetayushchaia Baltika” *Profil*, 14 July 2003, pp. 44-5.

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Skripov, “Pryzhok ‘Baltiiskikh tigrov,’” *Ekspert Severo-Zapad*, No. 19, (128), 26 May 2003, pp. 14-15.

injustice of Russia having lower investment ratings than the Baltic States. “Today, the standard of living in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia is one and a half to two times as high as ours. It’s offensive to see, especially considering the manifestly anti-Russian bent of many Baltic politicians, the parades of former SS soldiers in Rīga, and the open racism of local ‘patriots’.”<sup>6</sup> “Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have investment ratings (notwithstanding the strong dependence of their economies on “unstable Russia” and the practice of apartheid, which is far more serious than other Russian political risks).”<sup>7</sup> As noted elsewhere in this volume, disapproving references to Latvian minority policy were quite frequently included in stories on a wide range of topics, thereby constantly reminding the Russian audience about the alleged “discrimination” of local Russian-speakers.

Several pieces traced the fate of brands from Latvia which had been famous during the Soviet era. One journalist waxed particularly nostalgic: “Citizens of the USSR fell into ecstasy at the word ‘Dzintars’ [a Latvian cosmetic brand – NM]. Teenagers could, like adults, swagger in front of their friends with a gleaming moped “Rīga-12.” And before the Olympics, city folk received a minibus of unprecedented design called ‘RAF’” [Rīga Autobus Factory – NM]. Past success was contrasted with the recent decline of the Latvian industries producing these brands. RAF, noted the journalist, was sold for a sum that the director refused to divulge, because it was “humiliatingly low.” The Rīga Traincar Company or RVR bankrupted in 1998, and the director is cited as saying “We cannot compete with the West, but we have prospects in the East”. The fate of VEF, the acronym for the State Electrotechnical Factory, was even more dramatic: “from the former flagman of Soviet radio electronics, where 20,000 people worked, only cement flagstones and coverings are left.” The journalist noted that “Latvia lost many brands dear to the hearts of Russians.”<sup>8</sup>

While some authors traced the decline of Latvian brands to the Soviet break-up and subsequent structural readjustment, others linked it to broader faulty policies on the part of the Latvian government, particularly in the realm of minority policy. “In the new Latvia not only was the population divided into true citizens and newly arrived “occupants”, but the role of bulwark of the “occupation” was assigned to the largest enterprises – not only military, but also peaceful “RAF”, and even their own native “VEF”, “Alfa,” “Radiotehnika” and “Kommutator” all died.”<sup>9</sup>

In Russia’s extreme nationalist press, the decline of Latvian industry was portrayed as the result of a conscious policy to force Russians out of the country: “primarily Russians worked at these enterprises and now,

<sup>6</sup> Leonid Zhukhovitsky, “Pochemu my zhivem khorosho?” *Vechernaya Moskva*, No. 139, 29 July 2004, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Oleg Anisimov and Igor’ Terent’ev, “Pyataya vlast’,” *Finans*, 2 December 2003, pp. 16-22.

<sup>8</sup> Vladimir Gendlin, “Spokoinoy nochi, latyshi,” *Kommersant’- Den’gi*, 15 October 2002, pp. 30-34.

<sup>9</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, “VEF v roly “okupanta,” *Gudok*, 14 May 2003, p. 7.

deprived of the right to earn their slice of bread, they inescapably had to leave.” While Latvian ethnic prejudice contributed to Latvian industrial decline, this decline also reflected the backward nature of Latvians in general: “despite all their European “civilisational” pretensions, the Balts [...] never stood out with their intellectual abilities. By birth and by rearing they were primarily pig-keepers, raising bacon for Europe. The Baltic republics have also remained such bacon countries.”<sup>10</sup> Such outright disparaging remarks towards Latvians as whole were quite rare and appear to be the preserve of the extremist media in Russia.

A *Sovetskaya Rossiya* commentator also discovered a backward Latvia, with peasants living in “degrading poverty, rapidly dying out.” The Latvian countryside was awash in alcohol: “everybody drinks: children and adults, men and women, girls and teenagers.” “Women in the countryside are often killed, regularly beaten, without particular malice, and the women do not complain to the police, but just change their partners – legal marriages in the countryside are a rarity. One sees families with 5-6 children, and all from different fathers.” Again, backwardness and related social pathologies are attributed to conscious government policy: “These are the symbols of the new sovereign Latvia, where the destruction of one’s people has become government policy.”<sup>11</sup>

Such a one-sided view of the Latvian socio-economic landscape was infrequent. Indeed, on other topics, such as the Ventspils port, the banking system or tourism opportunities, one notes a grudging admiration for Latvia’s infrastructure, economic stability, and level of consumer service.

### **Ventspils: “They Can Build a Beach There”**

The single most common context in which Latvian economic issues were mentioned in Russia’s media during the time period under study was on topics related to Ventspils port on the West coast of Latvia. Ventspils had been a major export route for Russian oil and other raw materials since the Soviet era, with up to 12-13% of all Russian oil exports passing through the port in the late 1990s. However, under Putin, Russia sought to lessen its dependence on various transit countries and to acquire transit infrastructure bordering Russia and beyond. This was also the case in relations with Latvia. Russia stopped oil transit through Ventspils in January 2003, redirected it to Primorsk, and signalled that the oil flow would resume through Ventspils only if Russia were allowed to acquire cheaply a significant stake in the Latvian port, something the Latvian authorities did not permit.

Media commentary of Ventspils was almost solely conducted by journalists, with occasional brief comments by Russian officials or analysts. Latvian government officials were rarely cited, though long-time Ventspils mayor Aivars Lembergs, often portrayed as the key figure on the Latvian

<sup>10</sup> Evgeny Rostikov, “Na svyazi Minsk,” *Zavtra*, 24 March 2005, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Olga Ivanova, “Mogila bez imeni,” *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, 6 May 2003, p. 3.



side, did manage to be featured in several long interviews<sup>12</sup> or to be cited at length in several articles.<sup>13</sup>

Russian commentators readily acknowledged that “the key oil port in the post-Soviet space is Latvia’s Ventspils.”<sup>14</sup> What is more, they commented favourably on the service and infrastructure available there: it was the “traditional port for the export of oil, with 40 years of experience. Russian oil exporters know the port well and always note its agreeable, punctual work. The ice-free, deep water harbour permits large DWT tankers of up to 150,000 tonnes to transport oil cargoes the full year round, without using ice breakers.”<sup>15</sup>

While generally positive about the facilities and the service, commentators tended to exaggerate the role of oil transit in the Latvian economy. For some, it accounted for 10% of the budget;<sup>16</sup> for others, 20-23% of Latvian budget revenues;<sup>17</sup> some even claimed that Ventspils was responsible for “almost 25%” of the national budget!<sup>18</sup> By suggesting such a high level of dependence, Russian commentators placed Latvia in the position of a parasitic satellite of Russia.

However, this small, dependent satellite living well because of Russian exports was even capable of biting the hand that fed it. The 1990s witnessed what one commentator called the “harsh dependence of Russian exporters on Baltic providers of transit services, who, using their monopolistic position, began to raise tariffs.”<sup>19</sup> Contemporary Latvians exploited their position not only out of the desire to reap commercial gains, but also to extract “revenge” upon Russia in a manner as ruthless as their forebears during the Russian Revolution. “With the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia lost oil terminals in the Baltic. For the young, growing economies of Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia payment for transit of Russian raw materials became very good assistance. Evidently, in revenge for the “occupation”, they set completely merciless tariffs for us. In this regard, the descendants of the Latvian riflemen particularly stood out.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Tatyana Rybakova, “Aivars Lembergs, Predsedatel’ pravleniya Ventspilskogo svobodnogo porta: Rossiya seychas teryayet \$1,5 millyarda v god,” *Izvestiya*, 14 April 2003, p. 7; Denis Krilov, “Aivars Lembergs: “Odnim iz lozungov na shestviyakh esesovtsev byl “Lembergsa i tranzit – von iz Latvii,” *Russky fokus*, 27 January 2003, pp. 23-25.

<sup>13</sup> Yekaterina Kravchenko, “Ventspils prosit russkogo syr’ya,” *Izvestia*, 14 March 2003, p. 6. Denis Krilov, “Za Ventspils otvechaesh?” *Russky fokus*, 17 February 2003, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Irina Mokrousova, “Baltiisky gambit,” *Biznes*, No. 79, 4 May 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Dmitry Ivanov, “Bosfor i Dardanelly grozyat ubytkami,” *Parlamentskaya gazeta*, 23 March 2004, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Nikolay Viktorov, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 8 April 2003, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Aleksey Chichkin, “Drugim putem,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 1 April 2003, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksey Pushkov, Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,” *Postskriptum*, 19 April 2003, 21:00.

<sup>19</sup> Sergey Gerasimov, “Baltiiski transit: rabota nad oshibkami,” *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 2 February 2005, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Gleb Borisov, “Osada Ventspilsa, ili noski vmesto nefti,” *Moskovskaya promyshlennaya gazeta*, 27 February 2003, p. 10.

Some Russian commentators found it unfathomable that, given a choice, Russia would continue to use the Ventspils route for oil transit. “Until recently we exported oil to Europe through Ventspils port and for this Ventspils received more than USD 250 million a year. It seems that it would be more advantageous and patriotic if these millions went to Russian, not foreign oil terminals.”<sup>21</sup> The illogic of granting transit revenue to Latvia, portrayed by some as an unfriendly country, was underlined: “The leadership of Russia understood long ago that promoting the flourishing of not altogether friendly neighbours at one’s own expense is, to put it mildly, unreasonable.”<sup>22</sup> While shifting to Russian terminals would satisfy both commercial and “patriotic” needs, it would also provide some emotional gratification vis-à-vis Latvia: “the desire to punish Latvia for the long years of its transit monopoly can be explained.”<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, when the Primorsk oil terminal was fully operational and Russia had halted all oil transit through the pipeline to Ventspils, Russian commentators relished the turning of the tables on Latvia: “The Russian side is going to dictate the conditions. And for this we should thank Transneft, which built the Baltic Pipeline System and demonstrated who is the master of the house.”<sup>24</sup> This situation symbolised the new found pride and assertiveness of Putin-era Russia, which was no longer going to be pushed around by anyone, least of all Latvia: “the times when Russia was required to accept the conditions of the Latvian side are gone and without Russian oil Ventspils will remain a dry port.”<sup>25</sup> Halting the flow of oil through Ventspils was portrayed as a “strong blow” to Latvia, a “demonstration of strength and independence from our neighbours.”<sup>26</sup> This newfound position of strength was occasioned by some rather harsh rhetoric. Russian observers quoted with approval Sergey Grigoriev, vice president of Transneft, who remarked regarding Ventspils: “they can build a beach there.”<sup>27</sup>

When the oil stopped flowing, Russia made it clear that the only way it would resume was if Russia were allowed to acquire a controlling stake in Ventspils Nafta, the loading company with a monopolistic position in the port. “In essence, Latvia has been given harsh conditions: either allow Russian business control of the oil transit corridor to Ventspils, or transit will leave for your neighbours.”<sup>28</sup> The Latvian side tried various tactics to prod Russia to rethink its stance: arranging for the chairmen of several large Russian oil

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Popov, “Vyazhite noski i ne beytes’ za tranzit nefti,” *Gudok*, 15 February 2003, p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Gleb Borisov, “Osada Ventspilsa, ili noski vmesto nefti,” *Moskovskaya promyshlennaya gazeta*, 27 February 2003, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Kirill Semenov, “Truby rubyat – den’gi letyat,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 31 January 2003, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Anatoly Velednitsky, “Transneft na rasput’e,” *Trud*, 28 February 2003, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Dmitry Orlov, “Ekonomicheskie natsionalisty i real’nye interesy,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 23 May 2003, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> Nikita Nikolaev, “Truba u viska,” *Rossiskie vesti*, 29 January 2003, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Gleb Borisov, “Osada Ventspilsa, ili noski vmesto nefti,” *Moskovskaya promyshlennaya gazeta*, 27 February 2003, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksy Chichkin, “Tsena baltiiskoy karty,” *Konservator*, 21 March 2003, p. 11.

companies to send a joint letter to Putin, submission of a diplomatic note to Russia, and raising the issue through channels within the European Union and the United States. Recourse to support from international partners elicited a quite angry, ironic response from Russian commentators.

Latvia was portrayed as a naïve, plaintive child, always turning to Europe in times of need, whereas alleged wrongdoing on the part of the “imperialistic” Russian “occupiers” was mentioned with dripping irony: “In these circumstances, Rīga found nothing better than to turn to Europe with complaints about the remnants of Russian imperialism.”<sup>29</sup> “A complaint from Rīga to the European Union was sent not on the traditional theme of the Russian occupation.”<sup>30</sup> Particular ire was sparked by Latvia’s attempt to involve the United States in the dispute by raising the issue with U.S. President George W. Bush: “There they are, the indirect consequences of the victory of the United States in Iraq. Now Washington is going to tell us where and how to pump our oil. How do you like that?”<sup>31</sup> Here, the commentator linked dissatisfaction with U.S. unilateralism in Iraq, resentment at being told what to do by the West in the past, with the current oil transit dispute and Latvia.

When a contraband cross-border hose transferring home-brewed alcohol was discovered spanning the Russian-Latvian frontier, one commentator detected humorous parallels: “It cannot be excluded that the harrowing announcements about the “dry pipeline” and the sufferings of the Latvian budget awakened a creative process in people with a tendency to transit-transport research.” The author linked this “new mode of international communication” with a scandal involving Russian tycoon Yury Shefler, who had left Russia with the Stolichnaya and Moskovskaya brands and settled in Latvia. Together with Latvian “oligarch” Andris Skele, Shefler bought the spirits company *Latvijas balzams* and began producing the well-known Russian vodka from Latvia. While the author noted that the primary market for Stolichnaya and Moskovskaya is the United States, “it is unlikely that Mrs. Viķe-Freiberga will tell President Bush about this at their next meeting in the White House.”<sup>32</sup> This virtuous example of inter-textuality linked oil transit and moonshine contraband, the oil business and a scandal surrounding the well-known Russian vodka brands, with the tendency of Latvian politicians to complain to Western partners about Russia about all manner of Russian malfeasance.

### **Latvian Banks: Attractive, but a Little Shady (Except for Parex)**

After Ventspils, the second most frequent Latvian economic topic covered in the Russian media overall was the Latvian banking system, with

<sup>29</sup> Darya Zhdanova, “Kto ostalsya na trube?” *Moskovskie novosti*, 11 February 2003, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, “Latviya ‘nastuchala’ na Rossiyu,” *Gudok*, 4 February 2003, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Aleksey Pushkov, “Telekanal “TV-Tsentr,”” *Postskriptum*, 19 April 2003, 21:00.

<sup>32</sup> Evgeny Vostrukhov, “Tonnel’ pod granitsej,” *Gudok*, 9 August 2003, p. 6.

far more than a half of all items devoted to Parex Bank alone. It should be noted that this was a period in which Parex was seeking a strategic foreign investor, and thus, was likely to have engaged in considerable international public relations activities. Regardless, the degree to which Parex dominated the coverage of Latvian banking is quite striking, as it received easily more than 10 times as much coverage as any other single bank. Moreover, the portrayal of Parex was overwhelmingly positive. Before examining treatment of Parex, it is useful to examine briefly portrayal of the broader banking system.

In general, Latvian banks are portrayed as being very attractive: “Latvia (and particularly Rīga) in the last several years has become the financial centre of the Baltic states and really enjoys the love of Russian businessmen, particularly now, as it plans on entering the European Union.”<sup>33</sup> The attraction of Latvian banks increased significantly after the Russian Central Bank removed Latvia from a black list of “offshore zones” to which a special, strict financial regime had been applied since 1998. One commentator portrayed the restrictions as a means by which Russian financial regulators “kept the Balts on a short leash: they could be squeezed, punished”. Easing the restrictions was “an unexpected gift to our northwestern neighbour.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, Latvia was a little dog, while Russia was the stern, controlling master. Removing the restrictions was a bone tossed to the dog. For their part, Russian bankers and businessmen greeted the removal of the restrictions as “a colossal breakthrough,”<sup>35</sup> a decision that “should have been taken a long time ago,”<sup>36</sup> the rectification of an “absurd situation”.<sup>37</sup>

Money-laundering in Latvian banks was an issue that came up several times over the period in review. In 2002, Russian media reported on an American law enforcement operation that allegedly implicated Latvia’s Aizkraukles Bank in laundering the money of Columbian narcotics dealers.<sup>38</sup> In 2004, Russian media reported on the alleged involvement of Aizkraukles Bank in a money-laundering scheme created by the Russian company “Eko-Buro.”<sup>39</sup> That same year several reports appeared in Russia’s media about Latvian banks following the lead of United States financial institutions in closing correspondent accounts of Russian financial organisations, a fact perceived with some concern in Russian circles, as Latvian banks “occupy

<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Sysoev, “Tsentrбанк ubral absolyutno nenuzhnyi dokument,” *Gazeta*, 4 October 2002, p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Yaroslav Skvortsov, “Blizhe, chem Shveitsariya,” *Kompaniya*, 7 October 2002, pp. 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Natalya Kulakova, Kirill Yacheistov, “Rossiisky TsB poveril Latvii napolovinu,” *Kommersant*, 4 October 2002, pp. 1, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Otdel’ finansov, “Vy dovol’ny resheniem TsB?” *Kommersant*, 4 October 2002, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Anatoly Khodorovsky, “Absurd Pokidaet Tsentrбанк,” *Russky focus*, 23 September 2002, p. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Aleksandr Zakharov, Varvara Vasilyeva, “Latviisky bank priznalsya v otmyvanii,” *Kommersant*, 16 February 2002, p. 13; N.A., *Vremya novostei*, 17 December 2002, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Aleksandr Shvarev, “Kak militsioner prokurory,” *Vremya novostei*, 11 August 2004, p. 3.

fourth place in the world in the volume of clearing operations with Russian banks in dollars.<sup>40</sup> In 2005 Russian media contained several reports on US allegations against two Latvian banks (VEF Banka and Multibanka) for money-laundering.<sup>41</sup> In a rare attack on the Latvian banking system, “Radio Rossiya” even alleged that “Russian special services have announced more than once that field commanders from Chechnya keep their savings in Latvian banks, that funding goes through these banks towards terrorist activities on the territory of Russia.”<sup>42</sup>

While Russia’s media portrayed Latvia as an attractive place for banking in general, portrayal included mention of shady practices, following the lead of Russia’s arch-rival the United States, and even allegations that Latvian banks were used by terrorist enemies of the Russian state. In contrast, the portrait of Parex, Latvia’s largest commercial bank, was much more one-sided in a positive direction.

### **Parex: “The Only Russian-Speaking Western Bank”**

Articles and broadcasts devoted to Parex Bank were the second most frequent Latvian economic story in Russia’s media overall after Ventspils. This author counted 91 items devoted primarily or exclusively to Parex in the time period under review. The coverage often reads like advertising for the bank, especially when identical turns of phrase are used in various media outlets. The fact that the bank is located in Latvia often received mention only incidentally or was even downplayed.

With very few exceptions, the coverage was overwhelmingly positive, even adulatory: Parex is a “brand which for many has become a legend and model of enterprise.”<sup>43</sup> Parex has created “the best team of highly qualified and experienced professionals in the Baltic.”<sup>44</sup> While Russian journalists themselves praised Parex, they often cited international financial journals, such as *The Banker*,<sup>45</sup> *Euromoney*,<sup>46</sup> and *Global Finance*,<sup>47</sup> which had

<sup>40</sup> Inessa Pepernaya, “Vremya zakruchivat’ gaiki,” *Profil*, No. 43, 22 November 2004, p. 74.

<sup>41</sup> Evgeny Vatamanyuk, Tatyana Bochkareva, “V chernyi spisok,” *Vedomosti*, 25 April 2005, p. B6.

<sup>42</sup> Anna Solovyeva, “Iz zhizni deneg,” *Radiostantsiya “Radio Rossii*,” 1 June 2005, 07:14.

<sup>43</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Parex uverenno lideruyet,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 19 March 2003, p. 10. Kristine Bilaine, “Latviisky bank obosnovalsya v Evrope,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 25 March 2003, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Yury Petrov, “Parex svodit investorov s emitentami,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 24 June 2003, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> N.A. “Priz zhurnala The Banker u Parex,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 25 September 2002, p. 10; Karen Markaryan, “Bank Parex luchshy v Latvii,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 30 September 2004, p. 12.

<sup>46</sup> Yury Petrov, “Parex bank podtverdil mezhdunarodnoe priznanie,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 29 July 2003, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Bank Parex – luchshy,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 20 August 2003, p. 8. Karen Markaryan, “Parex – luchshy bank v Latvii,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 13 May 2005, p. 5.

bestowed various awards on Parex. In an unusual move, one fawning journalist from *Komsomol'skaya Pravda* reported having deposited USD 1000 in Parex himself and earning 5.5% annual interest or USD 44.40 in 10 months. He pointedly noted that, with a bit more patience, he could have earned a 20% return.<sup>48</sup>

As opposed to other topics in which interlocutors from Latvia were rarely allowed to speak for themselves, Russian media frequently let Parex bank officials do the talking in interviews or through extensive quotations. Media outlets featured long, friendly interviews not only with Parex co-head and co-owner Valery Kargin<sup>49</sup> and his partner Viktor Krasovitsky,<sup>50</sup> but with others as well, such as Vice President Aleksandr Kvasov,<sup>51</sup> Vice President Gatis Kokins,<sup>52</sup> Vice President Evgeny Zolotarev,<sup>53</sup> head of the department for sales and marketing Guntis Beļavskis,<sup>54</sup> deputy head of the branch department Vladimir Ivanov,<sup>55</sup> head of the credit card department Andris Riekstiņš,<sup>56</sup> President of Parex Asset Management Roberts Idelsons<sup>57</sup> and others.

In such circumstances, the way in which Parex representatives portrayed Latvia was just as important as the way in which Russian journalists portrayed it. Valery Kargin presented Latvia as “a small laboratory,” “a quiet, small Baltic state [...] It's a democratic country here.”<sup>58</sup> A common turn of phrase used by Kargin was also that Latvia is “a country where money rests.”<sup>59</sup> In this regard, Kargin was wont to draw compari-

<sup>48</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Kak zarabotat' na fondovikh rynkakh,” *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 26 November 2003, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Anatoly Khodorovsky, “Valery Kargin: ‘Ya okhotno dal by kredit Rossii kak strane,’” *Russky fokus*, 30 June 2003, pp. 63-5; Karen Markaryan, “My znachitel'naya finansovaya sila v vostochnoy Evrope,” *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 20 February 2004, p. 60; N.A., “Valery Kargin, Prezident Parex Bank: Svoy schot v Evrope,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 22 April 2004, p. 5; Boris Fyodorov, “Nam vypal zamechatel'ny shans,” *Ekspert*, No. 434 (444), 22 November 2004, pp. 129-130.

<sup>50</sup> Demis Polandov, “Viktor Krasovitsky: ‘Izmeneniya v nashikh otnosheniyakh mogut pouchuvstvovat’ zhurnalisty, no nikak ne bankiry,” *Russky fokus* 23 September 2002, pp. 74-5; N.A., “Latviya golosuet za Evropu,” *Moskovsky komsomolets* 14 October 2003, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Yuliya Govorun, “Pretekli,” *Gazeta*, 14 July 2004, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Andrey Nechaev, “Finansovy klub,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 10 April 2004, 12:45.

<sup>53</sup> Vladimir Sysoev, “Vsegda legche navesti porydok v mal'enkom dome, chem v ogromnom zamke,” *Gazeta*, 15 October 2002, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Internet-bank: bystro, nadezhno, vygodno,” *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 25 June 2003, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Parex v Londone – Parex,” *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 14 May 2003, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> N.A., “U zhurnalistov sozdaetsya vpechatlenie, chto u nas tut prosto rai dlya moshennikov,” *Gazeta*, 4 December 2002, p. 12.

<sup>57</sup> Andrey Nechaev, “Finansovy klub,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak,”* 22 November 2003, 12:45.

<sup>58</sup> Anatoly Khodorovsky, “Valery Kargin: ‘Ya okhotno dal by kredit Rossii kak strane,’” *Russky fokus*, 30 June 2003, pp. 63-5.

<sup>59</sup> Anatoly Khodorovsky, “Latviiskaya razborka c Rossiiskim dushkom,” *Russky fokus*, 2 June 2003, p. 17.

sons between Latvia and Switzerland, where Parex had recently bought shares in a private bank: “10 years ago Parex had the motto “We are closer than Switzerland”. Now it can be said differently: “We are already in Switzerland.”<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, when addressing Russia’s audience, Kargin displayed reverence for both tsarist Russia and Vladimir Putin. In a lengthy interview, Kargin pointed out that Parex works in a building that has housed a bank since 1912, “when Rīga was the largest port in the Russian Empire.” While respectful of tradition and Russian historical memory, Kargin also bowed in reverence towards contemporary Russia and claimed that the rest of Latvia did likewise: “We have great respect towards the policy of building a new Russia carried out by President Putin. For Latvian society, Putin is likeable.”<sup>61</sup>

Other Parex representatives also portrayed Latvia in similar terms, as a “small and quiet European country, where it is convenient to earn money,” a “place where for centuries Eastern and Western capital have met.”<sup>62</sup> Latvia was a “financial bridge” with “splendid knowledge of the Russian language” that was “closer than Zurich.”<sup>63</sup> Stressing the unique attraction of Parex, one representative even claimed that it was “the only Russian-speaking Western bank.”<sup>64</sup>

As opposed to other individual Latvian banks, which merited mention in Russia’s media primarily in the context of allegations of money laundering, Parex received coverage for a wide range of new services it offered, branch offices it opened, or for corporate sponsorship of various events. Thus, the media covered such new services as the introduction of a new client-to-client VISA cash transfer system,<sup>65</sup> Parex’s acquisition of exclusive rights to distribute American Express credit cards,<sup>66</sup> new loan programmes for the purchase of cars or mortgages for housing,<sup>67</sup> and Parex being the first Latvian bank to introduce the IBAN system.<sup>68</sup> The opening

<sup>60</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Parex uzhe v Shveytsarii,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 19 March 2004, p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Valery Kargin: My sposobstvuyem druzhbe mezhd Latviy i Rossiey,” *Komsomoskaya Pravda*, 27 February 2004, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> N.A., “Latviya golosuet za Evropu,” *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 14 October 2003, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Parex v Londone – Parex,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 14 May 2003, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Sysoev, “Vsegda legche navesti porydok v mal’enkom dome, chem v ogromnom zamke,” *Gazeta*, 15 October 2002, p. 12.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Markaryan, “Parex pervym v mire predlagaet novuyu uslugu VISA,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 23 October 2002, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> Yuliya Gorshkova, “V Latvii poyavyatsya novye kreditnye karty,” *Komsomol’skaya pravda*, 27 April 2005, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Kristina Bilaine, “Kreditnyi portfel’ dlya chastnikov,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 26 February 2003, p. 7. Kristina Bilaine, “Sem’ya’stala programmoy dlya banka,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 15 April 2003, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> Andrey Erokhin, “Banki Latvii perekhodyat na standarty ES,” *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 27 January 2004, p. 7.

of new Parex branch offices in London<sup>69</sup> and in Stockholm<sup>70</sup> also earned coverage, as did the purchase of shares in a Swiss bank.<sup>71</sup>

Parex as a good corporate citizen in Latvia, Russia and the international community was also a common theme. In Latvia, Parex sponsored not only a Russian folk festival in Rīga,<sup>72</sup> but also donated 10,000 Euro to the Riga International Institute of Transport and Communications,<sup>73</sup> a private Russian-speaking institution of higher education. Parex's largesse was not limited to Latvia, as it also sponsored an artist's exhibition in Moscow.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, Parex's sponsorship of "A Baltic Celebration" in Washington, D.C.<sup>75</sup> and role as the "sole corporate sponsor from the Baltic" at the Prague NATO summit in November 2002<sup>76</sup> also received positive coverage, which is particularly unusual given widespread anti-American and anti-NATO sentiment in Russia. Apparently, the image of being an international player that could even work with the Americans trumped the possible negative associations.

Amid the overwhelmingly positive coverage, the few negative stories about Parex stood out in sharp relief. One negative story linked Parex to former Russian Vice President Aleksandr Ruskoy. Ruskoy, accused of financial malfeasance, was alleged to have a Parex credit card under his wife's name, an allegation he vigorously denied.<sup>77</sup> Another brief negative story involved the closure by the Russian authorities of Parex representation offices in Yekaterinburg for "illegal banking activity and the removal of capital."<sup>78</sup> However, neither of these stories occasioned any particular comment about Parex in general or Latvia as a locale for banking in particular.

<sup>69</sup> Kristina Bilaine, "Pareks prishel v Velikobritaniyu," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 3 September 2002, p. 7

<sup>70</sup> Kristina Bilaine, "Latviiskie bankiry vysadilis' v Shvetsii," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 20 May 2003, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Yury Petrov, "Latviisky bank kupil shveytsarsky," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 23 March 2004, p. 7.

<sup>72</sup> Karen Markaryan, "Parex vozrozhdaet traditsii," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 14 January 2004, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> Yury Petrov, "Pareks bank podderzhivaet i vuzy, i uchashchikhsya," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 30 September 2003, p. 8; Karen Markaryan, "Parex pomogaet studentam," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 17 September 2003, p. 18.

<sup>74</sup> Lyudmilla Goncharova, "Khrustal'ny soblazn," *Kul'tura*, No. 14, 8 April 2004, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> N.A., "Parex bank sopredsedatel'stvoval na vtorom ezhegodnom forume 'A Baltic Celebration' v Vashingtone," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 2 December 2003, p. 2; Yury Petrov, "Bankiry baltii sblizhayut politikov," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 25 November 2003, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Kristina Bilaine, "Parex Bank prigliasili v NATO," *Rossiskaya Biznes-gazeta*, 26 November 2002, p. 7. Karen Markaryan, "Finansy i politika," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 27 November 2002, p. 12.

<sup>77</sup> Aleksey Zakharov, "Rutskomu otkazali," *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, No. 22, 6 February 2004, p. 5. Dmitry Orishchenko, "Aleksnadra Rutskogo kroyut kartoy ego zheny," *Kommersant*, 6 February 2004, p. 6

<sup>78</sup> Mariya Cherkasova, "Parex vyselili iz Yekaterinburga," *Kommersant*, 20 January 2003, p. 14.



The tendency to provide positive coverage of Parex was so pronounced, that even stories of little more than local importance became news in Russia. Thus, Parex's organisation of a large corporate bash with 4,500 people to celebrate its 15th anniversary was portrayed as the "largest corporate party in the entire history of Latvia." Parex was an international bank that happened to be in Latvia, insofar as "toasts in honour of Parex sounded not only in Russian and Latvian, but in German, English and even in Japanese."<sup>79</sup> When Valery Kargin purchased a Maybach, an expensive automobile, this also became "another calling card of the success of the largest bank in Latvia in terms of assets and deposits."<sup>80</sup>

### **Tourism in Latvia: Quiet, Romantic, and Surprise – No Language Barrier!**

Another Latvian economic topic that was relatively frequent in Russia's media was Latvia as a tourist destination. Here again, Latvia was occasionally portrayed as part of a broader Baltic unit. Rīga and the seaside resort of Jūrmala have their own images, though no other Latvian city registered on the Russian tourist's radar screen. Portrayal was overwhelmingly positive, and the portrayers were both tour operators, who often have a vested interest in painting a positive image, but also journalists.

In 2003 a journalist noted that "Love towards the Baltic has reawoken among Russians." Such love might be a bit embarrassing, were it not for the fact that it could be detected in Europe as well, "which lacks any psychological territorial complexes towards the Baltic, [where] one perceives not only a simple interest in the Baltic states, but a true fashion for the Baltic [...] the Baltic – something new, tasteful and occasionally even completely exotic."<sup>81</sup> Another commentator noted that "Russians are returning to the Baltics. The new years celebrations confirm this – the best hotels in Vilnius, Riga and especially Tallinn were literally crammed with our compatriots."<sup>82</sup> When a journalist asked a tour operator about the attraction, the response was quite simple: the Baltics are "an objectively good vacation."<sup>83</sup> Another noted that this was nothing new, since "today, as previously, a vacation in the Baltic is prestigious and what is more, relatively cheap."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>79</sup> N.A., "Parex otmetil 15 let," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 13 January 2004, p. 2. Karen Markaryan, "Brendu Parex – 15 let," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 26 December 2003, p. 61.

<sup>80</sup> Karen Markaryan, "Maybach dlya Kargina," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, 28 May 2003, p. 13.

<sup>81</sup> Elena Anosova, Ada Shmerling, "Novaya Evropa," *Inostranets*, 24 November 2003, p. 9.

<sup>82</sup> Vladimir Chernousov, "Kak i gde my otdykhaem," *Ezhenedel'yi zhurnal*, No. 8, 1 March 2004, pp. 71-74.

<sup>83</sup> Aleksey Venediktov, "Prezident Rossiskogo soyuza turizma Sergey Shpil'ko ob'yasnyayet problemy s polucheniem latviiskikh viz povysheniem sprosa na pribaltiku," *Radiostantsiya "Ekho Moskvy"*, 3 August 2003, 17:07.

<sup>84</sup> Mariya Katsman, "Nash sezon – otkryvaem svoyu pribaltiku," *Inostranets*, No. 10, 22 March 2005, p. 7.

Interestingly, some of the commentary surrounding the Baltic as a tourist destination betrayed a lingering incomprehension that Latvia and the other Baltic States were independent countries with all the associated attributes. It struck several commentators as odd that one needed a visa to travel to the Baltic and that they had their own currencies. “You can’t just buy a train ticket and go there: you need a travel passport (*zagranpasport*) and visa.”<sup>85</sup> One journalist who was particularly well-disposed towards Latvia even noted that, “for a citizen of Russia, who has not yet weaned himself from considering Latvia partly “ours”, this is an affront. From the beginning I felt no affront, on the contrary, I completely recognized the right to historical affronts for the Latvians.”<sup>86</sup> A tour operator to the Baltic explained to an incredulous interviewer: “They are proud of their local currencies and they all accept only local currency.” Moreover, “insofar as it is abroad, you need visas.”<sup>87</sup>

Given the overall image of the Baltic states as a place where the Russian minority lives in a difficult plight and the local populations harbour historical grudges against Russia, a question “that is of interest to absolutely everyone is the attitude towards Russian tourists there.” A tour operator reassured her interlocutor that the attitude towards Russian tourists was “simply remarkable.” Asked about “problems with the Russian language in restaurants and cafes,” the same operator responded “No problems at all.”<sup>88</sup> Another journalist noted with amazement, “What is most interesting – Rīga speaks Russian.”<sup>89</sup>

Some observers recalled the former image of Latvia as the most European part of the Soviet Union, “a country where previously you went to “have a look at Europe.” Now, one could go there “for the peace and quiet, the romance and nostalgia.”<sup>90</sup> Latvia’s capital Rīga and the nearby seaside resort of Jūrmala have more distinct images than Latvia does overall.

Rīga is “a most interesting capital of the Middle Ages,”<sup>91</sup> “a city that surprises with its proportional size and peaceful atmosphere.”<sup>92</sup> Another journalist implicitly compared contemporary Rīga with Soviet-era Rīga and stressed its European credentials: “Rīga turned out to be enchanting.

<sup>85</sup> Yekaterina Dolgosheeva, “Spokoistvie, tol’ko spokoistvie,” *Kommersant*, 3 July 2003, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> Marina Koldobskaya, “S’ezdit’ v Rīgu,” *Novoe vremya*, No. 44, 31 October 2004, p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Elene Shchedunova, “Direktor turfirm ‘Skanditour’ i ‘Satmarket’ o preimushchestvakh otдыхa v pribaltike,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak-24,”* 11 July 2003, 16:10.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Marina Koldobskaya, “S’ezdit’ v Rīgu,” *Novoe vremya*, No. 44, 31 October 2004, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> Yekaterina Dolgosheeva, “Spokoistvie, tol’ko spokoistvie,” *Kommersant*, 3 July 2003, p. 18.

<sup>91</sup> Elene Shchedunova, “Direktor turfirm ‘Skanditour’ i ‘Satmarket’ o preimushchestvakh otдыхa v pribaltike,” *Radiostantsiya “Mayak-24,”* 11 July 2003, 16:10.

<sup>92</sup> Yekaterina Dolgosheeva, “Spokoistvie, tol’ko spokoistvie,” *Kommersant*, 3 July 2003, p. 18.

Capitalism has done her well. It is a beautiful, clean, completely European city, which has not yet been besmirched by tourists.”<sup>93</sup> The highest form of flattery came from a journalist who went so far as to claim “One should live here. Maybe not all the time. Maybe just visit, but visit more often, as often as possible.” “Rīga is, as before, comfortable, quiet and hospitable. Those who say we lost her are stupid. The truth is only that we can discover her anew.”<sup>94</sup>

During the Soviet era, the Latvian resort of Jūrmala had competed with the Crimea as the favourite vacation spot for the Soviet elite. While Russian tourists kept away for the first decade of post-Soviet life due to inter-state political tensions, currency reforms and visa requirements, they were back in force from the beginning of the decade. Jūrmala was portrayed as a city of “sea, pine trees and romance,” a “city of ‘comical traditions’ and ‘intelligent rest’... a place where well-known actors, musicians, and artists relax.”<sup>95</sup>

While Jūrmala was a good place to visit, it was also a good place to invest in real estate. One article even dubbed it a “near offshore zone.” In response to the question, “What is attractive about Jūrmala?,” one journalist offered the following features: “The sea, the pine trees, the mild climate... A high level of service, qualitative and natural products. From Moscow, it is an hour’s flight or a night in a comfortable train. The public actively speaks Russian... The prices for real estate – at the level of those in Spain, but lower than in Moscow... For many Rīga and Jūrmala have become a kind of personal offshore zone, a quiet harbour where it is possible to take shelter from the domestic political tempest of one’s historical birthplace.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, Latvia was a calm oasis, a respite from the turbulent life in Russia.

## Conclusion

The portrait of Latvian economic issues in Russia’s media redounded well to Latvia’s overall image, as positive features outweighed negative ones. Moreover, the associations evoked by Latvia and the contrast with contemporary Russia served to help Russian journalists define Russia for a Russian audience.

On the positive side of the ledger, Latvia was an economic success story with a well-developed infrastructure and a high level of service in ports, banks, and the tourist industry. To the surprise of commentators from Russia, the everyday attitude of Latvians toward citizens of Russia was quite positive and Latvians spoke Russian well and willingly. This was the case not only in establishments such as banks, but also throughout Rīga and Jūrmala. Latvia in general was portrayed as an island of calm and quiet – an excellent locale for keeping one’s money and for relaxing. Rīga and Jūrmala,

<sup>93</sup> Marina Koldobskaya, “S’ezdit’ v Rīgu,” *Novoe vremya*, No. 44, 31 October 2004, p. 5.

<sup>94</sup> Timofey Khmelev, “My uzhe daleko,” *Ekspert Severo-zapad*, No. 14 9171, 12 April 2004, pp. 25-7.

<sup>95</sup> Mariya Katsman, “Nash sezon – otkryvaem svoyu pribaltiku,” *Inostranets*, No. 10, 22 March 2005, p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Lyusya Pribyl’skaya, “Blizhny ofshor,” *Moskovskie novosti*, 9 December 2003, p. 14.

in the estimation of observers from Russia, were cheaper than Moscow, but on a par with other European destinations. Indeed, Russian observers frequently applied the label “Western” or “European” to Latvia, and in the context of banking and tourism, this had a primarily positive connotation.

Despite the overall positive picture, a number of recurrent negative characteristics of Latvia were also emphasised. At least some of Latvia’s wealth was due to its parasitic nature, charging exorbitant fees until 2003 for the use of the Ventspils port for oil transit and occasionally providing safe haven for “dirty money” from Russia. For Russian commentators, Latvia had the annoying habit of complaining to Europe and the United States about Russian historical transgressions and Russian economic and political pressure. Such complaints elicited nothing but irony or anger from Russian observers. At the same time, even positive portrayals of Latvia often mentioned the alleged discrimination of Russians.

The treatment of Latvia often helped to define Russia in both implicit and explicit ways. Discussion of Latvia brought to the mind of some Russian commentators memories of loss – lost empire, lost ports, lost international influence. At the same time, many authors stressed Latvia’s “smallness” which was implicitly contrasted with Russia’s grandeur. Moreover, by re-directing oil transit or easing banking restrictions with regard to Latvia, Russia could assert its influence against this small neighbour. The tough tactics against Ventspils in particular suggested to Russian commentators that Russia was growing stronger, was no longer dependent on its neighbours, and could stand up to Europe and the US or Latvia backed by Europe and the US. While Latvia evoked memories of both the tsarist era and the Soviet Union, as before, it continued to symbolise Europe, which has traditionally evoked in Russia not only positive associations, but a range of contradictory emotions and stances, from wonder to repulsion and inferiority complexes.

## Conclusion

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The findings of the research confirm some widespread suspicions, but also yield a number of surprises. The Russian media did systematically manufacture an enemy image of Latvia with regard to some, but not all topics. As expected, the most pronounced negative portrayal concerned Latvia's treatment of Russian-speakers, Latvia's approach to history, and Latvia's accession to NATO. However, positive treatment of many cultural and economic topics tempered the overall negative picture. Moreover, recently, Russian media interest in Latvia has been declining.

The situation of Russians and Russian-speakers in Latvia is a theme that cuts across all other themes and comes up in stories on virtually all other issues. As Dmitri Trenin and Bobo Lo have argued, criticising Latvia (and Estonia) on the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities serves a number of purposes: it can not only be a useful bargaining chip in relations with Latvia or Brussels, it is also "an issue on which the elite can easily agree," thereby contributing to the efforts of Putin (and now Medvedev) at "political and national consensus building."<sup>1</sup> Thus, demonising Latvia unifies Russia, at least the Russian political class.

In the portrayal of Russian journalists, Latvia not only seriously violates the rights of Russians and Russian-speakers in Latvia, but also created a unique, "shameful" status for many of them as "non-citizens." Latvian policy, especially the reform of minority education and trials against former KGB and military veterans and their families, are seen as threatening the community as a whole, which is depicted as homogenous, united against the Latvian government (not ethnic Latvians), and intimately linked with Russia. Media treatment not only constructs Russia as a player of significant influence, but one which provides critical assistance to Russians in Latvia.

Latvia is portrayed as "attacking" Russia and Russian interpretations of history. The attacks take a variety of forms: "immoral" material and territorial claims against Russia, an almost sacrilegious questioning of "sacred" historical truths (e.g., about "liberation"), and legal action against people considered by many in Russia to be war heroes. These "attacks" force Russian journalists and officials to the defence and lead them to question Latvian motives. The primary motive Russian commentators can identify is revenge.

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<sup>1</sup> Dmitri Trenin and Bobo Lo, *The Landscape of Russian Foreign Policy Decision-Making* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 16.

The Russian media did not perceive Latvian accession to the EU to be nearly as problematic as Lithuanian accession, which had a direct impact on Kaliningrad. However, Latvia's NATO accession, along with that of other countries bordering Russia, was another matter altogether. While Latvia itself is portrayed as small, weak, unable to afford NATO and meet its democracy criteria, NATO threatens Russia. Insofar as NATO is depicted as a front for the United States, Latvia is a willing accomplice to the American encroachment on Russian interests.

A considerable number of media items are devoted to cultural and economic topics, which tend to depict Latvia in a more neutral, and sometimes even positive light. The Russian media continue to evidence nostalgia and show reverence towards Latvian cultural figures who made their names in the Soviet era, such as the pianist and jazz composer Raimonds Pauls, the pop singer Laima Vaikule, and the actors Vija Artmane and Ivars Kalniņš. At the same time, the Russian media are favourably disposed to some contemporary Latvian pop singers, such as "Brainstorm" and Maria Naumova, as well as to the New Rīga Theatre and the Latvian National Opera. Occasionally, the Russian media reveal arrogance or a patronising stance, though Russian interest in Latvian culture is probably greater than Latvian interest in Russian culture.

The primary economic topics used to define Latvia were the port of Ventspils, the banking system (especially Parex Bank), and Rīga and Jūrmala as tourist destinations. Interestingly, stories about the gas market, the construction industry, and Moscow-Rīga economic relations did not occasion wider commentary on Latvia or Latvian-Russian relations. While Ventspils is portrayed as an important port, the Latvian officials running it are portrayed as having long exploited a monopoly position to charge Russia exorbitant rates. When Russia rerouted oil transit to Primorsk, most Russian commentators thought Latvia had received a good comeuppance and Russia had demonstrated its newly rediscovered strength. The most positive portrayals involved the banking system, especially Parex Bank (the only "Russian-speaking Western bank"), which was depicted as very attractive for Russian depositors. Moreover, discourse about Rīga and Jūrmala as tourist destinations was downright enthusiastic, though the need for visas to travel to Latvia and Latvia's "odd" habit of having its own currency evoked some bewildered Russian commentary.

The portrayal of Russia vis-à-vis Latvia requires some comment, as it is racked by internal contradictions. Russians in Latvia need Russia, which is strong, influential and a strategic partner of the West. At the same time, Russia is on the defensive, it is being attacked on historical topics and encircled by NATO. Russia can assert its strength by flexing its oil transit muscles, dealing with individual Western countries instead of NATO and the EU as a whole, stressing the superiority of some of its cultural industry (e.g., television, cinema) and reminding the world about the glorious Victory. The struggle to ward off enemies and assert status, however, makes for a very turbulent Russia. Escape from the turbulence of Russia can be found not only in the resorts of Spain, but also in Jūrmala and Rīga, which are close, Russian-speaking, and comparably priced.

The interviews with journalists working in Latvia for Russian media outlets shed light on the mix of market, political and ideological factors that enter into their work. At the same time, the foregoing paragraph suggests that strong psychological factors are at work in Russian perceptions of the West in general and Latvia in particular. Interest in Latvia appears to have begun to wane, as Russia turns its attention to more “problematic” neighbours, such as Estonia, Georgia and Ukraine. However, it seems that Latvia will retain a unique capacity to get Russia’s attention through the mix of nostalgia for Jūrmala, the presence of a large Russian-speaking community, economic interests, and colliding national historical myths. It remains to be seen whether new “enemies,” such as Ukraine or Georgia, will displace Latvia or merely join it as targets of official, media, and public animosity in Russia.

## **Russia, Latvia and Latvian-Russian Relations: A Select Chronology of Key Events, January 2002 – June 2005**

### **2002**

January: TV-6, the last independent national television station, is shut down in Russia

Spring: Mass protests in Voronezh, Russia, against housing reform

May 24: Russia and the United States sign the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty

May 28: The first NATO summit with Russian participation

May 29: European Commission head Romano Prodi arrives in Moscow, pronounces Russia a market economy

July 5-6: Latvia hosts a summit of the “Vilnius ten” NATO aspirant countries

August 19: 140 persons die in a helicopter crash in Chechnya

August 20: Explosions in Moscow kill several persons and leave tens wounded

September 11: Russia issues an ultimatum to Georgia concerning Chechen fighters in Georgia’s Pankisi valley

September 21: Russian President Vladimir Putin receives Latvian opposition politician Jānis Jurkāns

October 5: Latvian parliamentary elections

October: The European Commission’s annual report on enlargement recommends accepting 10 candidate countries

October: Denmark refuses to extradite Chechen representative Akhmad Zakayev to Russia

October 23: The Nord-Ost terrorist attack in Moscow

November 7: The government of Andris Bērziņš steps down, the government of Einārs Repše is approved in Latvia

November 21: The NATO Summit in Prague decides to grant membership to 7 countries, including Latvia

### **2003**

March 20: The United States and Great Britain invade Iraq

May 21: The Russian parliament ratifies the border treaty with Lithuania

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June: The head of security at YUKOS is arrested in Russia  
July 3: Platon Lebedev, one of the leaders of YUKOS, is arrested in Russia  
August 21: Latvian security services impound a consignment of tank and plane parts at Rīga airport from Russia headed for Iran  
September 4: Large protests against education reform in Latvia  
September 20: 66.97% of Latvian voters vote for accession to the European Union  
October 5: Presidential elections in Chechnya  
October-April 2004: Russia resists applying the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to new EU member-states, including Latvia  
October 25: Mihail Khodorkovsky is detained in Russia  
November 23: The Rose Revolution in Georgia  
December 7: “United Russia” wins the elections to the Russian Duma with 37.1% of the vote

## 2004

February 24: Putin dismisses the Kasyanov government  
February 27: Foreign Ministry representatives from Latvia (Teikmanis) and Russia (Chizhov) meet  
March 9: The Latvian parliament approves the government of Indulis Emsis  
March 11: The Madrid terrorist attacks  
March 14: Putin is elected to a second term as president  
March 18: Representatives of the Latvian (Muižnieks) and Russian (Fedotov) governments meet on the margins of the United Nations  
April 16: Latvia concludes bilateral negotiations with Russia on its accession to the WTO  
April 23: The Latvian Foreign Ministry announces the expulsion of a Russian diplomat  
May 1: 10 new member states, including Latvia, enter the EU  
May: Mikhail Fradkov is approved for a second time as prime minister of the Russian government  
May 9: Chechen president Ahmad Kadyrov is killed  
June: The Russian tax authorities demand that YUKOS pay USD 3.4 billion.  
June 10-13: The first European Parliament elections in Latvia  
June 22: The Tikhvin icon is on display at the main Orthodox cathedral in Latvia  
July-August: The Russian Duma adopts legislation monetising social insurance, evoking mass protests  
August 24-5: A delegation of Latvian education experts visits Moscow to discuss the education reform

September 1: The Beslan tragedy in Russia  
September 1: Mass protests against the education reform in Latvia  
October 29: EU leaders sign the Constitution, EC president Barrozos withdraws his team  
November 16: Viktor Kaluzhny submits his accreditation and becomes Russian ambassador to Latvia  
December 2: The Kalvītis government displaces the Emsis government in Latvia  
December 9: Latvian foreign minister Artis Pabriks meets his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov  
December 26: Ukraine's Orange Revolution  
December: The tsunami in Southeast Asia

## **2005**

January 12: Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga announces that she will go to Moscow on May 9  
February 25: Boris Berezovsky visits Latvia, evoking Russian condemnation  
March 8: Russian armed forces kill Chechen leader Aslan Mashadov  
March 12: Municipal elections in Latvia  
April 8: An official Russian delegation led by Sergey Yastrzhembsky visits Latvia  
April 19: Joseph Ratzinger is elected Pope in Rome  
April 25: Andris Teikmanis becomes Latvian ambassador to Russia  
April 26: The Latvian government adopts a unilateral "explanatory declaration" to the border treaty; Russia announces that ratification is "impossible"  
May 6: U.S. President George W. Bush visits Latvia  
May 9: Latvian President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga visits Moscow to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II, agrees with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the "necessity of dialogue"  
May 12: The European parliament adopts a resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II stressing the victims of Nazism and communism  
May 24-7: Latvian Transport Minister Ainārs Šlesers visits Moscow to attend a meeting of European transport ministers

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