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**The End of an Empire:
Russia's Failure to Influence Policy Outcomes in Post-Soviet Latvia**

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Abstract

This major research paper examines the extent to which Russia has maintained its political, economic and social influence in Latvia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It argues that despite its economic and cultural importance for the region, Russia either has been reluctant - or at times unable - to manipulate policy outcomes in Latvia. The first chapter demonstrates that Russia remains a key economic, investment and energy partner for Latvia, and thus has been reluctant to compromise its own economic interests in the region through ideologically-driven foreign policy. In addition to addressing Russia's new pragmatic, profit-based approach to foreign policy, this paper also assesses the Russian Federation's relationship with Latvia's large Russian-speaking population. It concludes that Baltic Russian identity is incompatible with Russia's statist vision of nationalism, thus preventing the Russian Federation from "infiltrating" Latvian society. This analysis will debunk the myth that Russia still "pulls the strings" in all former Soviet republics, its ambitions and influence falling short of its neo-imperialist foreign policy doctrines and self-portrayal as a "great power." This major research paper will also demonstrate that Latvia's discursive qualification of Russia and Russian-speakers as "threats," which has led to a series of exclusionary domestic policies, has been exaggerated to justify the very existence of the Latvian state.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	p. 1-3
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CHAPTER 1

Russia's Pragmatic Foreign Policy: Issue Delinkage and the Pursuit of Economic Interests

Russia's <i>Derzhavnost'</i> Doctrine and Competing Discourses of Occupation/Liberation	p. 4
From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Pragmatic Russo-Latvian Economic and Energy Relations	p.11
Enabling Pragmatism: Desecuritized Discourse on Russian National Identity	p.23

CHAPTER 2

Incompatible Identities: Baltic Russians versus the Historical Homeland

Russophones in Latvia: Misrepresentation, Disenfranchisement and Marginalization	p. 26
Russia as a Homeland: Moscow's Failed Outreach to Latvia's Russophones	p. 33
Explaining Failed Mobilization: Soviet Identity, Ethnocultural Awareness and Becoming "Latvian"	p. 42

Conclusion and Prospects for Russo-Latvian Relations	p. 49-51
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Bibliography	p. 52-59
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Брань не дым - глаза не ест.

[Hard words break no bones.]

-Russian Proverb

The End of an Empire: Russia's Failure to Influence Policy Outcomes in Post-Soviet Latvia

The Soviet Union once viewed the Baltic states as a buffer zone against Western influence and encroachment. In light of modern Russia's strong political rhetoric based on its self-ascribed status as a "great power," its foreign policy towards the former Soviet republics has often been described as "imperialist" or "neo-imperialist."¹ Vladimir Putin's description of the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe"² of the 20th century has fed hackneyed arguments about Moscow's expansionist ambitions, about its desire to reincorporate the territories and population it lost in 1991. The Russian Federation's restoration of the Soviet national anthem's music in 2000³ and its glorification of Peter the Great⁴ are often - and legitimately - cited as evidence of Russia's nostalgia for its imperial past. Scholarly and popular literature, however, often do not calibrate the factual extent to which Russia has been able to influence or control policy outcomes in the former Soviet republics, including in Latvia and the other Baltic states.

This research paper argues that in spite of its economic and cultural importance for the region, Russia either has been unwilling - or at times unable - to pursue an imperialist foreign policy towards Latvia. The first chapter begins by demonstrating that Russia remains a key economic, investment and energy partner for Latvia, one that has been reluctant to compromise its economic interests by pursuing political objectives through energy or other forms of blackmail. The deliberate delinkage between the two streams of discourse that dominate Russo-

¹ Grigas, Agnia. August 2012. "Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States," *The Means and Ends of Russian Influence Abroad Series: Chatham House*, p. 3.

² BBC News. "Putin Deplores Collapse of the USSR," URL Address: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>, page viewed on January 6, 2013.

³ Президент России. 30 декабря 2000. "Указ Президента Российской Федерации, No. 2110," URL Address: <http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=5280&PSC=1&PT=3&Page=2>, page viewed on January 6, 2013.

⁴ Herspring, Dale R. 2005. *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*. Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 5.

Latvian relations - one on the pragmatic pursuit of economic interests and another on the incompatibility of Russia's and Latvia's national identities – explains why economic relations have not suffered from historical and political disagreements. This research paper demonstrates that these separate streams of discourse, which became all the more distinct following Latvia's accession to the European Union and NATO in 2004, have enabled pragmatic commercial and economic interests to prevail over identity-based discord. Beyond its assessment of Russia's reluctance to conduct an imperialist foreign policy towards Latvia, this paper also addresses the Russian Federation's relationship towards this former Soviet republic's large Russian-speaking population. The second chapter concludes that despite Russia's attempts at garnering local support in Latvia, Baltic Russian identity remains incompatible with the Russian Federation's statist vision of nationalism. This explains Russia's failure to attract or mobilize its ethnic and linguistic diaspora in its ability to influence the Latvian state.

This analysis of the pragmatic nature of Russian foreign policy debunks shallow arguments about Russia's "resolve"⁵ to maintain all-encompassing control over other former Soviet republics, its ambitions and influence falling short of its discursive self-portrayal as a "great power." It will also demonstrate that Latvia's discursive qualification of Russia and Russian-speakers as "threats," which has led to a series of exclusionary domestic policies, has been exaggerated to justify the very existence of the Latvian state. Although this major research paper does not constitute a comparative study of Russian influence in different former Soviet republics, it nonetheless demonstrates that Russia's relations with its "near abroad" are no longer ideologically motivated. It argues that Russian foreign policy has progressively lost its geopolitical nature for the sake of fulfilling pragmatic geoeconomic objectives.

⁵ Grigas, Agnia. August 2012. "Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States," *The Means and Ends of Russian Influence Abroad Series: Chatham House*, p. 2.

This research paper is partially based on interviews conducted between May and August 2012 in Riga, Latvia, with current members of the Latvian Parliament, including Boriss Cilevičs⁶, as well as with Viktors Makarovs, the current Parliamentary Secretary of the Latvian Foreign Ministry. It also refers to interviews conducted with Jakovs Pliners, a Latvian parliamentarian and the director of a Russian secondary school in Riga, and with Igors Pimenovs, the founder of *LASHOR*, the *Latvian Association for Support of Schools with Russian Language Instruction*. This major research paper also relies on international scholarly literature, Russian foreign policy documents and presidential decrees, in addition to the publications of Russian non-governmental organizations operating in Latvia. In its assessment of competing historical narratives and the specificities of Baltic Russian identity, this paper analyzes the different representational trends found in both Russian and Latvian official discourse.

⁶ Throughout this major research paper, the first and last names of Latvian officials will be spelled using official Latvian orthography.

CHAPTER 1

Russia's Pragmatic Foreign Policy: Issue Delinkage and the Pursuit of Economic Interests

Russia's Derzhavnost' Doctrine and Competing Discourses of Occupation/Liberation

Concerns that Russia's bilateral relations with the other former republics of the Soviet Union are driven by an imperialist agenda have not risen *ex nihilo*. They are not solely the product of Western Reaganesque rhetoric about the vestiges of an "evil empire."⁷ They also stem from Russia's incidental definition of its own national identity. With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia faced an acute identity crisis. Unlike the other 14 republics of the USSR, the Russian Republic – both as a state and a nation – could not factually relate to its past without referring to an empire⁸, be it the Soviet Union or pre-1917 Imperial Russia. Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian Federation from 1991 to 1999, was left with the mind-boggling task of rebranding a newly "democratic" state that once had thrived on expansionism and despotism. Political instability, hyperinflation (which reached 2,333% in 1992⁹) and the dire need to ensure macroeconomic stability¹⁰ left introspection about national identity low in the government's priorities. In these circumstances, the Russian Federation chose to define itself in the most obvious terms: Russia was the "continuer-state" (*prodolzhatel'*) of the Soviet Union and also

⁷ Reagan, Ronald. March 8, 1983. "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida," URL Address: http://www.reaganfoundation.org/bw_detail.aspx?p=LMB4YGHF2&h1=0&h2=0&sw=&lm=berlinwall&args_a=cms&args_b=74&argsb=N&tx=1770, page viewed January 5, 2013.

⁸ Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2004. "Russia in the Baltic Sea Region: Desecurization or Deregalization?" *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 319.

⁹ Trading Economics. "Russia Inflation Rate," URL Address: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/russia/inflation-cpi>, page viewed on January 5, 2012.

¹⁰ Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2004. "Russia in the Baltic Sea Region: Desecurization or Deregalization?" *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 319.

implicitly of the Russian Empire¹¹. The struggling Russian Federation in the first decade of its post-Soviet transition was thus presented as the continuation of two “mighty” empires. While unofficial symbols of the USSR have remained throughout the post-Soviet period, markers of Imperial Russia - including the biheaded eagle and the tricolour national flag from 1896 - were officially reintroduced as state symbols in 1993¹². The “new” Russia strived to reinvent itself but remained inexorably tied to its imperial heritage.

The restoration of Russia’s “imperial” identity and foreign policy was highly reactionary. It followed the fragmented results of the country’s 1993 parliamentary elections in which the Communist Party, the Liberal Democratic Party and other small groups won a majority in the State Duma¹³. These results attested to popular discontent with Yeltsin’s partnerships with the West and the hardships entailed by the “shock therapy”¹⁴ of 1992¹⁵. Discontent, however, was not limited to the general population. Russia’s parliamentarians had sought to impeach Yeltsin following his unconstitutional attempt to dissolve the legislature in September 1993; the conflict was eventually settled by military force. Having turned to the use of force against his own Parliament, Yeltsin’s political survival was incumbent on his ability to assuage generalized unrest. Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev knew that Russia’s instability and weakness could be momentarily forgotten by evoking a sense of pride in the country’s glorious imperial

¹¹ Matz, Johan. 2001. *Constructing a Post-Soviet International Political Reality: Russian Foreign Policy Towards Newly Independent States 1990-1995*. Uppsala: University of Uppsala, p. 123.

¹² Указ Президента Российской Федерации о государственном флаге Российской Федерации, N 2126. 11 декабря 1993 года. URL Address: <http://www.alppp.ru/law/konstitucionnyj-stroj/gosudarstvennye-simvoly--stolicy/1/ukaz-prezidenta-rf-ot-11-12-1993--2126.html>, page viewed on January 5, 2013.

¹³ Ciziunas, Pranas. 2008. “Russia and the Baltic States: Is Russian Imperialism Dead?” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 27, p. 293.

¹⁴ Shock therapy refers to the market-oriented reforms undergone by the Russian economy in the first years of its post-Soviet transition. It notably involved the privatization of state-owned businesses, the withdrawal of state subsidies and the liberalization of currency controls.

¹⁵ Ciziunas, Pranas. 2008. “Russia and the Baltic States: Is Russian Imperialism Dead?” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 27, p. 293.

past. In an effort to benefit politically from Russia's past as a "great power," Yeltsin and Kozyrev embedded the concept of *derzhavnost'* (or "great power status") in the Russian Federation's 1993 National Security Concept¹⁶. Similar to the United States' Monroe Doctrine, the concept of *derzhavnost'* "recognizes Russia's vital interests and special role in the former republics of the Soviet Union and legitimizes Russian intervention to protect them."¹⁷ It designates the former Soviet republics as Russia's "near abroad,"¹⁸ as independent countries that – by default – remain in the Russian Federation's sphere of influence. The timing of its adoption suggests that Russia's foreign policy is not inherently path dependent; its nature adapts to domestic circumstances. The reactionary nature of *derzhavnost'*, which - at its root - was meant to ensure Yeltsin's political survival, also suggests that Russia's imperial past does not necessarily condemn it to maintaining imperial ambitions.

The *derzhavnost'* doctrine implies that Russia would have a "special role" to play in Latvia. It would entitle it to meddle in the domestic politics of this former Soviet republic in which 35% of the population is Russian-speaking¹⁹. The issue that generates the most strife in Russia's bilateral relations with Latvia – and which should, according to the *derzhavnost'* doctrine, entice Russia to intervene beyond its borders – pertains to collective memory. Collective memory, which Timothy Snyder defines as the "organizational principle [...] by which nationally conscious individuals [Russians and Latvians, respectively] understand the past and its demands on the present,"²⁰ accounts for the infrequent and tense political exchanges

¹⁶ Shearman, Peter. 1997. "Defining the National Interest; Russian Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics," in Roger Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemiakin (eds.), *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, New York: St. Martin's Press, p. 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. *Population and Housing Census 2011*, URL Address: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html>, page viewed on December 8, 2012.

²⁰ Snyder, Timothy. 2004. "Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939-1999" in Müller, Jan Werner (ed.), *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 50.

between the two countries. The last official bilateral visit was that of Latvian President Valdis Zatlers in December 2010; no acting Russian president has made an official visit to Latvia since the collapse of the Soviet Union²¹. Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, president of Latvia from 1999 to 2007, has even described her country's political relations with Russia as a "dialogue of the deaf."²²

These tense political relations stem from divergent, and even incompatible, "memory regimes"²³ - ways of understanding the past's implications for present-day foreign and domestic policy-making. Although Russia and Latvia share a common history under the Soviet Union, they nonetheless present competing discourses about their past. Latvia and Russia vehemently disagree on the nature of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed by the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in 1939. The secret protocols of this non-aggression pact divided Eastern Europe into the respective superpowers' spheres of influence²⁴. Latvia fell on the Soviet side; it was subsequently occupied by the USSR between 1940 and 1941. After a German occupation from 1941 to 1944, Latvia was reincorporated into the USSR and remained a Soviet Socialist Republic until 1991²⁵. According to Nils Muižnieks, Latvia's historical narrative is one of "suffering and heroism" under the Soviet occupations while Russia's grand narrative revolves around the "expulsion of foreign enemies" during its "liberation" of Europe from fascism in 1945²⁶. Victory Day, while it marks the end of the Second World War for Moscow, embodies the perpetuation of Latvia's illegal occupation for Riga. Although the celebration marking the end of a brutal war is a

²¹ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 25.

²² Ozoliņa, Žaneta and Airis Rikveilis. 2006. "Latvian and Russian Foreign Policy: Bound by a Post-Soviet Heritage," in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 96.

²³ Onken, Eva-Clarita. "Commemorating 9 May: The Baltic States and European Memory Politics" in Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (ed.), *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, p. 40.

²⁴ Kasekamp, Andres. 2010. *A History of the Baltic States*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 124.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 34.

seemingly anodyne event, it has become controversial in Russo-Baltic relations. In 2005, Vladimir Putin invited the presidents of all three Baltic states to attend the 60th anniversary of the Soviet Union's defeat of fascism, which was celebrated with a military parade on Red Square²⁷. Ojārs Kalniņš, the former Latvian Ambassador to the United States, describes these maladroit invitations as a call "to celebrate the invasion, occupation and demographic decimation of their lands by Stalin's Red Army and Sovietization policies."²⁸

Moscow has yet to recognize the Soviet Union's occupation of the Baltic States and maintains that the Baltic States "willingly" joined the Soviet Union²⁹. The Russian Foreign Ministry asserts that Soviet troops entered the Baltic states in 1940 with the consent of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian governments. Recent Lithuanian demands for compensation from Russia for damages incurred by the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states were dismissed by the Russian Foreign Ministry. The Ministry insists that claims related to the Soviet "occupation" of the Baltic states ignore "all legal, historical and political realities, and are therefore utterly groundless."³⁰ It has also stresses that "the issue [of the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states] is closed, and that Russia does not intend to reopen it."³¹ Moscow notably expresses its dismissal of the Baltic occupation narrative by frowning upon Latvia's yearly commemoration of the 110,000 Latvians who were mobilized into Nazi military units, half of which fought for the Latvian Legion (the 15th and 19th Waffen-SS divisions)³². The Russian Foreign Ministry has expressed its outrage about the event, stating that "flagrant attempts to revise the truth about Nazi atrocities,

²⁷ Onken, Eva-Clarita. "Commemorating 9 May: The Baltic States and European Memory Politics" in Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (ed.), *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, p. 33.

²⁸ Kalniņš, Ojārs. April 13, 2005. "Latvia in the 20th Century – from the Local to the Global Perspective," Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the European Association of History Educators, Riga, Latvia, p. 2.

²⁹ Kasekamp, Andres. 2010. *A History of the Baltic States*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 129.

³⁰ RIA Novosti. January 18, 2007. "Russia's Rejection of Lithuania's Occupation Claims Final – Ministry," URL Address: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20070118/59322624.html>, page viewed on January 5, 2013.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Lumans, Valdis O. 2006. *Latvia in World War II*. New York: Fordham University Press, p. 296.

revise the rulings of the Nuremberg Trials which convicted SS personnel, cannot but excite indignation.”³³ While Russia and the international community view Nazi Germany as inherently more atrocious than the Soviet Union, Latvia places its two occupiers on equal footing, insisting that the crimes committed by the Communist regime “were equally barbaric to those committed by the Nazis.”³⁴ These competing collective memory discourses have impeded the countries’ willingness and ability to engage in productive bilateral political relations.

Although the Soviet occupation ended more than two decades ago, Riga remains in “occupation mode” in its political discourse. Former Latvian President Vīķe-Freiberga argued that “for us [Latvians], the Second World War and its sequels will end only [...] when we can be assured of not ever being occupied again as we were by two occupying powers: Stalinist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.”³⁵ While Latvia’s accession to NATO in 2004 provides it with the assurance that it will not be occupied by the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union’s successor state, Latvia remains focused on safeguarding itself from “occupying” elements. Having declared itself the legal and political continuation of the pre-occupation (pre-1940) Latvian state³⁶, Latvia’s narrative as a formerly occupied republic is used as a justification for its existence and a wide-range of controversial domestic policies. Latvia’s ethnocultural citizenship and language legislation, which is presented as compensation for the country’s occupation and subsequent Sovietization, has also sparked Russia’s indignation³⁷.

³³ Russia Today. March 16, 2012. “Riga Hosts SS Veteran March Amid Anti-Fascist Outcry,” URL Address: <http://rt.com/news/nazi-ss-veteran-riga-725/>, page viewed on January 5, 2013.

³⁴ Onken, Eva-Clarita. “Commemorating 9 May: The Baltic States and European Memory Politics” in Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (ed.), *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, p. 38.

³⁵ CNN World. “NATO Must Calm Russia Fears,” URL Address: http://articles.cnn.com/2004-04-02/world/nato.analysis_1_nato-russian-hoop-scheffer-nato-alliance?s=PM:WORLD, page viewed on January 5, 2013.

³⁶ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 103.

³⁷ The impact of these policies on Russo-Baltic relations will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Despite Russia's dismissal of and outrage towards Latvia's collective memory, the *derzhavnost'* doctrine has failed to materialize in Russo-Latvian relations, first under Yeltsin and more recently under Putin and former President Dmitri Medvedev. Reluctant to exercise its asymmetrical power in all aspects of its bilateral relations with Latvia, Russia has "agreed to disagree" in regards to divergent understandings of the history of the Second World War. Russia has willingly relinquished what Timothy Snyder refers to as "sovereignty over memory"³⁸ in its relations with Latvia; it no longer insists on holding a "monopoly" on history. The Russian Federation prefers to compartmentalize political and historical disagreements in two separate streams of discourse so as not to disrupt or jeopardize other aspects of its bilateral relations with Latvia. In fact, Latvia's 2010 presidential visit to Russia led to a series of bilateral agreements on economic cooperation, the transportation of nuclear fuel and the operations of customs points at the border.³⁹ Political and historical issues remained untouched. This suggests that unlike an empire, Russia has preferred not to engage in all aspects of Latvian political life, steering clear of the persistent political disagreements that threaten the more pragmatic (and profitable) aspects of the bilateral relation. When questioned by an Estonian journalist on why Russia refuses to "apologize" for the occupation of the Baltic states, Putin distinctly verbalized Russia's pragmatic position on the issue. He matter-of-factly answered, "[...] are we going to let the dead grab us by the sleeves every day, preventing us from moving forward now? [...]"⁴⁰

A closer examination of bilateral economic and energy issues will demonstrate that Russia does not let the "dead grab onto its sleeves" when it comes to its relations with Latvia.

³⁸ Snyder, Timothy. 2004. "Memory of Sovereignty and Sovereignty over Memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939-1999" in Müller, Jan Werner (ed.), *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 35.

³⁹ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Khitrov, Lengvard. 2005. "Paying Tribute to the Heroism and Courage of the Russian Soldier," *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy & International Relations*, No. 51, Vol. 4, p. 49.

Rather Russia fosters a pragmatic understanding of what constitutes its “vital interests” and “special role” in this former Soviet republic, one that does not equate the imperialist control of all aspects of the economic, political, historical and social spheres of the Latvian state.

From Geopolitics to Geoeconomics: Pragmatic Russo-Latvian Economic and Energy Relations

Since the early 2000s, the Russian Federation largely has abandoned its geopolitical approach to foreign policy. Although it remains a foundation of the country’s foreign policy, Russia’s focus on its “sphere of influence” as delineated in the *derzhavnost’* doctrine progressively has been replaced by concerns for a “sphere of interest.”⁴¹ Bobo Lo notes that under Putin “the presentation of ‘great power’ ideology has become ‘softer’ and more sophisticated, with little of the breast-beating and petty point-scoring of the past.”⁴² Moscow has seemingly lost interest in serving as the omnipotent successor of the Soviet Union, preferring to adopt a profit-based approach to its bilateral relations with its former republics. This makes Russia a “great *economic*”⁴³ power” rather than the expansionist “great power” it had envisioned in 1993. In the context of Russo-Baltic relations, Viacheslav Yelagin suggests that in the last decade Russia has demonstrated its readiness “to build its uneasy relations with the Baltic republics not on the basis of the psychological complexes of the Soviet era.”⁴⁴ Moscow, in fact, has opted to set aside these “psychological complexes” – its contentious views on Soviet history, its “embarrassing” loss of population and territory in 1991 – that potentially jeopardize business opportunities at home and abroad. The transition from Russia’s absolute dread of NATO expansion to its willingness to engage in pragmatic economic relations with the new members of

⁴¹ Trenin, Dmitri. 2009. “Russia’s Sphere of *Interest*, not *Influence*,” *The Washington Quarterly*, No. 32, Vol. 4, p. 4.

⁴² Lo, Bobo. 2002. *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 164.

⁴³ Emphasis added.

⁴⁴ Елагин, Вячеслав. 2001. "От Таллина до Москвы непростой путь," *Международная жизнь*, No. 4, p. 58.

European and transatlantic organizations is especially discernable in its Border Treaty (2007) negotiations with Latvia. This negotiation process, which lasted 16 years, clearly depicts a recent shift in Russia's foreign policy thinking towards the former Soviet republics. It also highlights the extent to which a discourse on the importance of pursuing pragmatic economic objectives has come to trump identity-based considerations in Russo-Latvian relations.

On August 23, 1944, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet unilaterally redrew Latvia's eastern border, which had been established by the Treaty of Riga following the Russo-Polish War of 1920⁴⁵. Moscow's post-war administrative borders between the Russian and Latvian Republics placed the Latvian district of Abrene (now Pytalovo in Pskovskaya Oblast') on the Russian side, adding 1,293 km² to the RSFSR's territory⁴⁶. Although Latvia had decided to recognize the *de facto* border as early as 1996, the official acknowledgement of this loss was politically unpalatable⁴⁷. While Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavs acknowledged that Russia was unlikely to "give up"⁴⁸ what had once been Abrene because of its overwhelmingly Russian-speaking population, other Latvian officials rejected demographic arguments for conceding territory that had been lost during the Soviet occupation. Juris Sinks, a member of the Latvian Foreign Affairs Parliamentary Committee, argued that if "we [Latvia] turn our backs on Abrene, then what do we say about Daugavpils, where just 10 per cent of the population is Latvian, or Riga, where nearly two-thirds of the populace is non-Latvian?"⁴⁹

While Riga struggled to recognize that Abrene would remain Russian, Moscow demonstrated its discontent towards the undue prominence of this "non-issue." Having yet to

⁴⁵ Mole, Richard C. M. 2012. *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. New York: Routledge, p. 130.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rostoks, Tom. 2006. "The Border Issue," in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 135.

⁴⁸ Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB): SWB SU/2216 E/1.

⁴⁹ Mole, Richard C. M. 2012. *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. New York: Routledge, p. 133.

adopt its contemporary pragmatic aspirations and objectives, Russia acted in accordance with its *derzhavnost'* doctrine and its traditional ideological foreign policy thinking. In fact, in 1997, Russia declined to sign the Border Treaty unless Latvia improved its treatment of its Russian-speaking population, arguing that Riga was creating a “legal basis for continuing a discriminatory, humiliating policy in respect of people [...] whose native language is Russian, to whom it [the Latvian state] intends to give the status of invaders.”⁵⁰ Tom Rostoks and Aivars Stranga view this not as an expression of genuine concern for Russian compatriots abroad but rather as a way to hinder Latvia’s accession to the EU and NATO, which would have threatened Russia’s security in its own “near abroad.”⁵¹ This tactic evidently failed because the unsigned Border Treaty did not dissuade the EU and NATO from accepting Latvia in 2004.

The scheduled signing of the treaty in 2005 marks a break between “ideological” and “pragmatic” – or “geopolitical” and “gloeonomic” – Russian foreign policy thinking. Richard C. Mole rightly notes that chronologically, “it was only after the Baltic states had secured entry to both organizations [the EU and NATO] that Russia signaled its willingness to proceed with the signing of the treaties and fix its border not just with Estonia and Latvia but also with the EU.”⁵² Having “lost” Latvia and the other Baltic states to these organizations, Russia calculated that it was in its best interest to delink contentious issues with the pragmatic ones from which it could benefit. Given that the most extensive business cooperation between the countries occurs in the Russian border region, Russia understood that the ambiguity of the border’s status jeopardized important cross-border investments from Latvia. In 2011, Pskovskaya

⁵⁰ Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS): FBIS-SOV-96-200.

⁵¹ Stranga, Aivars. 1997. “Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995- Beginning 1997,” in Atis Lejiņš and Žaneta Ozoliņa, (ed.), *Small States in a Turbulent Environment*. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, p. 199. & Rostoks, Tom. 2006. “The Border Issue,” in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 135.

⁵² Mole, Richard C. M. 2012. *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. New York: Routledge, p. 137.

Oblast', which shares a 292 km border with Latvia, reported that Latvian investment from more than 80 companies made up close to 50% of the region's total foreign direct investments⁵³. Before the 2008 economic crisis, direct Latvian investment in Russia totaled 45.1 million lats (\$84.9 million)⁵⁴. Had the Russian Federation let recalcitrant political disagreements poison economic relations, it would have been unable to reap the full benefits of Latvian foreign investment, which stimulates economic growth through technology transfers, employment and increased competition.

Moscow's approach to the Border Treaty negotiations also taught Riga a lesson of sorts on the importance of delinking irritants from the pragmatic aspects of bilateral relations. Two weeks prior to the scheduled signing of the Treaty in 2005, the Latvian government unilaterally approved a clause that mentioned the "illegal occupation of Latvia,"⁵⁵ a political manoeuvre to ensure that the loss of Abrene would be compensated by political gains in terms of promoting the state's official historical narrative. The Russian side rejected this insertion and insisted that Latvia's political schemes had "no place" in the signing of this treaty that would benefit both the Russian and Latvian economies⁵⁶. Moscow left Riga to realize that its lack of pragmatism was hindering its economic potential. Representatives from the fishing and cargo transit industries, two sectors with a strong interest in constructive relations with Russia, subsequently lobbied Riga to abandon the occupation rhetoric it wanted to insert in the Treaty⁵⁷. Andris Sprūds argues that the internal pressures "for interests to trump ideas" finally shifted the

⁵³ Zeltiņš, Arvils. 2012. "Business Interests in the Latvia-Russia Economic Relationship," in Andris Sprūds (ed.), *The Economic Presence of Russia and Belarus in the Baltic States: Risks and Opportunities*. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, p. 121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁵⁵ Rostoks, Tom. 2006. "The Border Issue," in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 134.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁷ Rikveilis, Airis. 2008. "The Interstate Border and Latvian-Russian Relations: the Past as an Impediment to Bilateral Cooperation," in Zanete Ozoliņa (ed.), *Latvia-Russia-X*. Riga: Zinatne, p. 305.

Latvian political discourse from one of “danger” to one of “opportunity.”⁵⁸ The Latvian state took two more years before it came to embrace Russia’s preference for pragmatism and dropped the clause about the illegal Soviet occupation of its territory; discourse on economic pragmatism had finally prevailed over the identity rhetoric of the past. At the signing in 2007, Latvian Prime Minister Ivars Godmanis declared that “[...] with the border agreement, the preconditions are made for a significant development of economic relations,”⁵⁹ embracing pragmatism for the sake of productive bilateral relations with Russia, the source of 9.66% of Latvia’s imports and the destination of 11.40% of its exports in 2011⁶⁰. Moscow’s willingness to delink different foreign policy issues, eventually echoed by Riga, demonstrates that it does not desire an imperialist stranglehold on its former Soviet republic. It is more interested in pursuing its economic interests without compromising the benefits of bilateral cooperation with irresponsible, ideologically-driven foreign policy.

The Russian Federation’s preference for the pragmatic compartmentalization of issues is also corroborated by a 2006 study conducted by the Moscow-based Centre for Financial and Economic Research on the insulation of trade issues from the otherwise tense political relations between Russia and Latvia⁶¹. Using 16,825 points of observation, including the countries’ respective GDPs and the distance between capitals, the study estimated the “normal” amount of trade that should occur between Russia and Latvia provided they entertained “normal” political

⁵⁸ Sprūds, Andris. 2009. “Entrapment in the Discourse of Danger? Latvian-Russian Interaction in the Context of European Integration,” in Berg Eiki and Piret Ehin, *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*. Surrey: Ashgate, p. 102.

⁵⁹ Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabinets. 2008. “Deklarācija par Ivara Godmaņa vadītā Ministru kabineta iecerēto darbību,” URL Address: <http://www.mk.gov.lv/lv/mk/vesture/godmana-valdiba-2/godmana-valdibas-deklaracija/>, page viewed on January 17, 2013 (Unofficial translation).

⁶⁰ Embassy of the Republic of Latvia in Moscow. 2012. “Relations between Latvia and Russia,” URL Address: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/moscow/Latvia-Russia/>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

⁶¹ Centre for Financial and Economic Research. *Russia Trade Policy Project*. URL Address: <http://www.cefir.ru/index.php?l=eng&id=20&y=2005>, page viewed on November 17, 2012.

relations⁶². Economists Vyacheslav Dombrovsky and Alfs Vanags found that the actual levels of trade between Russia and Latvia corresponded very closely to the predicted amounts⁶³. The absence of “missing trade” between the countries therefore suggests that economic relations have remained insulated from the contentious political issues that jeopardize them.

In addition to delinking issues for pragmatism’s sake, Russia also refuses to compromise its interests in Latvia, which likely would be threatened by the enactment of an imperialist foreign policy. Russia does not serve only as an important export market for Latvian goods and services, providing Latvia with significant national income (nearly 3% of its GDP in 2005)⁶⁴, but also massively invests in the Latvian economy. In 2006, Russian investments accounted for 16% of the total of foreign direct investments in Latvia⁶⁵. Dombrovsky and Vanags argue that the increase of Russian investment following Latvia’s accession to the European Union in 2004, a period during which Russia’s share of the Latvian export market doubled, suggests that Russia views Latvia and the other Baltic states as springboards to the broader European economic area⁶⁶. With its investments in energy, transportation, real estate and banking⁶⁷ totalling 281.7 million lats⁶⁸ (\$530.9 million), Russia clearly benefits from productive relations with Latvia. This situation in fact corroborates the principle of “commercial pacifism” in the liberalist theory of International Relations. According to this concept, increased economic interdependence and

⁶² Centre for Financial and Economic Research. *Russia Trade Policy Project*. URL Address: <http://www.cefir.ru/index.php?l=eng&id=20&y=2005>, page viewed on November 17, 2012.

⁶³ Dombrovsky, Vyacheslav and Vanags, Alf. “Latvian-Russian Economic Relations,” in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁵ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. *Cumulative FDI Stock by Country (2000-2006)*, URL Address: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/statistikas-temas/investment-key-indicators-30533.html>, page viewed on November 17, 2012.

⁶⁶ Dombrovsky, Vyacheslav and Vanags, Alf. “Latvian-Russian Economic Relations,” in Nils Muižnieks (ed.), *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 109.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁸ Zeltiņš, Arvils. 2012. “Business Interests in the Latvia-Russia Economic Relationship,” in Andris Sprūds (ed.), *The Economic Presence of Russia and Belarus in the Baltic States: Risks and Opportunities*. Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, p. 127.

cooperation generate norms, practices and intricate interdependencies that foster the necessity of engaging in peaceful relations⁶⁹. While Russo-Latvian political relations are far from normalized, both sides have understood that the cost of conflict and escalation is simply too high. Russia has realized that its vital interests do not correspond to the imperialist, expansionist and asymmetrical power ideals implied in the *derzhavnost'* doctrine. Rather, Russia's vital interests in Latvia require maintaining productive economic relations and avoiding the Pandora's box of political disagreements.

Russia's reluctance to compromise its own business interests is most evident in the Latvian energy sector, which accounts for 27.4% of Russian investments in Latvia⁷⁰. Russia has recognized that the use of energy resources as levers for political or economic blackmail is certain to backfire. Latvia is home to the Inčukalns Underground Gas Storage Facility, which stores 2.3 billion m³ of gas that is routinely supplied to Estonia, Lithuania and neighbouring Russian regions, including Pskovskaya Oblast' and Leningradskaya Oblast'⁷¹, home to 2.4 million people and to the old capital, Saint Petersburg. Although Russia remains dominant in its asymmetrical energy relations with Latvia - its energy sector accounting for 50% of its federal revenues, 61% of its export revenues and 18% of its GDP in 2007⁷² - Riga still holds the upper hand when it comes to energy distribution in Western Russia. Russian abuse would leave its second largest city in the cold and dark. Beyond Latvia's geographic importance for energy distribution, it also serves as a key, albeit small, market for Russian energy resources. *Gazprom*

⁶⁹ Roussel, Stéphane & Dan O'Meara. 2007. « Le libéralisme classique », in Alex Macleod & Dan O'Meara (dir.), *Théories des Relations Internationales: Contestations et résistances*. Montréal: Éditions Athéna, p. 98.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Sprūds, Andris. 2009. "Latvia's Energy Strategy: Between Structural Entrapments and Policy Choices," in Andris Sprūds, Toms Rostoks (eds.), *Energy: Pulling the Baltic Sea Region Together or Apart?* Riga: Zinatne, p. 226.

⁷² Åslund, Anders. April 2009. "The Russian Economy: More than Just Energy?" *Testimony for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament*, p. 4.

and *Itera*, two major Russian gas companies, together own a 50% share of *Latvijas Gāze*⁷³, which holds the monopoly on the natural gas market in Latvia. Juris Savickis, Vice-Chairman of the Council of the Joint Stock of *Latvijas Gāze*, has reported that in Latvia the total capital value of *Gazprom* and *Itera Latvija* is at least 600 million lats (\$1.13 billion)⁷⁴. Given that Latvia is completely dependent on Russian gas imports⁷⁵, *Gazprom*'s and *Itera*'s shared ownership of *Latvijas Gāze* guarantees strong leverage to maintain stable gas relations with the Latvian state, which notably ensures Russia's use, and Latvia's acceptance, of market price for energy transactions.

The use of market prices for energy resources attests to Russia's highly pragmatic approach to its relations with Latvia. Since 1992 Russia has demanded that Latvia pay the full price for its energy resources unlike Belarus and Ukraine, two former Slavic Soviet republics that have been charged preferential tariffs as low as 22% of market value over the past two decades⁷⁶. Boriss Cilevičs, member of the current Latvian Parliament and Council of Europe, argues that Latvia pays market prices for its Russian energy because economic issues have been delinked from "political attitudes."⁷⁷ According to Cilevičs, "we [Latvia] negotiated a price, we paid and received all of it [energy resources]. [...] This is just business, and nothing more."⁷⁸ Cilevičs's phrasing clearly highlights the transactional nature of contemporary Russo-Latvian bilateral relations. Latvia's full payments provide Moscow with much-needed hard

⁷³ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 48.

⁷⁴ Baltic News Network. May 23, 2011. "Gazprom un Itera negrib atteikties no Inčukalna gāzes krātuves." URL Address: <http://bnn.lv/gazprom-itera-negrib-atteikties-incukalna-gazes-kratuves-32137>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

⁷⁵ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 48.

⁷⁶ Reuters. December 21, 2012. "Factbox: Russia's Energy Disputes with Ukraine and Belarus," URL Address: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/21/us-russia-gas-disputes-idUSBRE8BK11T20121221>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

⁷⁷ Cilevičs, Boriss. Member of the Latvian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, June 4, 2012.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

currency. In return Moscow delivers energy resources to its Latvian counterpart on time and without interruption. The profit-seeking “nothing more than business” attitude is also found in the Latvian energy sector. In response to Russia’s market pricing in energy transactions, Latvia increased the transit fee for the pipeline running to the north western port of Ventspils, which has had the largest turnover of eastern Baltic ports, ranging from 22.4 to 36.2 million tons of cargo a year⁷⁹.

In 1997 transit of Russian oil products across Latvia contributed \$160 million to the Latvian economy⁸⁰. The rising tariffs, while highly profitable for Latvia, were in turn too costly for Russia. No longer willing to contribute benevolently to its former republics’ economies at the expense of its own, Moscow sought a more cost-efficient solution to the westward transit of its energy resources. Moscow opted to redirect its Baltic Pipeline System to the Russian port city of Primorsk⁸¹ and no longer use the transit route through Latvian territory. Such measures have enabled Russia to save a yearly \$1.5 billion by bypassing transit routes in foreign countries; the Baltic route to Ventspils annually cost Russia more than \$500 million⁸². This expense-cutting also greatly contributed to the development of the north western regions of Russia. In 2000, prior to the completion of the Baltic Pipeline System to Primorsk, the unemployment rates in Karelia and Leningradskaya Oblast’ were 11.29% and 9.63%.⁸³ In 2002, these rates dropped to 7.80% and 7.04%.⁸⁴ Given that Russia strives to maintain productive relations with Latvia for economic reasons, Moscow’s redirection of its energy exports should be understood as a self-interested,

⁷⁹ Sprūds, Andris. December 2001. “Political Priorities and Economic Interests in Russian-Latvian Relations,” *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, No. 620, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸² Busigina, Irina. 1998. “Krievija, Baltijas valstis un Eiropas Savienība,” in Talavs Jundzis (ed.), *Baltijas valstis liktengriežos*. Riga: Latvian Academy of Science, p. 481.

⁸³ Unemployment in the Russian Federation. “Unemployment in North-West Federal District,” URL Address: http://unemploymentinrussia.com/north-west_federal_district.aspx, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

cost-cutting development strategy. While some observers have described Russia's decision as a way to "punish" Latvia for its treatment of its Russian-speaking minority, a simple costs-benefits analysis suggests that this has not been the case. Transit through Latvia had become too costly and was being done at the expense of the Russian economy. When questioned about Russia's termination of oil transit to Ventspils in 1998, Cilevičs argued the Latvian tariffs were "absolutely unreasonable"⁸⁵ and that Russia simply could not afford to have its oil transit through Latvia. In 2005, the tariff structure in the Baltic states made it three times more expensive for Russia to ship oil through Latvia than to send it to the port of Saint Petersburg.⁸⁶

Moscow's self-interested approach to its energy relations with Latvia raises broader questions about the Russian Federation's foreign policy in its "near abroad." Do Russia's pragmatic economic relations with Latvia constitute an exception or a trend in the post-Soviet space? Or rather is Russia selectively pragmatic, enabling ideology to cloud its decisions when it comes to Slavic republics and regimes amicable to Moscow? In fact, Russia's recent transition from ideological to pragmatic foreign policy thinking is not solely discernible in the Baltic states. An examination of recent developments in Russia's economic relations with "loyal" regimes in its "near abroad" reveals that Russian pragmatism has become widespread.

In 2010, Stefan Meister observed that "Russia no longer considers close alliance partners and instead asserts its own economic and political interests."⁸⁷ When disruptions of gas distribution to Ukraine over a pricing conflict halted supplies to Western Europe in 2006, Russia's energy was equated to a "weapon" in Western political discourse⁸⁸; energy security

⁸⁵ Cilevičs, Boriss. Member of the Latvian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, June 4, 2012.

⁸⁶ Nimmo, Ben. February 18, 2005. "Russia's Ports a Challenge, Not a Threat," *The Baltic Times*.

⁸⁷ Meister, Stefan. September 2010. "The Economization of Russian Foreign Policy: the Conflict Between Russia and Belarus escalates," *DGAPstandpunkt*, No. 10, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Trenin, Dmitri. October 2008. "Energy Geopolitics in Russia-EU Relations," in Katinka Barysch (dir.), *Pipelines, Politics and Power*. London: Centre for European Reform, p. 15.

became understood as security against Russia's (or *Gazprom's*) whim. Sporadic interruptions in gas and oil deliveries to Ukraine since the 2004 Orange Revolution have been interpreted as a manifestation of Moscow's disapproval of Ukraine's courting transatlantic and European institutions. *Prima facie*, such explanations might seem accurate as they closely correspond to Russia's *derzhavnost'* doctrine. A deeper analysis of the economic issues at hand, however, reveals that Russia's foreign policy decisions increasingly have been economically and not politically motivated.

Russo-Belarusian energy relations provide insight into this matter. Belarus has had one of the warmest relations with Russia of all post-Soviet republics. Unlike Latvia and Ukraine, Belarus does not have any significant historical or political disagreements with Russia⁸⁹. In February 1995, Russian President Boris Yeltsin stated that "the two nations [had] shared a common historical experience over many centuries."⁹⁰ According to Yeltsin, this common historical past, "created the basis for signing the treaty [Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation] and other documents on deeper integration of our two countries."⁹¹ Yeltsin was convinced that "among all CIS countries, Belarus has the greatest rights to such a relationship due to its geographical location, its contacts with Russia, our friendship and the progress of its reforms."⁹²

As a Slavic republic loyal to Moscow, Belarus has been able to survive on Russia's subsidies without having to open to Europe. Until 2006, Belarus paid Russian domestic prices for

⁸⁹ Trenin, Dmitri. October 2008. "Energy Geopolitics in Russia-EU Relations," in Katinka Barysch (dir.), *Pipelines, Politics and Power*. London: Centre for European Reform, p. 15.

⁹⁰ ITAR-TASS. February 22, 1995. "Yeltsin on Protecting CIS Border," in Zbigniew Brzezinski and Paige Sullivan. 1997. *Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States: Documents Data, and Analysis*. New York: Armonk, p. 311.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

oil and gas and benefitted from full duty-free access to the Russian market⁹³. Russia's support was invaluable in maintaining Belarus' social system and its out-dated industrial sector. Meister argues that Russia views a dependent Belarus as "having overplayed its hand in the post-Soviet bargaining game."⁹⁴ In 2010 Russia insisted that Belarus could no longer "free-ride" with preferential tariffs. The Russian Federation subsequently reduced Belarus' gas supply by 15%, urging its neighbour to pay its \$192 million debt⁹⁵. Russia's decision to decrease subsidies and increase gas prices is in no way based on an imperialist desire to topple Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's regime, which has been in power since 1994. Russia has no reason, intent or desire to do so. Russia realizes that Lukashenko's fierce opposition to European and transatlantic organizations makes Belarus – at least in theory – one of its best neighbours. The absence of political strife between the countries suggests Russia has become more pragmatic in its dealings not only with the more confrontational former Soviet republics.

The case of Belarus confirms Russia's generalized pragmatic delinkage of bilateral issues; its warm political relations with loyal republics no longer entail preferential economic treatment. Dmitri Trenin observes that although Russia's energy price hikes were staggered and prices varied slightly from one former republic to the next, "no one was spared."⁹⁶ Moscow now does its former republics "favours" only in return for profit. In November 2011, Russia reduced gas prices for Belarus by 40 per cent (to \$165.60 per 1,000 cubic meters) in return for *Gazprom's* acquisition of *Beltransgaz*, Belarus' pipeline operating company⁹⁷. This suggests that above all

⁹³ Meister, Stefan. September 2010. "The Economization of Russian Foreign Policy: the Conflict Between Russia and Belarus escalates," *DGAPstandpunkt*, No. 10, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Reuters. December 21, 2012. "Factbox: Russia's Energy Disputes with Ukraine and Belarus," URL Address: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/21/us-russia-gas-disputes-idUSBRE8BK11T20121221>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

⁹⁶ Trenin, Dmitri. October 2008. "Energy Geopolitics in Russia-EU Relations," in Katinka Barysch (dir.), *Pipelines, Politics and Power*. London: Centre for European Reform, p. 18.

⁹⁷ National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus. January 3, 2013. "Russia Ratifies Gas Agreement with Belarus." URL Address: <http://law.by/main.aspx?guid=102783>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

Russia seeks to increase the capitalisation of its state-owned energy companies (*Gazprom*, *Rosneft* and *Itera*, among others). For contemporary Russia, every former Soviet republic is now abroad.

Enabling Pragmatism: Desecuritized Discourse on Russian National Identity

Russia's transition from an ideological to a pragmatic approach to foreign policy cannot be understood as a case of sudden illumination or an impromptu redirection towards a business-oriented mindset. While they can be outlined in quantitative cost-benefit analyses, Russia's economic interests do not stem from a realist zero-sum game understanding of International Relations. From a Wendtian constructivist perspective, state interests correspond to "the product of intersubjective processes of meaning creation."⁹⁸ The construction of meaning both on domestic and international levels "create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another."⁹⁹ Given that state interests emanate from ideas and identities according to this theoretical framework, an assessment of Russia's national identity provides insight on what has enabled pragmatism in Russo-Baltic relations.

Russia's willingness to disengage with Latvia on political issues for the sake of productive economic relations can be explained by the "desecuritization" of Russian discourse on national identity. Desecuritization, which Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap De Wilde define as "the shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere,"¹⁰⁰ has occurred in Russian discourse about its own identity, about what distinguishes it from "others" in the international system. Viatcheslav Morozov argues that the

⁹⁸ Weldes, Jutta. 1996. "Constructing National Interests," *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 3, p. 279.

⁹⁹ Wendt, Alexander. Spring 1992. "Anarchy is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, p.394.

¹⁰⁰ Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole & Jaap De Wilde. 1998. *Security: A New Framework of Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., p. 4.

d securization of Russian political discourse on national identity has allowed it to engage productively with the Baltic states, which it no longer views as the threatening embodiment of an “anti-Russian Europe.”¹⁰¹ Until the early 2000s, the Baltic states represented what Iver Neumann refers to as “false Europe”¹⁰² in the Russian political imaginary. According to this framework, countries in “false Europe” have lost genuine European values and thus cling to anti-Russian attitudes while “true Europe” embodies the original European spirit and generally has had solid ties with Russia throughout its history. (France, for example, would be part of “true Europe.”) By discursively presenting a “true” and a “false” Europe, Russia has tried to displace its own fears of being ostracized from the European political scene. Morozov posits that “criticism against Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius was in part a discursive practice aimed at securing Russia’s own European identity.”¹⁰³ Russia’s bold rhetoric towards the Latvian state, which it accused of harbouring pro-Nazi sympathies and supporting the Chechen cause from the mid-to-late 1990s, perpetuated its Soviet-era “besieged fortress”¹⁰⁴ disposition. Latvia’s “hurry with hustling the country into NATO”¹⁰⁵ also convinced Russia that enemies were at its border. Evolving domestic circumstances - the two Chechen Wars between 1994 and 2000, the series of apartment bombings in 1999, and the 2002 Nord-Ost siege in Moscow – have turned Russia away from its traditional “others,” NATO and the West. Russia now defines its European nature in alterity with the “uncivilized” world of terrorism. Russia’s new European self-identification thus matches that of both the formerly “true” and “false” Europe, united in their fight against global terrorism. Russia

¹⁰¹ Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2004. “Russia in the Baltic Sea Region: Desecurization or Deregionalization?” *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 318.

¹⁰² Neumann, Iver B. 1996. *Russia and the Idea of Europe: a Study in Identity and International Relations*. London: Routledge, p. 117.

¹⁰³ Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2004. “Russia in the Baltic Sea Region: Desecurization or Deregionalization?” *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 319.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

¹⁰⁵ Пайп, Рик. 13 ноября 1999. "Ландсбергис сочувствует Ичкерии," Независимая газета. URL Address: http://www.ng.ru/world/1999-11-13/6_ichkeria.html, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

implicitly is now a member of the “civilized” world, “true” and “false” Europe combined. NATO and its new Baltic members had become redundant enemies.

No longer incompatible with Russia’s European self-identification, the Baltic states have taken on a different meaning in Russian political imaginary. The Baltics are now viewed in a more favorable light, even as a post-Soviet model for Russian social reforms. The Russian Federation no longer considers Latvia and the other Baltic states as malignant NATO “enemies”; they have now become “partners.” This reconceptualization has contributed to Russia’s pragmatic approach to economic and energy relations. Despite sporadic discursive flare-ups in which Latvia even has been referred to as a “land of hooligans run by Nazis,”¹⁰⁶ Moscow has begun to boast about the use of Baltic technology in its subway systems and to praise the region’s economic success¹⁰⁷. A 2003 article in *Izvestia*, a widely circulated Russian newspaper, featured the headline “It is Already Far From Moscow to Tallinn,”¹⁰⁸ underlining the Estonian capital’s advanced housing reforms. This suggests that Moscow, too, can aspire to Tallinn’s and other Baltic capitals’ “European” economic and social revival considering their common past and analogous economic hardships in the first decade of their respective post-Soviet transitions. This desecuritized discourse has placed Moscow on an even footing with these new NATO members. This discourse has promoted Russia’s pragmatic engagement with its “equal” Baltic business partners.

Although Russia no longer portrays Latvia as an imminent threat, Moscow’s interpretation of its national and ethnocultural identity still plays a central role in its societal and citizen-to-citizen engagement with the Latvian state. The next chapter analyzes Russia’s inability

¹⁰⁶ Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty. October 13, 2003. *Baltic States Report*, No. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2004. “Russia in the Baltic Sea Region: Desecurization or Deregalization?” *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, Vol. 39, No. 3, p. 322.

¹⁰⁸ Сагдиев, Ринат. 1 марта, 2002. “От Москвы до Таллина уже далеко,” *Известия*. URL Address: <http://izvestia.ru/news/258388>, page viewed on January 17, 2013.

to actualize *derzhavnost'* in Latvia, its vision of nationalism failing to mobilize Latvia's large Russian-speaking population.

CHAPTER 2

Incompatible Identities: Baltic Russians versus the Historical Homeland

Russophones in Latvia: Misrepresentation, Disenfranchisement and Marginalization

According to the 2011 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the country's substantial ethnic Russian minority accounts for 27% of the total population of 2.07 million; 35% of this number have yet to receive Latvian citizenship and are categorized as "non-citizens."¹⁰⁹ Citizens of the Russian Federation, however, are fewer in number, accounting for a mere 1.6% of Latvia's population¹¹⁰. Although this data rightly indicates that a considerable number of ethnic Russians are citizens of Latvia, it fails to account for the country's larger Russophone population. The distinction between ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers of other ethnicities – including Belarusian, Ukrainian, Polish, Udmurt and Mordvin, among numerous others – have little or no relevance in the Latvian context. Overwhelmingly Russophone, these groups tend not to distinguish among themselves and are not divided by significant social boundaries¹¹¹; the Russian language unites them. The Latvian state's politically-charged statistical methods, which excessively categorize groups by ethnicity, have come to misrepresent

¹⁰⁹ Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. *Population of Latvia by Nationality (01.07.2012)*, URL Address: <http://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/statistika/Naturalizacija.html>, page viewed on November 12, 2012.

¹¹⁰ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. *Population and Housing Census 2011*, URL Address: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html>, page viewed on December 8, 2012.

¹¹¹ Brubaker, Rogers. November 2011. "Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 11, p. 1800.

Latvia's Russian-speaking minority as minimal and fragmented¹¹². Considering the number of individuals who most often speak Russian at home – be they categorized as Belarusian, Ukrainian, Jewish, Moldovan or hailing from the former Central Asian republics – the number of “Russians” in Latvia, equated to “Russian-speakers” in political discourse, rises to 35%¹¹³. Given their indiscernibility, Latvia's ethnic Russian minority, which comprises 27% of the population, cannot be disassociated from the remaining 8% that constitute the country's overall Russian-speaking population. These numbers indicate that Latvia's statistical portrayal of its largest minority community, equated to ethnic Russians with ties to the Russian Federation, is unrepresentative of the actual management of its minority population.

While these statistical methods differentiate among the various ethnic groups that compose the Russian-speaking minority – thus inherently portraying Latvians as constituting a strong and homogenous titular ethnic group – the Latvian state does not make such distinctions in its official discourse. Latvian Foreign Minister Georgs Andrejevs' call in 1993 for affirmative action “to compensate Latvians for the discrimination they have experienced in their own country”¹¹⁴ did not specifically target the ethnic Russian minority as having been “discriminators.” Nor did Andrejevs target the ethnic Russian minority when he stated that “Russia, by using [“Russian-speakers] as a fifth column [...] is seeking to create a situation enabling forces which are not Latvian to come to power and to annex Latvia to Russia.”¹¹⁵ Rather Andrejevs' comments were directed at the broader category of “Russian-speakers” in Latvia, a group whose common language is emblematic of the Soviet era and the memory of Moscow's

¹¹² Arel, Dominique. 2002. “Demography and Politics in the First Post-Soviet Census: Mistrusted State, Contested Identities,” *Population-E*, Vol. 57, No. 6, pp. 813-814.

¹¹³ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. *Population and Housing Census 2011*, URL Address: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html>, page viewed on December 8, 2012

¹¹⁴ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p.109.

¹¹⁵ Andrejevs, Georgs. February 26 – March 4, 1993. “Latvia Accuses Russia of International Sedition,” *The Baltic Independent*.

stranglehold. The statistical methods that overemphasize the presence of ethnic Russians as opposed to Russophones, combined with the discursive linkage between Russian-speakers and the Soviet past, demonstrate the state's willingness to link its Russian-speaking population (of all ethnicities) to an external "historical homeland" with which it shares a common language, the Russian Federation. The management of 35% of Latvia's population thus loses its domestic character as it is "internationalized" through the counterfactual portrayal of a minority group as hailing from Latvia's eastern neighbour.

Latvia's deliberate internationalization of its population management serves to present the Russian-speaking minority as a threat to the country's sovereignty. Portrayed as Moscow's channels of influence, inherently "unfaithful" to the Latvian state, Latvia's Russophones are discursively imbued with loyalty to Moscow. Before being fired for being "too conciliatory"¹¹⁶ with Russia and Latvia's Russian-speakers in 1992, Jānis Jurkāns, the Latvian Foreign Minister, clearly expressed this notion in his farewell speech. Jurkāns declared, "I think that relations with Russia are our number one issue at the moment for Latvia's independence and security. And we can't talk about good relations with Russia if our relations with the non-Latvians in Latvia are in disarray."¹¹⁷ This statement inherently ties Russia's political agenda to Latvia's Russophones (or "non-Latvians," in Jurkāns' terms). These individuals are, in fact, discursively presented as having the potential to "ruin the republic's sovereignty from the inside."¹¹⁸ It has even been suggested that *Harmony Centre*, a political party whose voters are primarily Russian-speaking citizens of Latvia, could "infiltrate" the Latvian political system to promote Russia's interests¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁶ Mole, Richard C. M. 2012. *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, Discourse and Power in the Post-Communist Transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. New York: Routledge, p. 124.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB): SWB SU/1379 A2/1.

¹¹⁹ Grigas, Agnia. August 2012. "Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States," *The Means and Ends of Russian Influence Abroad Series: Chatham House*, p. 3.

Although *Harmony Centre* came in first with 28% of the votes in the 2011 Latvian Parliamentary elections, it was not invited to join the ruling coalition based on suspicions of its ties with United Russia, Putin's party¹²⁰. As a result of this lack of trust, *Harmony Centre*, which has in fact never been part of any Latvian government, remains side-lined from decision-making, curtailing Moscow's potential influence and further marginalizing Russian-speakers' influence in their country's political life. The system's coalition structure in itself demonstrates that *Harmony Centre*, which is routinely portrayed as a threat to the state, is factually harmless. A purported loyalty to Moscow thus makes Russian-speakers all the more threatening given their supposed ability to promote Russia's interests within Latvia. Depicted as Moscow's stooges, Latvia's Russian-speaking minority is viewed as a force that Moscow can leverage to keep Riga in its "mighty grip."

In addition to being perceived as a threat to state sovereignty, the Russian-speaking population of Latvia was nearly universally disenfranchised in the early years of the post-Soviet transition. Following its renewed independence in 1991, Latvia was charged with the uneasy task of redefining its *demos*, of determining the membership criteria for belonging to its political community. The Latvian state chose to equate *demos* to *ethnos*, making membership in the political community incumbent on belonging to the Latvian ethnic and cultural community. Latvia would thus be considered the political and legal continuation of its pre-1940 state, before the Soviet and Nazi occupations¹²¹. On October 15, 1991, Latvia therefore reinstated its 1919 *Law on Citizenship*. Individuals who had not been citizens of Latvia before 1940, or who could

¹²⁰ Central Election Commission of Latvia. The 11th Saeima Elections. URL Address: <http://web.cvk.lv/pub/public/30182.html>, page viewed on December 12, 2012.

¹²¹ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 103.

not prove their lineage included Latvian citizens from this period, were not granted citizenship¹²². This legal measure disenfranchised a total of 700,000 individuals¹²³, mostly Russian-speakers (and their descendants) who had migrated to Latvia from other Soviet republics. These individuals, who constituted more than 28% of Latvia's residents, were left in "legal limbo" until 1995, when they were granted permanent resident status (but remained excluded from certain civil service and legal professions, and were limited in their right to own property)¹²⁴. These new permanent residents, many of which had been born in Soviet Latvia, could subsequently naturalize according to a pre-determined timetable, provided they fulfilled the Latvian language and history requirements¹²⁵. Viktors Makarovs, the current Parliamentary Secretary of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explains that Latvians feared that if Russophones had been granted the right to vote during the first years of the country's renewed independence, they would have "voted Latvia back into the Soviet Union."¹²⁶ Despite the progressive easing of citizenship requirements, there remained 481,352 non-citizens in Latvia in 2004, a number that accounted for 57% of the country's Russian-speakers and 20% of its total population¹²⁷. This also meant, however, that 43% of Latvia's Russophones had naturalized by 2004. As of March 2011, the number non-citizens had dropped to 295,122, constituting 14% of Latvia's population, and encompassing 42% of its Russophones¹²⁸.

¹²² Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 103.

¹²³ Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. 1993. *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in Latvia*. Washington D.C., p. 5.

¹²⁴ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 103.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹²⁶ Makarovs, Viktors. Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 13, 2012.

¹²⁷ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 104.

¹²⁸ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia. *Population and Housing Census 2011*, URL Address: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html>, page viewed on December 8, 2012.

While these “de-Sovietization” strategies were often considered non-controversial on a national level, the Soviet practice of equating “Soviet” to “Russian” remained in Latvian political discourse, a practice that Øyvind Jaeger refers to as a “discursive chain of equivalence.”¹²⁹ All things “Russian” were inherently equated to the Soviet past, a reality that opposed the Latvian discourse about its restored independence. Defining its new identity by breaking from its Soviet past, Latvia’s vision of itself as a state for “one nation, one language and one political community” was incompatible with the societal inclusion of the Russian-speaking minority, viewed as a remnant of the Soviet era. Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Chairman of the Latvian Supreme Council, explained that Russian-speakers would widen the gap between the “necessary” correspondence of language and citizenship in a nation-state. He stated that “no other country in the world, as a result of occupation by two criminal regimes, the communist and the Nazi, has lost as many of its native inhabitants¹³⁰. [...] Therefore, now in the state of Latvia huge efforts must be devoted to saving the country’s language, the basic mark of the Latvian nation.”¹³¹ The promotion of Latvian and the marginalization of Russian were understood as the same process. Echoing Gorbunovs’ statement were those of the Latvian National Independence Movement that demanded that “state institutions and local governments of the Republic of Latvia eliminate texts in Russian on television, radio, at cinemas and at other public places.”¹³² The Latvian state accomplished this with the 1992 amendments to the 1989 *Law on Languages*, which strengthened

¹²⁹ Jaeger, Øyvind. 2000. “Securitizing Russia: Discursive Practices of the Baltic States,” *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 24.

¹³⁰ Latvians’ share of their country’s population in fact dropped from 75.5% in 1939 to 53 % in 1989, according to the All-Union Census of the USSR.

¹³¹ Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB): SWB SU/1499 A2/2.

¹³² Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB): SWB SU/1559 A2/2.

the status of the Latvian language and regarded every other language¹³³ as a “foreign.”¹³⁴ Latvia thus broke with its Soviet past and, by association, with its Russophone population.

The disenfranchisement of Russian-speakers and the demotion of their language in Latvia’s post-Soviet transition point to the emergence of a new form nationalism, a concept Rogers Brubaker has termed “nationalizing nationalism.”¹³⁵ Brubaker defines a “nationalizing” state as one in which “claims are made in the name of the ‘core nation’ or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole.”¹³⁶ Despite having retrieved “ownership” of the state, the titular ethnic group of a nationalizing state continues to perceive itself as being culturally, politically and economically weak within its own borders. This weakness, which Latvia attributes to the Soviet past its Russian-speakers embody, leads the state to pursue remedial and compensatory policies to promote the interests of the titular ethnic group. According to this framework, Latvia’s disenfranchisement of its Russian-speaking minority simply becomes a natural, legitimate reversal of the social hierarchy. The remedial policies pursued by a nationalizing state, which discursively associates this minority to a designated “historical homeland,” raises questions as to how this homeland ought to respond to its compatriots’ situation abroad. The triadic relationship among the nationalizing state, its minority population and the minority’s historical homeland provides insight as to whether Russia has been able to use the nationalizing state’s minority (Latvia’s Russophones) for the promotion of its national interests abroad.

¹³³ Every language except Latvian and Liv, which is spoken by a small number of indigenous inhabitants of north-western Latvia, are considered foreign languages.

¹³⁴ Saeima of Latvia. 1999. *Official Language Law*. URL Address: http://valoda.lv/en/downloadDoc_436/mid_644, page viewed on December 12, 2012. (Translated by the Translation and Terminology Centre of Latvia).

¹³⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Russia as a Homeland: Moscow's Failed Outreach to Latvia's Russophones

Latvia's discursive designation of Russia as a historical homeland for its Russophones has been mirrored by the Russian Federation's willingness to play such a role. As a historical homeland, Russia claims "that its rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis ethnonational kin transcend the boundaries of territory and citizenship."¹³⁷ This "national role conception"¹³⁸ leads Russia to consider certain residents and citizens of other former Soviet republics as co-nationals, as "fellow members of a single transborder nation."¹³⁹ This compels Russia to feel "responsible" for their welfare. Russia's role as a "homeland" for the Russian-speakers of Latvia and the other former Soviet republics has, in fact, seeped in the Kremlin's foreign policy. In the years preceding – and even following – Latvia's accession to the European Union in 2004, Moscow expressed its disenchantment with the disenfranchisement of its compatriots to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)¹⁴⁰. In meetings at the international level, the Russian government referred to Latvia's treatment of its Russophone minority as "civilized ethnic cleansing."¹⁴¹ Despite its use of colourful language to describe the situation of its compatriots abroad, Russia failed to directly influence Latvian decision-making in this matter. Moscow's short-lived economic sanctions against Latvia – which included a boycott of Latvian products in

¹³⁷ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.

¹³⁸ Holsti, Kalevi J. 1970. "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 235.

¹³⁹ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ Fawn, Rick. December 2009. "Bashing About Rights'? Russia and the 'New' EU States on Human Rights and Democracy Promotion," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 10, p. 1779.

¹⁴¹ Crawshaw, Steve. September 5, 1992. "Moscow Battles with Balts: Calls for CSCE Factfinding Mission to Look at Treatment of Russian Minority," *The Independent*.

certain Russian regions¹⁴² – proved unsuccessful in accelerating the naturalization process for non-Latvians¹⁴³. The 1998 economic crisis, combined with Moscow’s nascent pragmatic approach to economic relations, made Russia reluctant to apply further economic sanctions to punish Latvia for a non-related political issue. Unable and unwilling to directly influence policy outcomes in Latvia through economic sanctions and bold rhetoric, Russia had no choice but to turn to international institutions to urge Latvia to improve the management of its minority population. Russia’s influence over the treatment of its compatriots in Latvia proved to be far from that of an empire.

While it failed to pressure Latvia into amending its citizenship policy, Russia was nonetheless successful in putting the disenfranchisement of Russophones of the Baltic states on the international agenda. According to Nils Muižnieks, Russia has been “relentless in stomping on the Baltics’ minority policies in international organizations – the OSCE, the UN, even NATO.”¹⁴⁴ Although Russia has not adopted all protocols of the European Convention on Human Rights, it has been known to selectively raise the issue of human rights violations against its compatriots when it has “deemed necessary.”¹⁴⁵ For example, the Russian government declared itself to be a “third party” in the case of *Sysoyevs vs. Latvia*, in which Arkadiy Sysoyev, a retired Soviet military officer, had been accused of war crimes by Latvian authorities¹⁴⁶. By inserting itself as an observer, the Russian Federation sought to influence the result of the case in which

¹⁴² The Moscow region, as well as the Primorie, Yaroslavl and Saratov regions, participated in the boycott of Latvian products.

¹⁴³ Sprūds, Andris. December 2001. “Political Priorities and Economic Interests in Russian-Latvian Relations,” *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, No. 620, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty Newswire. November 21, 2006. “Baltic Politicians, Experts Comment on Russian Policy,” Vol. 10, No. 215, Part I.

¹⁴⁵ Fawn, Rick. December 2009. “‘Bashing About Rights’? Russia and the ‘New’ EU States on Human Rights and Democracy Promotion,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 10, p. 1781.

¹⁴⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. June 9, 2006. “Russian MFA Information and Press Department Commentary Regarding Examination in European Court of Human Rights of the *Sysoyevs vs. Latvia* Case,” URL Address: http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/BB84499C98376C7BC3257188004F3AA6?OpenDocument, page viewed December 15, 2012.

Sysoyev faced deportation from Latvia. Russia also presented itself as an observer (or as an active “public opinion mobilizer”) in six additional ECHR cases against Latvia that dealt with the Soviet past¹⁴⁷, demonstrating its willingness to address its inherited responsibilities towards its compatriots who became citizens of “foreign” states following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Having recognized its impotence in swaying Latvian decision-making, Russia became an agenda-setter that sought to influence the institutions that were still able to affect Latvia’s behaviour through conditionality, a “bargaining strategy of reinforcement by reward.”¹⁴⁸ Following Russia’s outcry over the predicament of Latvia’s Russophones, Max van der Stoep, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, issued a statement that criticized Latvia’s “illiberal” Citizenship Law in July 1998¹⁴⁹. The OSCE’s criticisms of Latvia’s minority policy could have been an impediment to Latvia’s future accession to the EU, which required the respect and protection of national minorities as delineated in the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria¹⁵⁰. Hoping to safeguard its potential membership in the EU, Latvia followed the OSCE’s recommendations and liberalized its Citizenship Law in October 1998. Notably, the amendments to the law entitled “non-citizen” children born in Latvia after August 21, 1991, to obtain citizenship and simplified the mandatory Latvian language proficiency test¹⁵¹. Viktors Makarovs doubts that the issue would have drawn international attention without Russia’s initial indignation. He argues that “[Russian] attempts at economic pressure were made [to compel Latvia to amend its Citizenship

¹⁴⁷ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 37.

¹⁴⁸ Schimmelfennig, Frank & Ulrich Sedelmeier. August 2004. “Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 11, No. 4, p. 670.

¹⁴⁹ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – High Commissioner on National Minorities. “Statement on Latvia by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities,” URL Address: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/53194>, page viewed December 15, 2012.

¹⁵⁰ EUROPA. Summaries of EU Legislation. “Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria),” URL Address: http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm, page viewed on December 15, 2012.

¹⁵¹ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 106.

Law], but they were not successful. They were relatively mild. Politically, Latvia was put under huge pressure. The Europeans and the Americans, the institutions that Latvia wanted to become part of, said to Latvia that it needed to act, that change was needed. [...] What happened was that the Russians made the Europeans and Americans not just realize there was a problem – they already realized that well enough – but to put pressure on Latvia to do something.”¹⁵² In its limited capacity to influence Latvia in the management of the Russophone population, Russia is simply an agenda-setter, a catalyst for action, not the omnipotent protector its role as a historical homeland implies.

According to James Hughes, the Russian Federation’s tactful reprobation of human rights abuses serves to keep international (and mostly European) institutions in check when it comes to their minimization of unresolved issues¹⁵³. Hughes argues that following the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, EU institutions (the Council, the Commission and the Parliament) remained “in conscious denial about the subject [the treatment of Russophones in the Baltic states] because to revisit it in any form would be tantamount to admitting that they had got it wrong when assessing Estonia and, in particular, Latvia’s conformity with the accession conditionality.”¹⁵⁴ The Russian Foreign Ministry was convinced that Europe had in fact turned its back on the condition of the Russian-speaking minority in “states [Latvia and Estonia] that regard themselves as being advanced or established democracies.”¹⁵⁵ Unable to coerce Latvian decision-makers into improving the status of the country’s Russophones on its own, Russia sought to “remind”

¹⁵² Makarovs, Viktors. Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 13, 2012.

¹⁵³ Hughes, James. 2005. “‘Exit’ in Deeply Divided Societies: Regimes of Discrimination in Estonia and Latvia and the Potential Russophone Migration,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, p. 756.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. November 28, 2006. “Press Release: Adoption at the Second Resumed Session of the UN Human Rights Council of the Russian Draft Resolutions 'Human Rights and Arbitrary Deprivation of Nationality' and 'Integrity of the Judicial System',” URL Address: http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/CB332044164D757AC3257234005818B4?OpenDocument, page viewed on December 15, 2012.

international institutions of the necessity to take action against “mass noncitizenship” in a “civilized” Europe, as Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov highlighted at a meeting with the 25 EU foreign ministers at the 2006 General Assembly of the United Nations¹⁵⁶. From this perspective, Russia is not only an agenda-setter, but also a “whistle-blower” of sorts, preventing European institutions from applying double standards of democracy and human rights when the status of “overlooked” Russophones is at stake. In its reprobation of international institutions, Russia seeks to present itself as a “benevolent protector” of its compatriots to its own population, reinforcing a sense of national pride in Russia’s ability to act on the international stage. Analogous to the inception of Yeltsin’s *derzhavnost’* doctrine, Russia’s self-endowed role as a historical homeland for Russian-speakers abroad is a mere product for domestic consumption, catering to nationalist sentiment. Polls in fact indicate that 79% of citizens of the Russian Federation believe the rights of their compatriots abroad are being violated¹⁵⁷. The compatriots themselves – including Latvia’s Russophones – do not constitute the main audience for the Russian Federation’s identity discourse. Rather this discourse is aimed at Russians living in Russia. Russia’s roles as a catalyst and “whistle-blower” within the international system therefore do not correspond to the ideals of an imperial foreign policy. They simply serve to present Russia as a major player on the world stage to a population thirsty for national pride and success. With an authentic imperialist foreign policy, Russia would have been able to unilaterally coerce Latvia into modifying its citizenship policy or would have succeeded through the use of soft-power methods, “through attraction rather than coercion or payments,”¹⁵⁸ persuading Latvia to voluntarily align its behaviour with Moscow’s demands. The imperial ideals present in Russia’s

¹⁵⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. September 26, 2006. “Press Release: Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov Attends CE, OSCE Leaders Meeting,” URL Address: http://www.mid.ru/Brp_4.nsf/arh/9B354ED0698545D1C32571F1004E731F?OpenDocument, page viewed December 15, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Левада-Центр. “Л. Седов: Страна и мир.” 6 мая 2006. URL Address: www.levada.ru/press/2006050600.html, page viewed on February 28, 2013.

¹⁵⁸ Nye, Joseph. 2004. *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs, p. 6.

bold identity discourse have not been actualized in the Russian Federation's approach to Latvia's Citizenship Law. Russia's longing to enact an imperialist foreign policy has not materialized beyond its northwestern border.

In light of its inability to directly influence citizenship policy in Latvia, the Russian Federation saw fit to reinvigorate its own disillusioned populace by reiterating its status as a homeland for the Russian-speakers living in the former Soviet republics. In 1999, Russia adopted the *Federal Law on State Policy towards Compatriots Living Abroad*, which stipulates that "efforts are to be made to promote the unity of Russian communities abroad and to protect their rights and interests in accordance with international standards."¹⁵⁹ This law also promotes the voluntary resettlement of Russian-speakers to their historical homeland. The Russian Federation's 2009 "National Security Strategy to 2020" straightforwardly addresses Russia's role as a homeland for Russophones in the Baltic states, stating that, "of fundamental importance for Russia are the matters relating to the rights of the Russian-language population in accordance with the principles and norms of European and international law [...]"¹⁶⁰

The Russian Federation's relations with its compatriots abroad are vastly carried out by the Russkiy Mir Foundation, established by the Kremlin in 2007. The Foundation's stated goal is to build "new and stronger links between Russian communities abroad and the Russian Federation."¹⁶¹ Russkiy Mir does not automatically dispense funds based on the Kremlin's whim; rather it accepts grant proposals and distributes funding accordingly. With a budget of

¹⁵⁹ Russkiy Mir Foundation. "Vladimir Putin: Russia Always Remembers its Compatriots," URL Address: <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/en/publications/articles/article0306.html>, page viewed on November 11, 2012.

¹⁶⁰ Министерство иностранных дел Российской Федерации. 12 мая 2009. "Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года," URL Address: <http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/0e9272befa34209743256c630042d1aa/8abb3c17eb3d2626c32575b500320ae4?OpenDocument> page viewed December 15, 2012 (Unofficial translation).

¹⁶¹ Russkiy Mir Foundation. "Grants of the Russkiy Mir Foundation," URL Address: <http://www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/en/grants/>, page viewed on December 15, 2012.

approximately 1 billion rubles (\$32 million) in its first two years of operation¹⁶², Russkiy Mir notably supported the Victory Day celebrations and the Russian-language schools¹⁶³ of its compatriots in Latvia. Upon request, Russkiy Mir provides Russian language schools with a curriculum that praises the “mightiness of the Russian nation” and stresses the heroics of the Soviet “liberation” of Europe in 1945¹⁶⁴. With the support of Russkiy Mir, Latvian Parliament members Jakovs Pliners and Valerijs Buhvalovs compiled a pedagogical collection entitled *Russian Schools in Latvia in the Twenty-first Century*.¹⁶⁵ Buhvalovs’ chapter on the Second World War maintains that Riga “welcomed the restoration of the Soviet regime. [...] The arrival of the Red Army meant an end to terror and to the murder of civilians. [It meant] the restoration of the economy and a calm and peaceful life.”¹⁶⁶ No mention of the Latvian interpretation of this event – the continued Soviet occupation – is ever made. Pliners, who is also the director of a Russian private school in Riga and a former spokesman of the *Russian School Defense Staff* in Latvia, contends that such contentious material has made its way into the curriculum of Russian schools as part of a course on the “Foundations of Russian Culture.”¹⁶⁷ (In an interview conducted in July 2012, Pliners indicated that the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science does not, surprisingly, closely track minority schools’ violations of approved educational content.¹⁶⁸)

Although Russia is able to present Latvia’s Russophones with a competing vision of history that undermines that of the Latvian state, this tactic has failed to mobilize the Russian-

¹⁶² Springe, Inga. May 21, 2012. “Spreading Democracy in Latvia, Kremlin Style,” *The Baltic Times*.

¹⁶³ Since 2004, Russian and other minority language schools are required to teach 60% of their curriculum in Latvian, while the remaining 40% can be taught in the minority language.

¹⁶⁴ Springe, Inga. May 21, 2012. “Spreading Democracy in Latvia, Kremlin Style,” *The Baltic Times*.

¹⁶⁵ Pelnēns, Gatis. 2010. *The “Humanitarian Dimension” of Russian Foreign Policy Toward Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the Baltic States*. Riga: Centre for East European Policy Studies, p. 158.

¹⁶⁶ Springe, Inga. May 21, 2012. “Spreading Democracy in Latvia, Kremlin Style,” *The Baltic Times*.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Pliners, Jakovs. Member of the Latvian Parliament, director of Evrika and former spokesman for the *Russian School Defense Staff*. Telephone interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 20, 2012.

speaking minority in the promotion of their “glorious” homeland. Noting that the Russian-speaking community is inactive in supporting and promoting the Russian Federation, Boriss Cilevičs remarked that while there certainly were “Russian nationalists and patriots of Russia” in Latvia, this was a “rather marginal trend.”¹⁶⁹ Russia’s promotion of its history beyond its borders generally has also failed to attract Latvia’s Russophones to assuage the Russian Federation’s own demographic crisis¹⁷⁰. Despite the various benefits, including tax cuts, offered to potential repatriates from Latvia’s Russophone community and the glowing local coverage in the Russian language press of opportunities in Russia, Russia’s *Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad* program has generated scant interest in Latvia. In 2005, a mere 764 individuals chose to take part in this program¹⁷¹. Although this number has increased because of the 2008 financial crisis, Nils Muižnieks argues that the program remains an “insufficient magnet”¹⁷² to attract Russian-speakers to their historical homeland. Russia’s lack of appeal to Latvia’s Russophones stems beyond the recent adoption of the *Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots Living Abroad* program; emigration patterns in the early 1990s suggest that Russia’s power of attraction – albeit stronger than in recent years – was still far from universal.

In 2011, there were nearly 500,000 fewer Russian-speakers in Latvia than there were in 1989¹⁷³. In addition to succumbing to natural demographic processes, large numbers of the country’s Russian-speakers emigrated in the early years of Latvia’s post-Soviet transition. In 1992, 27,332 Russophones left Latvia, while this number decreased to 17,762 the following

¹⁶⁹ Cilevičs, Boriss. Member of the Latvian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, June 4, 2012.

¹⁷⁰ In February 2012, Vladimir Putin stated that if the Russian Federation’s demographic crisis were not reversed, the country’s population would shrink from the current 143 million to an estimated 107 million by 2050.

¹⁷¹ Muižnieks, Nils. 2011. *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, p. 69.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Демоскоп: Институт Демографии Национального исследовательского университета “Высшая школа экономики.” 1989, “Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР,” URL Address: http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=10, page viewed on February 27, 2013.

year¹⁷⁴. Russophones' emigration from Latvia continued to decline, as 8,395 left the country in 1995¹⁷⁵. Although a portion of this number returned to Russia as a part of the Russian Federation's final withdrawal of the remaining 18,000 troops stationed on Latvian territory in 1994¹⁷⁶, Russophone emigration cannot be interpreted as the product of Russia's appeal to its Baltic compatriots in the absence of political rights. Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev's accusation, in 1994, that Latvia was trying to "deport thousands of people to Russia"¹⁷⁷ was in fact overblown and inaccurate. Given that the emigration dynamics of linguistic and ethnic minorities were similar in Latvia and Lithuania¹⁷⁸ – the latter having not adopted a restorationist approach to defining its political community and having universally endowed its minorities with Lithuanian citizenship – it is impossible to conclude that Russian-speakers' emigration from Latvia was solely motivated by the deprivation of political rights and by Russia's promise of a fairer future¹⁷⁹. In light of this evidence, a likely explanation is that Russian-speakers' emigration from Latvia was mostly economically motivated, as was the case in Lithuania where ethnic minorities were not disenfranchised. While some Latvian Russophones certainly did return to Russia in the first years of the country's post-Soviet transition (including a large number of demobilized military personnel and their families), many others sought a better life in Western Europe and North America, a life their historical homeland could not provide in the midst of its own economic hardships, its skyrocketing crime rate (which increased by 27% between 1991 and 1992)¹⁸⁰ and its political instability. This demonstrates that Russia's appeal to Latvia's

¹⁷⁴ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 110.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Iwaskiw, Walter R. 1995. "Foreign Policy Directions," in *Latvia: a Country Study*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office for the Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁷ Radio Free Europe *B-WIRE*. February 7, 1994. "Kozyrev Accuses Baltics of Ethnic Cleansing."

¹⁷⁸ In 1991, 10,409 Russian-speakers left Lithuania. This number increased to 16,380 in 1992.

¹⁷⁹ Budryte, Dovile. 2005. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States*. Hampshire: Ashgate, p. 74.

¹⁸⁰ Kuznetsova, Ninel F. 1994. "Crime in Russia: Causes and Prevention," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 2, p. 442.

Russophones, while it was stronger in the early years of the post-Soviet transition than it is today, was not inherent.

These seemingly counter-intuitive findings demonstrate that Russian-speakers, discriminated against and disenfranchised in the first decade of Latvia's post-Soviet transition, have been generally reluctant to associate with a historical homeland that offers them rights and a citizenship that corresponds to their cultural community. Why have Latvia's Russophones remained aloof in the face of Russia's grandiose historical narrative and its promise of a more equitable future? A closer examination of the "Baltic Russian" identity is required to elucidate this phenomenon.

Explaining Failed Mobilization: Soviet Identity, Ethnocultural Awareness and Becoming "Latvian"

Russophones' grievances in post-Soviet Latvia – which include disenfranchisement, the suppression of the Russian language and general discrimination – suggest that they should have mobilized in defence of their rights. Ted Gurr's theory of ethnic conflict bolsters this hypothesis, which posits that "the greater a group's collective disadvantages [inequalities in material well-being, political access or cultural status] vis-à-vis other groups, the greater the incentives for action."¹⁸¹ According to Gurr's argument, Russian-speakers' factual and discursive inferiority to Latvians would have provided them, at least theoretically, with the necessary incentives to organize and make a collective claim to their political and social rights. Surprisingly, this has not been the case. The inability of Latvia's Russophones to effectively mobilize on an ethnocultural basis thus inherently compromises Russia's ability to use its compatriots' discontent for its own interests. Russia's failure to mobilize its "co-nationals" can partially be explained by a new

¹⁸¹ Gurr, Ted Robert. 2000. *Peoples Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, p. 71.

Russophone collective identity that has progressively distanced itself from the Russian Federation as a historical homeland. Pål Kolstø posits that Russian-speakers in the Baltic States have been undergoing a “process of dissociation from the Russian core group.”¹⁸² During the Soviet era, ethnic Russians, and Russian-speakers more generally, that lived in non-Slavic republics were “highly urbanized and clustered,”¹⁸³ residing in the capital or other large cities. They were most often employed in white collar jobs and were considered to be part of the “technical intelligentsia.”¹⁸⁴ They left the menial jobs to the titular ethnic group. In Latvia in 1989, a mere 4.3% of ethnic Russians were employed in agriculture, while 36% of ethnic Russians in the Russian Soviet Republic worked in the same industry¹⁸⁵. Given that more Russians living in the outline Soviet republics occupied prestigious and influential positions than their counterparts in the RSFSR, Russians in Latvia were generally close to the Soviet system. They fostered a Soviet, rather than a Russian, identity¹⁸⁶. Their geographic mobility was enabled by their social mobility within the Soviet system, which, in turn, depended on their ideological proximity to the regime. Russian-speakers in Latvia generally viewed themselves as “Soviet citizens,” which enabled them to live in any of the 15 republics. They did not perceive any rigid political and geographic boundaries between the territories of Latvia and the Russian Soviet Republic. Rogers Brubaker argues that during the Soviet era “the salient territorial and institutional frame ‘of’ and ‘for’ Russians – the territorial and institutional space in which they could live and work as *Russians* – was that of the Soviet Union as a whole, not that of the

¹⁸² Kolstø, Pål. 2011. “Beyond Russia, Becoming Local: Trajectories of Adaptation to the Fall of the Soviet Union Among Ethnic Russians in the Former Republics,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, p. 153.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Арутюнян, Ю.В. (1992). Русские этносоциологические очерки. Москва: Наука, p. 93.

¹⁸⁶ Kolstø, Pål. 2011. “Beyond Russia, Becoming Local: Trajectories of Adaptation to the Fall of the Soviet Union Among Ethnic Russians in the Former Republics,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, p. 158.

Russian Republic.”¹⁸⁷ To the Soviet Union’s Russophones, Latvia and Russia were simply two republics encompassed by their homeland, the Soviet Union. In fact, in a 1999 survey assessing which country they regard as their homeland, the Russian-speakers of Latvia answered “Latvia” in 41.1% of cases¹⁸⁸. Ranking second and third were the “Latvian Socialist Republic” and the “Soviet Union” with respectively 21.5% and 17.5%¹⁸⁹. The Russian Federation came in last with 11.4% of cases¹⁹⁰. These numbers indicate that a majority of Latvia’s Russian-speakers associate with their current country of residence. Those who do not, portrayed as “unfaithful” by the Latvian state, associate with a country that no longer exists: the Soviet Union. To them, the current Russian Federation is simply “another” former republic, carrying no more importance symbolic importance than Uzbekistan, Moldova or Georgia.

A Soviet identity, enabling them to feel at home and speak their native language in all 15 republics, has fostered feelings of relative indifference towards the Russian Federation. Russia’s willingness to attract or mobilize its compatriots in Latvia falls on deaf ears. Cilevičs, the Latvian parliamentarian, says that to Latvia’s Russophones, “Russia is a foreign country; it’s very different. [...] The Russophones of Latvia feel very close ties to the Russian language and Russian culture, but not a political allegiance to Russia as a state.”¹⁹¹ The inextricable nexus between language and state by which the Latvian state abides does not apply to Russia and its transborder compatriots. Although Russia portrays itself as the guardian of the Russian language and Russophones abroad, Russian-speakers in the former Soviet republics have become members of states that are not their historical homeland. Russophones may very well cherish the Russian

¹⁸⁷ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 51.

¹⁸⁸ Kolstø, Pal (ed.) 1999. *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, p. 239.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Cilevičs, Boriss. Member of the Latvian Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, June 4, 2012.

culture and language but their geographic dispersal throughout the former Soviet Union – 25 million Russians were living outside the Russian Soviet Republic when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991¹⁹² – has diluted Russia’s ability to call upon them to promote its interests. The disconnection between language and territory is an intrinsic part of a new “Baltic Russian” identity that is still in the making. Viktors Makarovs’ description of his personal experience as a Russian-speaking citizen of Latvia corroborates this analysis. Makarovs insists that “despite the fact that Russian is my native language, Russia is not my home country; I’d rather go elsewhere.”¹⁹³ In terms of Russia’s failed repatriation program, Makarovs explained that “[...] one thing is certain. We [Latvia] are not going to have thousands of Russians leaving this country for Russia. People have been leaving this country for other countries [mostly in the European Union] – but not for Russia.”¹⁹⁴ From this perspective, Russia does not have a stronger grip over its compatriots by virtue of shared ethnocultural characteristics.

In addition to fostering a Soviet identity that attributes little symbolic importance to the Russian Federation, Russophones in the post-Soviet republics also lack the ethnocultural awareness that could enable them to unleash collective actions in claiming their rights or in promoting Russia’s interests. The pervasive institutionalization of ethnicity during the Soviet era, notably through ethnically defined republics and internal passports, poorly applied to ethnic Russians. Under the Soviet Union, “Russianness” was a “zero-value, an unthematized background condition.”¹⁹⁵ Russians constituted a mere category – a *nacional’nost’* inscribed in passports – and not a group, which implies a degree of cohesion, solidarity and common sense of

¹⁹² Kolstø, Pal. 2011. “Beyond Russia, Becoming Local: Trajectories of Adaptation to the Fall of the Soviet Union Among Ethnic Russians in the Former Republics,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 2, p. 153.

¹⁹³ Makarovs, Viktors. Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia. In-person interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 13, 2012.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 49.

identity. Rogers Brubaker compares “Russianness” in the Soviet Union to “whiteness” in the United States as being the “universal condition against which other nationalities existed as [...] ‘deviations.’”¹⁹⁶ Constituting an “unmarked” category of the Soviet population, Russian-speakers failed to develop awareness of their ethnic belonging. They constituted the norm. The development of a particularist Russophone ethnocultural identity would have been superfluous.

Despite sporadic Slavophile movements throughout its history, Russia has essentially fostered a state-oriented nationalism rather than one based on ethnocultural particularities. Roman Szporluk posits that nationalist pride in Imperial Russia and during the Soviet Union was based on the Russian state, a powerful entity that spanned the Eurasian continent, and not on belonging to the predominant ethnic group¹⁹⁷. This state-oriented form of nationalism, focusing on the power of the state rather than on primordialist ethnic ties, views a multi-ethnic state simply as a natural consequence of state power¹⁹⁸. Under Putin, the goal of this state-oriented nationalism has been to reinforce pride in the civic ties that link the multi-ethnic population to the state, not to equate ethnicity to citizenship as has been the case in Latvia. In 2007 Putin declared that “Russia is an ancient country with historical, profound traditions and a very powerful moral foundation. And this foundation is a love for the Motherland and patriotism.”¹⁹⁹ From this perspective, love for the state transcends potential reverence for ethnocultural specificities. Even the Russian language clearly distinguishes between ethnic and civic ties to the state. The word *russkiy*, which translates as “ethnic Russian,” does not appear in the Russian Federation’s official discourse. The term used is *rossiyskiy*, an adjective that designates individuals and institutions

¹⁹⁶ Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 49.

¹⁹⁷ Szporluk, Roman. 1989. “Dilemmas of Russian Nationalism,” *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 38, No. 4, p. 18.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Putin, Vladimir V. December 19, 2007. “Interview with Time Magazine.” URL Address: http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/12/19/1618_type82916_154779.shtml, page viewed on December 20, 2012.

that are tied to Russia in civic terms, notwithstanding ethnicity. This means that a citizen or resident of *Rossiyskaya Federaciya* (the Russian Federation) does not necessarily have to be *russkiy* (ethnic Russian). Russia's *rossiyskiy* nationalism thus runs counter to its ethnocultural appeals to its compatriots abroad. Inconsistent with its own philosophy, the Russian Federation inherently compromises its ability to mobilize Russian-speakers on an ethnocultural basis for the promotion of its interests. Lack of ethnic awareness and Russia's statist vision of nationalism have led to the "fragmentation and weak mobilization"²⁰⁰ of Latvia's Russian-speakers as an ethnocultural group and explains what Igor Zevelyov refers to as the absence of "a common enemy or common dreams for the future"²⁰¹ between the Russophones from the "core" (Russia) and the periphery (post-Soviet republics).

Russia itself, however, is not the sole cause of its own failures. The Latvian state has also played a crucial role in reducing Russia's appeal in the eyes of the Russian-speaking minority. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Latvia's Russophones, who had not been strongly attached to their "unthematized" Russianness, began to foster stronger ties to Latvia, their former home republic. Latvia's nationalizing policies, with the stated goal of turning Russophones into "Latvians of Russian origin,"²⁰² have been successful on a grand scale. Given that Latvia has pursued discriminatory policies towards its Russian-speaking minority since the demise of the Soviet Union, it is curious that Russophones now experience a sense of attachment to the Latvian State. This phenomenon cannot be attributed to an arbitrary form of Stockholm Syndrome (or what would be "Riga Syndrome" in this case). The Russophones of Latvia have

²⁰⁰ Зевелёв, Игорь. 2008. "Соотечественники в российской политике на постсоветском пространстве." *Россия в глобальной политике*, No. 1, p. 6.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² Prozorov, Sergei. 2009. "In and Out of Europe: Identity Politics in Russian-European Relations," in Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (ed.), *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic Russian Relations and European Integration*. Surrey, England: Ashgate, p. 142.

not acquired an irrational sympathy for the state that long deprived them of political rights but rather have become an integral part of its civic life. They have become “locals.”

The lack of cohesion among Russophones in Latvia has served as an opportunity for the Latvian state to “territorialize” Russophones’ collective identity. David Galbreath posits that the decreasing number of unilingual Russian speakers, which dropped from 22% to 12% between 1999 and 2002²⁰³, and the proliferation of Russian minority language schools, in which 60% of the curriculum is taught in Latvian, have contributed to the “conglomeration” of the collective identity of Latvia’s Russian-speakers²⁰⁴. This conglomeration allows “an individual to feel both a minority and also a part of the majority society.”²⁰⁵ While Russian-speakers constitute Latvia’s largest ethnocultural minority, they have become an integral part of the majority in the country’s civic life. The progressive naturalization process over the late 1990s and early 2000s, the necessity to speak fluent Latvian to succeed in the national job market and the universal application of the Latvian Language Law have made Russophones part of the majority. Russophones’ perceptions of their integration into the fabric of the Latvian majority were noted in Brigita Zepa’s 2005 study of the link between ethnicity and belonging to a state. Her findings revealed that 82% of ethnic Latvians felt a “strong sense of belonging” to Latvia while the same was true for 74% of Russian-speakers and other ethnic groups²⁰⁶. These numbers indicate that a vast majority of Russophones feel at home in Latvia; they speak Latvian, they work and study in their second language and many have acquired citizenship. Survey data indicate that Russian-speakers do not only acknowledge the usefulness of learning the titular language but also

²⁰³ Zepa, Brigita. 2003. “*Language 2002-2003*,” State Program for Latvian Language Training in Latvia (LVAVP). Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, p. 8.

²⁰⁴ Galbreath, David J. September 2006. “From Nationalism to Nation-Building: Latvian Politics and Minority Policy,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 34, No. 4, p. 395.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Zepa, Brigita. 2004. *Society Integration and Business: the Ethnic Dimension*. Riga: Baltic Institute of Social Sciences and Institute of Economics, Latvian Academy of Sciences, p. 6.

understand the “legitimacy of being required to learn it.”²⁰⁷ These findings suggest that Russian-speakers in Latvia no longer define themselves simply as Russophones. They have become “Latvian Russophones.” Jakovs Pliners, a member of the Latvian Parliament and director of a Russian-language minority school in Riga, corroborates the existence of Russophones’ strong sense of belonging to the Latvian state. Pliners states, “I am Russian, but Latvia is my Motherland. This is how the students feel as well.”²⁰⁸ Igors Pimenovs, also a parliamentarian and the director of the *Latvian Association for Support for Schools with Russian Language of Instruction (LASHOR)*, echoes Pliners’ statements²⁰⁹. Pliners also adds that despite their Kremlin-sponsored curriculum, his students “do not especially desire” to pursue further educational or career opportunities in Russia because Latvia is “their home.”²¹⁰ Latvia’s Russophones’ conglomerate identity, enabled by stringent language and minority integration policy, has further prevented Russia from influencing its compatriots, individuals who have been “transformed” into Latvians. Russia’s ethnocultural appeals thus have become all the more powerless.

Conclusion and Prospects for Russo-Latvian Relations

In conclusion, the Russian Federation’s pragmatic approach to foreign policy has made it reluctant to compromise its business and economic interests in Latvia. It has largely outgrown ideological foreign policy-making in favour of a profit-based understanding of inter-state

²⁰⁷ Brubaker, Rogers. November 2011. “Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 11, p. 1800.

²⁰⁸ Pliners, Jakovs. Member of the Latvian Parliament, director of Evrika and former spokesman for the *Russian School Defense Staff*. Telephone interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 20, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Pimenovs, Igors. Member of the Latvian Parliament and director of *LASHOR*. Telephone interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 26, 2012.

²¹⁰ Pliners, Jakovs. Member of the Latvian Parliament, director of Evrika and former spokesman for the *Russian School Defense Staff*. Telephone interview conducted by Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber. Riga, Latvia, July 20, 2012.

relations. In all likelihood, commercial pacifism will remain the key theme in Russia's relations with Latvia. Pragmatism will continue to foster fruitful economic relations while maintaining the *status quo* on political disagreements.

Russia's compartmentalization of bilateral issues also attests to a newly acquired maturity in its relations with the former Soviet republics. This analysis suggests that the portrayal of Russia in scholarly literature and numerous media outlets is often flawed. The Russian Federation is, in fact, routinely attributed with motives and intentions it has long abandoned. The gratuitous attribution of expansionist and imperialist ambitions to the Russian Federation has hindered productive analysis and dialogue about its evolving nature.

This analysis also demonstrates that Russia's internal contradictions, combined with the unresponsiveness of Latvia's Russophones, have rendered Moscow's compatriot policy harmless to Riga. The Latvian state, however, has failed to grasp Russia's true appeal to its Russian-speaking minority. Portrayed as "unfaithful" by the Latvian authorities, Russophones in Latvia are actually more unfaithful to the Russian Federation than they are to their state of residence and citizenship. In need of an external enemy to justify its own existence, Latvia perpetually portrays Russia and its own Russian-speaking minority as threats to national sovereignty. Although Latvia has facilitated the naturalization process for the children of non-citizens, Latvian citizenship legislation has not been amended since 1998. This attests to Latvia's wariness over the potential "infiltration" of sympathizers of the Russian Federation. Indeed, in January 2013, the Latvian Parliamentary Subcommittee on Citizenship Law announced that more resources would be

required to verify the “loyalty of potential Latvian citizens” if citizenship legislation were to be further liberalized²¹¹.

The construction of Russia and Russian-speakers as threats will certainly be perpetuated in Latvian official discourse. This strategy is an inherent part of Latvia’s nationalizing narrative on its renewed independence. Additional openness to Russia and the country’s Russophones would jeopardize the very existence of the Latvian state. Latvia’s security discourse will thus remain oblivious to the Russian Federation’s blatant failure to garner popular support within Latvian borders. While the Russian state is confident it can mobilize its compatriots on an ethnocultural basis, Latvia is convinced that Russia’s failed tactic is succeeding despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Both Russia and Latvia are engaging in delusional thinking.

²¹¹ Baltic News Service. January 16, 2013. “Checking Loyalty of Potential Latvian Citizens Might Require Additional Resources.”

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