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LATVIAN LANGUAGE  
PROFICIENCY  
AND THE INTEGRATION  
OF SOCIETY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the renewal of Latvia's independence, one of the main goals of language policy has been to promote Latvian language training and use as one of the principal mechanisms for the integration of society. But what have the results of this effort been to date?

Although Latvian language proficiency is gradually improving, a large number of people living in Latvia still have poor Latvian language skills. This study will analyze the problem by responding to three main questions:

- To what extent and in what areas does poor knowledge of Latvian hinder the integration of society?
- What are the main causes of poor knowledge of Latvian?
- How can language policy be improved so that it might stimulate learning of Latvian and integration of society?

The study concludes that poor Latvian language proficiency is an obstacle to integration. It reduces the chances and the motivation of non-citizens to acquire Latvian citizenship. It hinders communication with the administration and restricts opportunities for social and political participation. Although a certain percentage of those who belong to ethnic minorities have no need to use Latvian in everyday communication, the role of Latvian in the job market is steadily increasing, and insufficient knowledge of the language limits both the choices and the competitiveness of job seekers. At the same time, improvement of Latvian language skills does not always help ethnic minorities to overcome alienation, but the motivation to integrate economically and politically leads to the motivation to learn and use the language. This means that a balance must be found between support for Latvian language training and support for other measures that promote the integration of society.

Although a number of government institutions and non-governmental organizations provide Latvian language training for adults, problems arise from a lack of coordination and uncertainty about sources of financing. The study concludes that the demand

for Latvian language training is more differentiated and significantly greater than the supply, and it recommends greater government and public support.

Specifically the report recommends that the government:

- clearly define the role of the institutions that will be dealing with Latvian language training in the coming years;
- address a broader spectrum of the population and provide greater language training opportunities for those who are socially isolated;
- find long-term solutions to financing problems;
- promote greater involvement of other agents (local governments, educational establishments, non-governmental organizations and private companies) in implementation of the language policy.

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### Abbreviations

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| CCDE  | – Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination   |
| BSSI  | – Baltic Social Science Institute                     |
| FIS   | – Foundation for the Integration of Society           |
| NES   | – National Employment Service                         |
| NGO   | – non-governmental organization                       |
| NPLLT | – National Program for Latvian Language Training      |
| OSCE  | – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| SFL   | – Soros Foundation – Latvia                           |
| SLC   | – State Language Committee                            |
| UNDP  | – United Nations Development Program                  |

## INTRODUCTION

Since the renewal of independence in 1991, a number of measures have been taken to increase the use of Latvian as the state language, which had significantly declined under Soviet rule. Efforts to regulate the language situation have included legislative amendments and language training programs. Although a gradual improvement of Latvian language proficiency can be observed, many people in Latvia still have poor command of the Latvian language. Approximately 42% of the population belong to ethnic minorities.<sup>1</sup> About half of them has good knowledge of Latvian; but the other half does not. This includes about 12% who know no Latvian at all. In essence, approximately one person in four needs to improve his or her knowledge of the state language.<sup>2</sup>

Poor Latvian language proficiency on the part of so many people indicates that the language policy is not being effectively implemented. Both Latvian and foreign experts have come to the conclusion that opportunities for Latvian language training must be increased. However, studies also show that there is a lack of motivation to learn and use the state language. There is no consensus (among experts and politicians) about the problem itself and about the best ways of supporting and increasing Latvian language training opportunities, especially for adults, and promoting the integration of society. The study seeks to find more focused ways of implementing the language policy in the next couple of years in order to promote integration (see definition of integration of society in Box 1).

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<sup>1</sup> This study will use the term “ethnic minorities” for people who in surveys and case studies have named Russian, Belarussian, Ukrainian, etc. as their native languages, or who have acknowledged that they belong to an ethnic minority. At the beginning of 2003, Latvia’s population was made up of 58.4% ethnic Latvians, 29.0% ethnic Russians, 3.9% ethnic Belarussians, 2.6% ethnic Ukrainians, 2.5% ethnic Poles, 1.4% ethnic Lithuanians and 2% other nationalities. See: <http://www.np.gov.lv/fakti/index.htm> (last accessed on May 5, 2003). The native language of 62% of Latvia’s population is Latvian; that of 36% is Russian. 1% of the population speaks some other language. Provisional results of the 2000 census. Central Bureau of Statistics. Riga (2001), pp. 40–41.

<sup>2</sup> National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT), Baltic Social Science Institute (BSSI), “Valoda [Language]” survey, November 2002 – February 2003.

**Box 1.****What is integration of society?**

Although society in Latvia generally agrees on the need for integration, views on how integration is to be understood or promoted frequently differ. Some politicians place the emphasis on “integration on the basis of the Latvian language.” Other experts and members of ethnic minorities frequently underline other aspects of integration, for example, public participation and the protection of ethnic minority rights.

**For the purposes of this study, integration is understood as a policy that promotes the participation of individuals in the country’s social, economic, political and cultural development.** Integration has both objective and subjective aspects. On the one hand, integration means equal opportunities for individuals and groups to be involved in the protection of their social, political, economic and other interests. Government policy can encourage or it can hinder this. Integration means promotion of the equality of opportunities for individuals, groups and regions. This is why integration policy is focused on overcoming social isolation and inequality in different aspects of development.

On the other hand, there is also the desire and the readiness of individuals and groups to integrate and cooperate with other individuals and groups. An integrated society is characterized by “mutual understanding and cooperation among individuals and groups within the framework of the state.”<sup>3</sup> The evolution of an integrated society is promoted by communication between individuals, groups and regions.

Integration policy supports the rights and opportunities of individuals and communities to preserve and cultivate their ethnic and language identities on a voluntary basis. The state also guarantees the right of ethnic minorities to use their native language in accordance with national legislation and international standards on ethnic minority rights.

<sup>3</sup> Integration of Society in Latvia. Framework Document. Riga (1999), p. 4.

The study examines:

- the current situation in regard to Latvian language proficiency;
- its effect on the integration of society;
- the main causes of the problem, with focus on both motivation and language training opportunities (see theoretical explanation of these aspects in Box 2).

### **Box 2.**

#### **Factors affecting language proficiency and use**

Why do people know or not know a language? What motivates individuals and communities to learn languages? Analyses of language policy usually focus on language supply and demand. In this study, supply is understood to mean the opportunities that are provided by government, society and social environment for learning and using a language, and demand is understood as the motivation to learn and use a language.

#### **Motivation to learn and use a language**

Motivation to learn a language has several components. D. Ager analyses different types of motivation at the individual, community and state level and identifies the motivation components of language policy:

- attitudes (these can be characterized by language proficiency, attitude towards a language, the desire to improve language skills);
- motives (for example, preservation or change of identity, loyalty to an ideology, creation of an image, uncertainty, preservation or elimination of inequality, integration into a society, instrumental motives);
- goals (vision of action, needs, goal-oriented strategies).<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that attitudes do not always result in specific action, nor does readiness to do something always mean that it is actually done. Language behavior and language planning are goal-oriented processes that

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<sup>4</sup> Ager, D. *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney (2000), pp. 7–12.

are influenced by attitudes, accompanying circumstances, expected results and available resources. Motivation is a dynamic process that can be made up of different motives.

In the case of individuals, instrumental motivation dominates. This is determined by awareness of the contrast or discrepancy between the actual and the desirable situation: the greater this contrast, the clearer the goals of the individual and the greater the motivation to act. The predominant motives for an individual to learn a language are social prestige, employment, and career plans. One contrast could be the social status of a language (the social and economic value of a language). For example, a high social status will not promote motivation to learn other languages. Another contrast could be the discrepancy between an individual's standard of living and career plans. Usually, socio-economic motives encourage learning of languages if this helps to achieve the goals that people have set for themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Motivation to learn a language is closely linked to the economic value of languages, competition between languages,<sup>6</sup> prestige in society, the foreign policy situation, the international status of a language. Those who have voluntarily migrated have greater economic motivation to learn a language than those who live in countries undergoing changes in the political system.<sup>7</sup>

For organized communities (ethnic minorities), the main motives are usually preservation of identity and the struggle against social inequality (unequal distribution of political and economic resources). Such communities usually try to give prominence to the importance and status of their own language.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ager, D. *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney (2000), p. 197.

<sup>6</sup> Druvietē, I., D. Baltaiškālna, V. Ernestsonē and V. Poriņa. *Latvijas valodas politikas analīze: ekonomiskie aspekti* [Latvian language policy analysis: economic aspects]. University of Latvia Latvian Language Institute. Riga (2001).

<sup>7</sup> Bratt, P. C. *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings. Implications for Language Policies*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam/Philadelphia (1994).

<sup>8</sup> Ager, D. *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney (2000), pp. 158–172.

### Opportunities to learn and use a language

Real opportunities to learn and use a language are equally important for individuals who are learning this language. It must be pointed out that language supply also has an impact on motivation to learn a language since it either stimulates or limits language training and use. Such opportunities are to a great extent affected by language environment aspects: factors such as participation in public institutions (the educational system, the army, government agencies, etc.), access to mass information media, employment that provides an opportunity to use a specific language. Opportunities are also linked to the attitude of the dominating ethnic group or political elite towards minority participation and control over minority access to public resources.<sup>9</sup> The opportunity to learn the official or state language is an internationally recognized ethnic minority right.<sup>10</sup>

The study also addresses the National Program for the Integration of Society and the activities of other institutions concerned with language policy issues. Since the beginning of this policy analysis project in 2001, a number of government institutions (among them the Foundation for the Integration of Society, the Naturalization Board and the National Program for Latvian Language Training) have started or continued to explore ways of increasing Latvian language training opportunities for adults, involving other institutions, and finding new sources of financing. The need for coordination of the language policy has been conceded and the President's State Language Committee set up for this purpose. However, such plans are still under discussion, and whether or not they are actually carried out will depend on the existing situation and awareness of the problems.

In addition to examining Latvian language training problems, the study also draws attention to the integration problems that are linked to language policy. Solutions must be sought not only in the improvement of language training, but in a whole package of measures aimed at promoting integration.

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<sup>9</sup> Bratt, P. C. *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings. Implications for Language Policies*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Amsterdam/Philadelphia (1994).

<sup>10</sup> de Varennes, F. *A Guide to the Rights of Minorities and Language*. COLPI Papers 4. Open Society Institute (2001), pp. 33–34.

The chapter “**Language proficiency and the integration of society in Latvia**” analyses language trends and the role of language proficiency in different aspects of integration: political and socio-economic. The chapter “**Language policy and Latvian language proficiency: the current situation**” examines how previous language policy initiatives (legislative regulation of language use, various language training projects) have contributed to improvement of Latvian language proficiency and integration of society. The document concludes with **conclusions** and **recommendations** for government institutions and society at large.

This policy analysis is based on available statistics, survey data, interviews, and in-depth analyses of individual Latvian language training projects (see description of the methods applied in Appendix 1).

## 1. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIETY IN LATVIA

### 1.1. Latvian language proficiency, training and use among ethnic minorities: general trends

#### Latvian language proficiency

Statistics and sociological surveys show that in recent years the number of Latvian speakers has been slowly increasing. Data obtained from the 2000 census show that 81.7% of the population know Latvian (including 58% Russians).<sup>11</sup> These figures are a significant improvement over the 1989 census results, when only 62.3% of the population could speak Latvian (among them, approximately 20% whose native language was not Latvian).<sup>12</sup> However, two aspects must be considered when analyzing statistical data on language proficiency:

- they do not give an accurate picture of the actual level of language proficiency;
- they can be influenced by people's attitudes towards a language, which, in turn, can be influenced by the political situation, public sentiments and opinions.

Although the personal assessment of respondents regarding their level of language proficiency is subjective and can change along with changes in public sentiments, it provides a more accurate idea of language proficiency levels. According to the "Valoda

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<sup>11</sup> Provisional results of the 2000 census. Central Bureau of Statistics. Riga (2001), pp. 40–41.

<sup>12</sup> Kamenska, A. *Valsts valoda Latvijā (panākumi, problēmas, perspektīvas)* [The state language in Latvia (achievements, problems, prospects)]. Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. Riga (1994).

[Language]” survey<sup>13</sup>, since 1996 the number of respondents who do not know any Latvian at all has declined by about 10%, but the number of those who know Latvian at the middle level or are fluent in Latvian has increased by 5% (see Figure 1). A rough idea of the improvement in language proficiency is also provided by another subjective personal assessment: about 60% of citizens and non-citizens feel that their Latvian language skills have “considerably improved” or “somewhat improved.”<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, a large part of the population (60%) whose native language is not Latvian has poor or no command of the language, but only 40% of those whose native language is not Latvian have highest or middle-level Latvian language proficiency<sup>15</sup> (see Figure 1). Respondents have lately been somewhat more critical in their assessments of personal Latvian language proficiency, and assessments can differ greatly from region to region (see below).<sup>16</sup> Some language experts claim that this can be attributed to a change in the attitude of ethnic minorities towards the Latvian language: there is greater awareness of the need for knowing Latvian and consequently greater awareness of one’s own lack of language skills and the need for improvement.<sup>17</sup> Figures obtained from the aforementioned “Language” survey show a decline in recent years in the number of respondents who speak Latvian fluently (and respondents who speak Latvian poorly) and who feel that their language skills are sufficient for everyday communication and job requirements. This could suggest an improvement of the status of the Latvian language in Latvia and a growing need for good Latvian language skills. And in fact, the number of people who have good Latvian language skills, and who consider these skills to be adequate, has started to grow (see below).

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<sup>13</sup> National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT), Baltic Social Science Institute (BSSI). “Valoda [Language]” survey, November 2002 – February 2003. In this survey, which has been carried out for NPLLT since 1996, respondents are asked to give a personal assessment of their proficiency in speaking, reading and writing in Latvian. The questionnaire includes multiple choice answers that correspond to language proficiency levels (lowest, middle, highest). The common indicator for language proficiency was obtained by calculating the mathematical average of the answers given by the respondents.

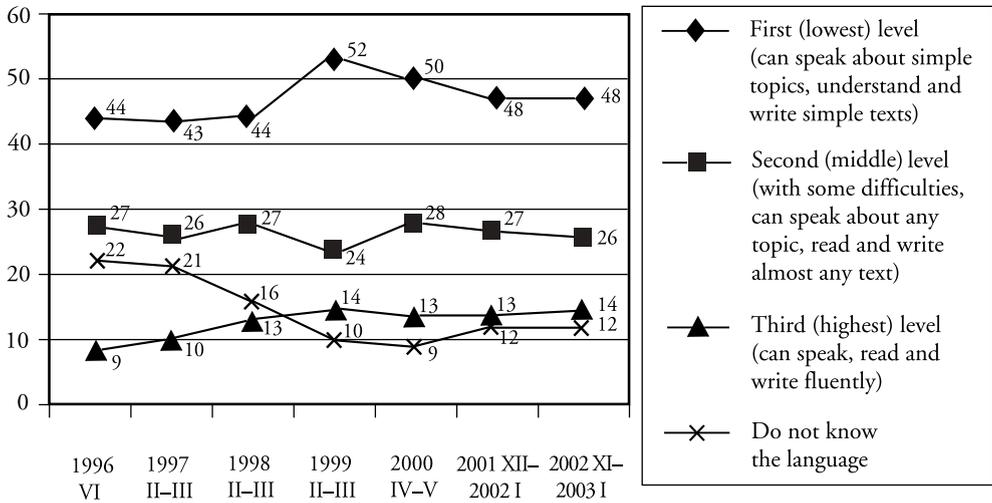
<sup>14</sup> BSSI, Republic of Latvia Naturalization Board. “On the Way to a Civic Society” program. Sociological survey, November 2000. Report 2001, p.102.

<sup>15</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> According to another “On the Way to a Civic Society” survey, personal assessment of the levels of Latvian language proficiency in the year 2000 was almost unchanged as compared to 1997, when a similar survey was carried out: 55% of the Russians who are Latvian citizens, 28% non-citizens of other nationality and 26% Russian non-citizens had third- or second-level Latvian language proficiency. “On the Way to a Civic Society 200/2001,” pp. 94–95.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Aija Priedite, director of the NPLLT Latvian Language Program Unit, June 13, 2002.

Figure 1. Latvian language proficiency among ethnic minorities (% of respondents whose native language is not Latvian)



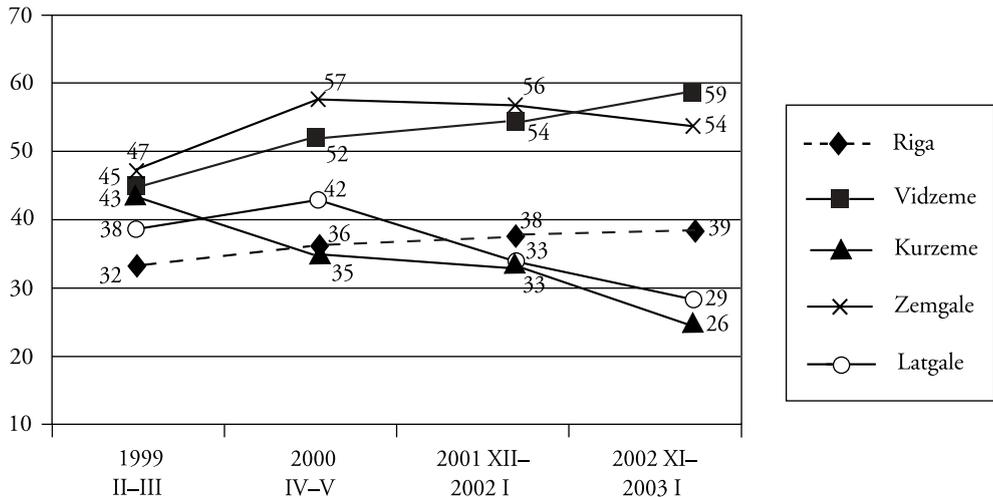
Sources: NPLLT, BSSI. “Valoda [Language]” survey, November 2002 – February 2003, p. 23.

Different groups of the population have different levels of Latvian language proficiency. The younger generation has better language skills, the middle and older generations have poorer skills (see Appendix 2). Those who are citizens have better command of Latvian than those who are not (see Chapter 1.2). According to the surveys, there are no significant differences in language proficiency or in attitudes to language and language training among different ethnic groups (Russian or other). However, the 2000 census shows that Lithuanians, Germans, Roma, Jews, Poles and Estonians have better language skills as compared to Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians and other minorities.

Ethnic minorities living in rural areas have higher levels of Latvian language proficiency. The explanation for this is the greater proportion of Latvians living in rural areas as compared to the cities. At the same time, there are large numbers of people in rural areas who do not speak any Latvian at all. This has to do with the age structure of the rural population and greater social isolation. Ethnic minorities that live in Vidzeme and Zemgale – regions with a higher percentage of Latvians – have better language skills. In Vidzeme and in Riga, the percentage of people who speak Latvian has increased in recent years, but at the same time, in Riga as well as in Kurzeme and Latgale, the number of people who speak no Latvian has also increased. The lowest levels of state language proficiency, with a downward trend, are found in Kurzeme and Latgale,

which is probably due to a more rapid aging of the population and exacerbation of the social problems in these regions.

Figure 2. Latvian speakers in Latvia's regions (*people who speak the language at the highest or middle level as percentage of all respondents whose native language is not Latvian*)



Sources: NPLLT, BSSI. "Valoda [Language]" survey: February/March 1999, April/May 2000, December 2001 – January 2002, November 2002 – February 2003.

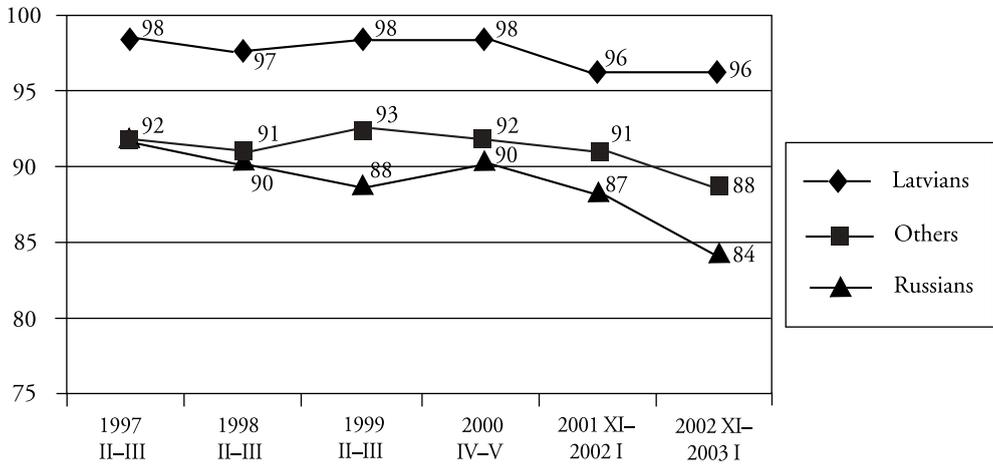
## The attitude of ethnic minorities to Latvian language proficiency and use, and the desire to improve language skills

### Attitude towards the need to know Latvian

Studies show that the need to have good command of the Latvian language is understood by the majority of people in different groups the population in all regions of Latvia (see Figure 3). There are no significant differences between different nationalities, although those who belong to the non-Russian ethnic minorities express this attitude more often than Russians. Although surveys show that, since about 2000, the number of people (both Latvians and other nationalities) who feel the need to speak Latvian fluently has declined, no really major changes have been observed over the years in the attitude towards the need to know and learn Latvian, and it can generally be described as positive. It should be noted that members of all nationalities consider knowing Latvian to be more important than knowing Russian or English. In the past

4–5 years, the number of Latvians and people belonging to non-Russian ethnic minorities who feel that it is necessary to know Russian has increased (similarly as in 1997/1998). It is interesting, however, that the number of Russian respondents who express this view has even slightly declined.

Figure 3. How important, in your opinion, is it for all people in Latvia to be fluent in Latvian? (Answers: “very important,” “fairly important.” % of the respective ethnic groups)



Sources: NPLLT, BSSI. “Valoda [Language]” survey, November 2002 – February 2003, p. 23.

Although many people in Latvia still wish to improve their Latvian language skills, the number of those who wish to learn Latvian has somewhat declined since 1999 (from 70% in 1996 to 65% at the end of 2002).<sup>18</sup> This trend is logically connected with people’s personal assessment of the adequacy of their language skills: since 1999, the number of respondents who consider their language skills to be sufficient has somewhat increased, especially among those with middle or highest level of language proficiency. There are slightly more non-citizens than citizens who wish to improve their Latvian language skills, more women than men, more people who belong to the younger and middle generations up to the age of 50, city dwellers, people with higher or secondary education. There are no significant differences in the motivation to learn Latvian between school or university students, salaried employees, unemployed persons,

<sup>18</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 32.

housewives or businessmen. People's desire to improve their Latvian language proficiency is substantiated by the great demand for cost-free Latvian language courses in 2001–2001 (see Chapter II).

These trends in attitudes towards languages still require more study, but it is clear that to some degree they go hand in hand with language policy developments. Since 1997, when the surveys were started, the number of respondents who feel that it is important to know Latvian has declined. The downward trend increased in 1999–2000, at the height of the debates over the State Language Law and at the time when the bilingual education reform for ethnic minority schools was launched. As political tensions eased, people began to look somewhat differently at opportunities for “all people in Latvia” to be “fluent” in Latvian, and also at the practical aspects of knowing Russian.

Surveys carried out in 2002 also show that in the previous three years the number of respondents who support the introduction of Russian as the second state language in Latvia has slightly increased.<sup>19</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that these people are disloyal to Latvia or that they do not wish to know Latvian. For example, 73% of the naturalised citizens who have good command of Latvian and are generally more loyal to Latvia than non-citizens would like to see Russian as the second state language.<sup>20</sup>

### Practical application of Latvian language skills and attitude to use of the language

It is characteristic for people in Latvia to use their native language in everyday communication, and the use of Latvian has increased only at work<sup>21</sup> (see below). However, surveys show that there is generally a neutral or positive attitude towards the use of Latvian, and attitudes to the Latvian language have recently improved.<sup>22</sup> An analysis of the attitudes of different population groups to practical use of Latvian shows that a slightly more negative attitude is generally expressed by groups with a lower level of

<sup>19</sup> In 1997, 79% of the non-citizens held this view; in 2000, 83%. “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001” survey, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Baltic Data House, BSSI. “Jaunpilsoņu aptauja [Survey of naturalised citizens].” Report, April 2001, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Surveys show that ethnic minorities usually use Latvian “when addressed in Latvian” (62%), “if the other person does not speak Russian” (61%). The attitude of respondents to use of the Latvian language is predominantly neutral (42%). A positive attitude (“I enjoy speaking Latvian, I do so very willingly,” or “I willingly speak Latvian”) is expressed by about 35% of the respondents, but a more negative or clearly negative attitude (“I speak Latvian without much enthusiasm,” “I don’t like to speak Latvian, I do so unwillingly”) is expressed by only 10%. “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 22.

language proficiency: males, non-citizens, persons with unfinished secondary or vocational education, as well as unemployed persons, housewives and residents of Latgale.

Latvians often use Russian to communicate with members of other ethnic groups. Various reasons are given for such behavior. For example, Daugavpils residents had the following arguments: courtesy (“*I feel uncomfortable, I don’t want to embarrass the other person when I see that he doesn’t understand what I am saying...*”<sup>23</sup>); differences in the mentalities of Latvians and Russians (“*The Russian mentality is stronger.*”); the desire to get things done quickly (“*I don’t want to waste time.*”); lack of patience (“*If I am in a hurry, I am more likely to address the saleslady in Russian than wait for her to understand what I am saying.*”); as well as the desire to show regard for a person by speaking in his or her native language. One of the reasons why Latvians speak Russian is force of habit in situations where Russian is usually spoken and the stereotype that people who are not native Latvians do not speak Latvian very well.

Ethnic minorities, too, do not always take advantage of opportunities to practice their Latvian. This is due to “*embarrassment,*” “*fear*” of speaking Latvian, of “*butchering the language*” (“*My teacher always told me that I shouldn’t speak a foreign language incorrectly, that I should learn to speak correctly from the very start.*”), and because “*this is what is usually done.*” A language expert has made the valid observation that an effort should be made to overcome language stereotypes by educating society about modern approaches to language training.<sup>24</sup> An important role in breaking these stereotypes has been played by the teaching philosophy of the National Program for Latvian Language Training (see Chapter II).

Use of Latvian is also linked to an individual’s attitude towards state, language and speakers of the language. “*To speak Latvian, you have to understand that the language is necessary, but this cannot be accomplished by force,*” is how one Daugavpils resident explains the situation. Social communication also affects the attitude to use of the language. During a focus-group discussion, Daugavpils residents mentioned “*the aggressiveness of Latvians if you speak faulty Latvian*” (see summary of focus-group discussions in the Appendix). People have also voiced the opinion that Latvians do not wish to help them learn Latvian, to speak Latvian with them. On the other hand, participants in the

<sup>23</sup> Djačkova, S. “Valodas loma reģiona attīstībā [The role of language in the development of a region].” Master’s thesis (2000), University of Latvia Sociology Department. For this analysis, the author has used data obtained during fieldwork in Daugavpils in 2000–2001, including interviews with local residents.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Ina Druviete, head of the Sociolinguistics Department of the University of Latvia Latvian Language Institute, April 26, 2001.

discussion (experts) who are native Latvians pointed to many cases where those who are not Latvians refuse to speak Latvian and are aggressively inclined towards Latvians.

A tolerant attitude towards the use of different languages and a show of respect for other languages and cultures are important preconditions for harmonic inter-ethnic relations. The use of the state language, especially in informal communication, is not an end in itself, nor a means of achieving integration, but rather the result of integration. This is why, when dealing with motivation to learn the state language, special attention should be paid to fulfillment of the requirements imposed by the state.

### Latvian language training activities of the ethnic minorities

For part of Latvia's population, the desire for good Latvian language skills and for improvement of these skills cannot always be fulfilled. According to the "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey that was carried out in 1997–1998, approximately 50% of the Latvian citizens whose native language is not Latvian and 44% of the non-citizens had not attempted to improve their Latvian in the previous seven years.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the majority of those who belong to ethnic minorities still wish to improve their Latvian language proficiency, with preference given to language courses as a means of achieving this goal.

As to ways of learning Latvian, most of the people in all age groups have learned Latvian at school (55%). A predominant role in learning the language has also been played by communication with colleagues at work or fellow students at school (23%), and informal or social communication (19%). About 17% of those who belong to the ethnic minorities have attended Latvian language courses.<sup>26</sup> A smaller number of respondents have learned Latvian through self-education (10%).

As will be shown in more detail in Chapter II on language policy measures in Latvia, Latvian language courses for adults are provided by the National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT), private language schools, government agencies that include educational services in their programs (Naturalization Board, National Employment Service), and various public organizations. Of the respondents who have

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<sup>25</sup> Baltic Data House, "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey. Report on stages 1 and 2, November 1997 – January 1998, p. 101.

<sup>26</sup> "Valoda [Language]" survey, p. 27.

attended courses, the majority mentioned courses organized by a language school, centre, private company (60%), or their employers (28%). A small percentage (11%) has attended NPLLT courses, but 9% have learned Latvian through private instruction. In the past few years, language courses have not been a widely exploited way of learning Latvian.<sup>27</sup>

About 50% of the respondents who would like to improve their Latvian language skills (**approximately 32% of the total number of persons belonging to ethnic minorities**) would be prepared to attend language courses (at an average cost of about 13 lats); 33% would prefer a private teacher; 26% would like to take advantage of language programs on television; 22% would like to study on their own using self-education materials.<sup>28</sup> 34% of those whose native language is not Latvian, find that Latvian correspondence courses would be useful<sup>29</sup> (especially the younger and middle generations, salaried employees, unemployed persons, school and university or college students, persons with low incomes, residents of Latgale).

**Courses and private teachers** are preferred by the middle and younger generations, and city dwellers, especially in Riga, Kurzeme and Latgale. **Courses** are acceptable to persons from various social groups – most often unemployed persons, housewives and women on maternity leave, salaried employees. **Private teachers** are preferred by school and university or college students, employers, self-employed persons, and also housewives. **Self-education** (books and television programs) is more acceptable to the middle and older generations, residents of other cities, the rural population and pensioners.

This leads to the conclusion that the majority of people see language courses or private teachers as the best way of learning Latvian. This is primarily because these methods are best suited for improving the language skills needed at work or for passing language tests. This can also have to do with insufficient information about other ways of learning a language. In recent years, however, the demand for self-education books and television programs has also increased.

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<sup>27</sup> In the period from 1997 to 2001, 88% citizens and 82% non-citizens had not attended language courses. Of the respondents who had attended language courses, 15% of the non-citizens and 2% of the whole population had attended Latvian language courses (usually persons up to the age of 50 with higher education and higher incomes). “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001” survey, p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 82.

### Latvian language training problems

Approximately half of the respondents said that they had problems with learning Latvian, although in recent years this number has declined (from 56% in 1996 to 44% at the end of 2002).<sup>30</sup> Non-citizens, pensioners, unemployed persons and residents of Riga and Latgale were the ones who admitted to the greatest problems. The main reasons mentioned in recent years were connected with age (complicated grammar, poor memory), lack of time, financial difficulties and lack of opportunities to use the language.

### Conclusions

- Latvian language proficiency is slowly but steadily improving.
- There are significant differences in people's self-assessment of their Latvian language skills from region to region. It is becoming more positive in Riga and Vidzeme, but more negative in Latgale, Kurzeme and Zemgale.
- In recent years, the number of people with different ethnic backgrounds who attach great importance to the need for good command of the Latvian language has slightly declined.
- A decline has also been observed in the number of people belonging to ethnic minorities who wish to do something to improve their Latvian language skills. This can be explained with aging of the population, improvement of language proficiency, and easing of political tensions, but also with a certain amount of isolation from a Latvian language environment.
- At the same time, a generally positive attitude prevails toward the Latvian language and language training.
- Language courses are not a very widely used method of learning Latvian, although they are most frequently mentioned as the preferred method.
- The demand for Latvian language self-education materials has increased.

The next two chapters will examine the areas in which and the extent to which insufficient state language proficiency creates problems for the integration of individuals and society.

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<sup>30</sup> "Valoda [Language]" survey, p. 38.

**Box 3.****The role of state language proficiency in the integration of society**

Language policy is closely linked to the integration of society inasmuch as it regulates the use of language as a means of communication.

- Language is primarily a means of communication that contributes to mutual understanding among individuals and groups, and provides access to different types of information.
- Language proficiency also affects a country's social and economic development, which is very much dependent on the effectiveness of communication.<sup>31</sup>
- Language proficiency helps to understand other cultures and the values of other nations – a prerequisite for inter-ethnic communication and national harmony.<sup>32</sup>
- Ethnic conflicts are more likely to occur if an ethnic group is unable to protect its economic or political interests, or preserve and develop its language and culture due to the status of its native language or to poor knowledge of the official language.
- An important factor in an inter-ethnic context is respect for other cultures and languages. Today, the traditional conception of the role of the state language is changing due to the growing need for communication between government agencies and the public and to the growing influence on national policy of international human rights standards, which assign a greater role to the functioning and development of minority languages.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gellner, E. *Nations and Nationalism*. Basil Blackwell Ltd. (1983).

<sup>32</sup> Shibutani, I. and K. M. Kwan. *Ethnic Stratification. A Comparative Approach*. The Macmillan Company, Collier Macmillan Ltd. London (1965).

<sup>33</sup> Runnut, M. "The Common Language Problem." In: *Language: A Right and a Resource. Approaching Linguistic Human Rights*. CEU Press (1999).

## 1.2. Language proficiency and political integration

*“Failure to know Latvian and a non-citizen status limit participation.”*

(UNDP. Latvia. Human Development Report 2000/2001)

*“Unfortunately, our society’s problem is that decision-makers often ignore not only non-citizens, but also well-educated citizens of Russian nationality, who have very good command of the Latvian language. This means that naturalization, education and language training will not in themselves solve the problem of minority participation.”*

(Boriss Kolčanovs)<sup>34</sup>

Political integration can be defined as the existence of a common system of social and political values that is supported by different population groups regardless of their ethnic, linguistic or other identities.<sup>35</sup> The most important aspects of political and civic integration are citizenship, political participation, political communication.

### Language and citizenship

The effect of poor Latvian language proficiency on the naturalization process is not as clear as it may seem. On the one hand, insufficient Latvian language proficiency is one of the major factors that prevent many people, especially the middle and older generations, from applying for citizenship. On the other hand, many non-citizens still lack the motivation to acquire citizenship. Passivity, lack of financial resources, insufficient information, and insufficient estimation of the importance of citizenship are other factors.

On January 1, 2003, 77% of Latvia’s total population were Latvian citizens, 22% were non-citizens (permanent residents), but 1%, foreigners and stateless persons.<sup>36</sup> According to the 2000 “On the Way to a Civic Society” survey, only about 20% of the non-citizens were planning to become Latvian citizens in the next 12 months. Of those who were not planning to become citizens within the next year, 26% intended to do so at some time in the future.<sup>37</sup> These were generally persons up to the age of 40, with higher incomes.

<sup>34</sup> Kolčanovs, B. “Minoritāšu līdzdalība sabiedrības integrācijā [Participation of minorities in the integration of society].” See: <http://www.politika.lv/?id=101281&lang&print=> (last accessed on May 5, 2003).

<sup>35</sup> UNDP. Latvia. Human Development Report 1997. Riga (1997), p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> See: <http://www.np.gov.lv/fakti/index.htm> (last accessed on May 5, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001,” pp. 27 and 32.

Although the attitudes of non-citizens to and their assessment of the naturalization test have become more positive, the obstacle to acquiring Latvian citizenship that is mentioned most often is poor Latvian language proficiency.<sup>38</sup> Surveys show that the Latvian language proficiency levels of non-citizens are considerably lower than those of citizens whose native language is not Latvian. If the language proficiency levels of non-citizens are measured against the requirements set down by the Law on Citizenship for naturalization candidates, it is clear that many potential candidates for Latvian citizenship lack the necessary language skills.<sup>39</sup> Age is one of the reasons for the poor Latvian language skills of non-citizens: there is a much higher percentage of retirement-age persons and a much smaller number of young people between the ages of 15 and 30 among non-citizens than among citizens. In particular, pensioners and persons with only primary school education or unfinished secondary school education figure prominently among those who say that inability to pass the Latvian language proficiency test is one of the main obstacles to acquiring Latvian citizenship. However, it should be pointed out that 55% of the non-citizens are under the age of 50, and one-third is under 40 – age groups that are economically active.

At the same time, many people who do know Latvian are, nevertheless, not planning to apply for citizenship. According to the “On the Way to a Civic Society” survey, more than half of the respondents who speak Latvian fluently are not planning to apply for citizenship within the next 12 months. Of the respondents who are not planning to apply for citizenship in the next year and who speak Latvian fluently, approximately 40% are not planning to apply for the citizenship of any country. It should be noted, however, that readiness to acquire Latvian citizenship increases in direct proportion to improvement of Latvian language proficiency,<sup>40</sup> which suggests that insufficient Latvian language proficiency negatively affects motivation to acquire citizenship.

Experts on citizenship issues point out that non-citizens often underestimate their ability to pass the naturalization test due to lack of information and an overly negative personal assessment of their language skills. According to a survey of naturalized citizens carried out in 2001, 46% of the naturalized citizens claimed that the Latvian language

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Reasons such as “I can’t pass the Latvian language test” are mentioned by 59% of the non-citizens.

<sup>39</sup> Only 26% Russians and 28% other ethnic minority non-citizens have little or no problems with the Latvian language (as compared to 55% citizens). 17% non-citizens do not speak any Latvian (citizens – 3%). “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001,” p. 92.  
The Latvian language requirements for naturalization candidates can be compared to level 2A (middle level) requirements for state language certification. Interview with Jānis Kahanovičs, deputy head of the Naturalization Board, February 7, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001,” additional calculations.

test had been easier than expected; 83–85% found that the language requirements of the naturalization test had been acceptable.<sup>41</sup> Data provided by the Naturalization Board also show that 95.5% of the candidates pass the Latvian language test. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that naturalized citizens have better language skills and they are younger. There is also the fact that test results are not the same in all parts of the country.<sup>42</sup>

The great demand for Latvian language courses among those who want to apply for citizenship (see Chapter 2.5) suggests that a successful naturalization and integration policy could not only encourage more non-citizens to naturalize, but that it could also stimulate motivation to learn Latvian.

### Public participation and political communication

Although there is a shortage of data that would make it possible to draw clear conclusions about factors that affect public participation, studies show that people with good Latvian language skills are socially and politically more active. Inadequate language proficiency does to some extent affect political and social participation – it limits social contacts, access to information, and communication between government agencies and ethnic minorities on issues of national importance. At the same time, the improvement of Latvian language skills does not always help ethnic minorities to overcome their sense of alienation, which is also closely linked to factors that affect integration such as communication with public administration institutions and with Latvians, and public participation.

Although a low degree of **political participation** is characteristic for both Latvians and ethnic minorities, studies show that a number of key social and political participation indicators (participation in public and political activities, level of information about political developments and decisions, faith in one's political influence) are lower for ethnic minorities and non-citizens than for Latvians and Latvian citizens.<sup>43</sup> A survey

<sup>41</sup> Baltic Data House, BSSI. "Jaunpilsoņu aptauja [Survey of naturalised citizens]." Report, April 2001, pp. 19–20.

<sup>42</sup> Naturalization Board. Annual Report 2001. Riga (2001), p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> See the following surveys: "On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001"; University of Latvia Institute for Philosophy and Sociology, "Survey on Policy and Regional Development Issues," 2000; SKDS, "Integration of the Population: Public Activities," sociological survey, March 2002. For example, according to the "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey, more citizens whose native language is not Latvian claim that they have not participated in any of the political activities mentioned in the questionnaire (59.3% Latvians, 73.2% Russians, 73.6% other nationalities). (The question did not include participation in elections.) 88% of the non-citizens claimed that they had not participated in any of the political activities.

carried out in 2000 shows that there are no significant differences between Latvians and other nationalities where participation in a number of political activities is concerned (for example, participation in protest demonstrations, strikes, etc).<sup>44</sup> However, other important political activities such as meetings with deputies, ministers and journalists, participation in public hearings and public debates on the development plans of one's city or township are activities in which ethnic minorities participate less often than Latvians.

According to the "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey, respondents with better command of Latvian (who are, at the same time, younger and have a better education) have participated more frequently in the political activities named in the questionnaire and have more faith in their ability to do something if the government, the Saeima or the local government were to act against public interests.<sup>45</sup> People who are involved in the work of public organizations also have higher levels of Latvian language proficiency.<sup>46</sup>

Although there is insufficient data on factors that affect participation, it is clear that, with their current level of Latvian language proficiency, a large part of the ethnic minorities in Latvia would not be able to take part in discussions, hearings, and meetings, or take advantage of the Latvian-language media.<sup>47</sup> Views on speaking in public were expressed by participants at a focus-group discussion in Daugavpils.

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<sup>44</sup> "Survey on Policy and Regional Development Issues." University of Latvia Institute for Philosophy and Sociology (2000).

<sup>45</sup> "On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001" survey, additional calculations. For example, the answer "have not participated in anything" was chosen by 76.7% citizens whose native language is not Latvian and who have poor or no Latvian language skills and by 68.1% citizens who are fluent in Latvian or have middle-level Latvian language skills. A similar trend can be observed in the answers of non-citizens.

<sup>46</sup> According to the results of the "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey, of the respondents who are citizens, whose native language is not Latvian, and who participate in non-governmental organizations, 15.8% had lowest-level Latvian language proficiency and 26.5% had middle or highest level. For the non-citizens, these figures were 11.6% and 20.7%, respectively. "On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001" survey, additional calculations.

<sup>47</sup> One-quarter of the respondents whose native language is not Latvian mentioned insufficient knowledge of Latvian as an obstacle that denies them access to the Latvian-language media. "Valoda [Language]" survey, p. 61.

**Box 4.****Views on participation in discussions that are conducted in Latvian expressed by participants in focus-group discussions**

- *At a conference in Riga, I can understand everything, but if I disagreed with anything that was said, I would never get up and speak publicly. They simply wouldn't understand me, they would "devour me with their eyes." My professor is a wonderful person who knows all these languages, and when I go to see her, I speak Russian. There are no problems. What I mean is that all questions can be solved so easily. I must admit that it is difficult to express myself in a foreign language in the way that I would like to. In this sense, problems do exist.*
- *I find that these problems have been artificially created. At conferences, people from different countries speak English and deal with different problems that must be solved, and they understand each other although their English is not that perfect. People create all these problems artificially.*

Source: Excerpts from a focus-group discussion in Daugavpils in May 2001. Note: To some extent, these statements also demonstrate language stereotypes – both on the part of Latvians and ethnic minorities; for example, fear of making mistakes when speaking a language, potential intolerance towards those who speak with mistakes, and the tendency of Latvians to switch to Russian.

People with better command of Latvian are also better **informed** about the country's current affairs and say more often that they would like to receive more information.<sup>48</sup> Respondents with poor Latvian language skills are more likely to choose the answer "this does not interest me." It is typical that this trend can also be observed in regard to issues that affect persons of different ages and social status: healthcare, social insurance, the rights and obligations of the people, etc. This suggests that those who speak Latvian have better information channels than those who do not know the Latvian language, and a greater sense of belonging to the country and its society. This is substantiated by the results of the aforementioned study.

However, the results of the "On the Way to a Civic Society" survey also prompt a reassessment of perceptions about the dominating role of Latvian language proficiency

<sup>48</sup> "On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001" survey, additional calculations.

in the integration of society. The survey revealed that young non-citizens with above average Latvian language proficiency levels feel a greater sense of alienation than they did three years earlier.<sup>49</sup> This suggests that the difference in the attitudes of people with different levels of Latvian language proficiency is not just connected with language skills but also with other factors that are conducive to integration, among them better communication channels, participation and better contacts with Latvians.<sup>50</sup> Although Latvian language proficiency is gradually improving, a certain degree of “demarcation” from the Latvian language environment has also recently been observed, and use of the Latvian language in everyday communication has declined.<sup>51</sup>

One of the most disputed points in the debate about language and **communication with government institutions** is the provision of the State Language Law according to which all documents submitted to state, municipal and judicial institutions must either be in Latvian or accompanied by a translation.<sup>52</sup> Latvian legislation also does not provide for the possibility of communicating with local government agencies in the languages of the minorities. On the one hand, although there is no comprehensive data on whether or not this provision of the law is strictly applied, some experts claim that it infringes on the rights of some of the underprivileged population groups and

<sup>49</sup> According to the survey, only 57% of the respondents identified themselves with Latvia. For young people who are citizens, this figure was 92%. “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001,” p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Zepa, B. “Komunikācija – politiskās integrācijas nosacījums [Communication – a requirement for political integration].” In: Vēbers, E. (ed.) *Integrācija un etnopolitika [Integration and ethnopolity]*. Jumava, 2000. In her analysis of the “On the Way to a Civic Society” survey results, Brigita Zepa comes to the conclusion that integration is affected by various forms of communication. The informal and formal communication networks of non-citizens (public organizations, mass media) affect their attitude to the state and its affairs. It has been observed, for example, that Russian non-citizens who have Latvian family members have more faith in Latvia as a state and less of the psychological uncertainties that are connected with a non-citizen status. This group has a more positive assessment of Latvia’s economic development and greater trust in the Latvian media.

<sup>51</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> State Language Law, Section 10, Clause 2: “State and local government agencies, courts and judicial institutions, as well as state or municipal enterprises (companies), shall accept and process only such documents which are in the state language, except in the cases set out in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of this section of the Law or in other laws. These provisions do not apply in cases where the documents are submitted to police authorities or healthcare institutions, rescue services and other emergency and ambulatory medical aid services, or in cases where a crime or other offence has been committed, or in cases of fires, accidents or other casualties.” Clause 3: “Documents in a foreign language shall be accepted if they are submitted together with a translation into the state language which has been certified in accordance with Cabinet of Ministers regulations or by a notary.”

See: <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=14740> (last accessed on May 5, 2003).

conflicts with international human rights standards.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, public officials often continue to process documents that have been submitted in Russian and communicate with people in Russian, but this is done on a voluntary basis and is not sanctioned by the law. Although the ethnic minorities usually do use the state language when dealing with public administration institutions, contrary to the situation at work or in everyday communication, oral communication with public officials in the state language has not significantly increased.<sup>54</sup> Some local governments (for example, in Daugavpils) provide cost-free translation of documents submitted by the city's residents. This suggests that restrictions on the use of minority languages have not significantly contributed to an improvement of Latvian language proficiency or practical application of the language<sup>55</sup> (see Chapter 2.1).

### 1.3. Language proficiency and socio-economic integration

*"I work too much to be able to learn Latvian. I simply don't have the time."*

(a businessman in Krāslava)

*"Latvian is necessary, of course, because it means a stable income, certainty about the future as far as employment is concerned."*

*"The first requirement is not English, not your professional skills, but Latvian."*

(excerpts from discussions with Daugavpils residents)

### Language proficiency, employment and unemployment

Although ethnicity is not a factor that can be directly linked to different levels of economic prosperity, and many members of ethnic minorities do not have much need to apply their Latvian language skills at work, the importance of Latvian in the job

<sup>53</sup> The Latvian National Human Rights Office (LNHRO) recently suggested that a government agency should be set up to provide such translation services. It also proposed that state and municipal agencies should accept documents in foreign languages on criminal or civil offences, including claims and applications submitted to courts, if there are objective reasons for the failure to provide a translation (for example, imprisonment). LNHRO. *Aktuālie cilvēktiesību jautājumi Latvijā 2002. gada pirmajā ceturksnī* [Human rights issues in Latvia in the 1st quarter of 2002], pp. 13–14.

<sup>54</sup> 36% citizens and 42% non-citizens speak only Russian with public officials. "On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001," p. 97.

<sup>55</sup> A similar conclusion was drawn after analysing how language restrictions imposed on the electronic media have affected the situation of the Latvian language. Signe Martišūne's study (unpublished at the time of the preparation of this study).

market is increasing and insufficient knowledge of the language can have a negative effect on the choices and chances of job seekers.

Some studies suggest that in Latvia nationality and language are generally not factors that significantly affect income levels. For example, the “Valoda [Language]” survey does not correlate Latvian language proficiency with level of income.<sup>56</sup> The results of the “On the Way to a Civic Society” (2000) survey indicate that the employment rate is similar for citizens and non-citizens (45% and 44%). There are also no significant differences in the income levels of citizens and non-citizens.<sup>57</sup>

However, other data indicate that ethnic minorities have greater problems finding a job than Latvians. For example, the survey carried out in 2000 shows that 10% Latvians and 17% other nationalities say that they are unemployed and receive no unemployment benefits.<sup>58</sup> National Employment Service (NES) data indicate that the percentage of registered unemployed Latvians in 2002 was 7.4% below the percentage of Latvians living in Latvia. The percentage of unemployed Russians, Belarussians, Ukrainians and Poles more or less surpassed the percentage that these nationalities make up of the total population.

Table 1. Nationality of persons registered as unemployed (%)

|              | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | Permanent residents 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | Permanent residents 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | Permanent residents 2002 |
|--------------|------|------|------|--------------------------|------|------|------|--------------------------|------|------|--------------------------|
| Latvians     | 47.3 | 49.4 | 53.7 | 55.3                     | 49.6 | 49.0 | 49.8 | 57.7                     | 51.1 | 50.8 | 58.2                     |
| Russians     | 38.6 | 36.7 | 33.5 | 32.5                     | 36.5 | 36.7 | 35.9 | 29.6                     | 35.2 | 35.4 | 29.2                     |
| Belarussians | 5.3  | 5.4  | 4.8  | 4.0                      | 4.9  | 5    | 5.1  | 4.1                      | 4.7  | 4.7  | 4.0                      |
| Ukrainians   | 2.8  | 2.7  | 2.5  | 2.9                      | 3.0  | 3.0  | 2.9  | 2.7                      | 2.9  | 2.9  | 2.6                      |
| Poles        | 3.0  | 2.9  | 2.8  | 2.2                      | 2.9  | 3.0  | 3.0  | 2.5                      | 2.9  | 2.8  | 2.5                      |
| Lithuanians  | 1.5  | 1.5  | 1.4  | 1.3                      | 1.5  | 1.5  | 1.5  | 1.4                      | 1.4  | 1.6  | 1.4                      |
| Jews         | 0.2  | 0.2  | 0.1  | 0.4                      | 0.2  | 0.2  | 0.2  | 0.4                      | 0.2  | 0.1  | 0.4                      |
| Others       | 1.3  | 1.2  | 1.2  | –                        | 1.4  | 1.6  | 1.6  | –                        | 1.6  | 1.7  | 1.7                      |

Sources: Central Bureau of Statistics, Latvia's Statistics Yearbook. Riga (2001), p. 58. Information provided by the National Employment Service, May 9, 2003.

<sup>56</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 61.

<sup>57</sup> “On the Way to a Civic Society 2000/2001,” p. 15.

<sup>58</sup> Rose, R. New Baltic Barometer IV: A Survey Study. Studies in Public Policy, No. 284. Public Policy Studies Center, Strathclyde University. Glasgow (2000), p. 5.

An analysis of job opportunities and integration of the unemployed shows that insufficient knowledge of the state language does limit the choice of available jobs.

In 2000, only 43% citizens whose native language is not Latvian and 23% non-citizens said that they would be able to work at a job that requires knowledge of Latvian; 30% and 28% could do so with difficulty; 22% and 38% could not, because they do not know the language.<sup>59</sup> Lack of Latvian language skills is one of the factors that limit job opportunities in the public sector (government agencies and institutions, state-owned or local-government-owned companies). This is one of the main reasons why ethnic minorities are underrepresented in government institutions.<sup>60</sup>

Studies show that the Latvian language proficiency levels of unemployed persons are among the lowest when compared to other population groups.<sup>61</sup> National Employment Service (NES) figures show: on April 1, 2002, a state language proficiency certificate had not been submitted by 11,538 unemployed persons – approximately 13% of all unemployed. The highest numbers of unemployed persons without language certificates were registered in Riga and Latgale.<sup>62</sup> The language proficiency levels of the unemployed often make them ineligible for jobs for which they might otherwise be qualified. This is undoubtedly a problem for many job seekers, since it also prevents them from taking advantage of the services of NES or taking part in professional education courses.<sup>63</sup> Another problem is that the supply of language training opportunities for the unemployed is greatly surpassed by the demand (see analysis in Chapter 2.7).

### Socio-economic motivation to learn Latvian

Observations and interviews show that the motivation to learn and use Latvian is closely linked to the need for using the language. The main motives for learning Latvian are employment, career and education (see summary of focus-group discussions in the Appendix).

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<sup>59</sup> BSSI, Republic of Latvia Naturalization Board. “On the Way to a Civic Society” program. Sociological survey, November 2000. Report 2001.

<sup>60</sup> Pabriks, A. Occupational Representation and Ethnic Discrimination in Latvia. Soros Foundation – Latvia. Nordik (2002), p. 50.

<sup>61</sup> Self-assessment: 53% of the unemployed whose native language is not Latvian have the lowest Latvian language proficiency level, but 13% do not speak any Latvian at all. “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 61.

<sup>62</sup> National Employment Service figures, May 9, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> National Employment Service figures, May 9, 2003.

There are two sides to the role that Latvian language proficiency plays in the job market. On the one hand, knowledge of Latvian plays a major role. State language certification requirements have been an important factor, which still encourages individuals to learn Latvian (see Chapter 2.1). In addition, there has been a marked increase in the number of persons who want to improve their language skills and actually use the language. Surveys show, for example, that the use of Latvian at work is consistently increasing.<sup>64</sup> This indicates that, as requirements on the job market change, command of Latvian is becoming increasingly necessary and intercultural communication increasingly important – a sign that integration is taking place.

On the other hand, part of the population, especially the middle and older generations, lacks the economic motivation to improve language skills. This has to do with their social environment, in which they have little or no contact with Latvians, or with their jobs, which require little practical use of Latvian or involve a narrow range of professional functions. Latvian language proficiency does not always mean a higher income. A job in the private sector, where most people who belong to ethnic minorities are employed, often makes it possible to earn a better living than a job in the public sector, where use of the state language is more firmly established (see Chapter 1.3).

Latvian language proficiency is closely linked to the need for using the language, to the language environment and to language requirements in the job market. This is why in certain regions and cities with a large proportion of ethnic minorities Latvian language proficiency levels are lower and use of the language less pronounced. The demand for Latvian in the job market is linked to the market situation. In Latgale, for example, which has a high rate of unemployment, the job market situation often fails to stimulate motivation to improve language skills and apply them in Latgale. In Riga, on the other hand, state language proficiency is to a much greater extent associated with better job opportunities, and the number of Latvian speakers in Riga is consistently increasing (see Figure 2).

For national socio-economic development and integration of society, it is extremely important that the language skills of the population and opportunities to use the language fulfil modern job market requirements and the demands that are put forward by the state. Although language proficiency is not the only qualification required for getting a job, a situation in which insufficient Latvian language skills prevent many needy people from finding a job, and reduce the choices and competitiveness of job

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<sup>64</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 21. The number of people belonging to ethnic minorities who speak “mainly or only Latvian” or “more Latvian than Russian” at work has increased from 9% in 1996 to 26% at the end of 2002. The number of respondents who speak “Russian more than Latvian” has declined from 64% to 41% over the same period of time.

seekers, has a negative effect on Latvia's socio-economic and regional development.<sup>65</sup> It can be predicted that companies concerned with their image and open to the requirements of the market and of their clients will be placing increasing importance on language skills, including Latvian language skills. In view of the fact that people with good Latvian language skills are currently in a more competitive position than those without, and the fact that these are usually young people, it is important to improve the competitiveness of middle-aged persons and those close to retirement age.

## Conclusions

- The effect of language proficiency on the integration of society cannot be clearly defined. On the one hand, insufficient knowledge of Latvian is an obstacle to integration since it reduces the possibilities and motivation of non-citizens to acquire citizenship and limits opportunities for communication and participation. At the same time, although the improvement of Latvian language skills does not necessarily help ethnic minorities to overcome their sense of alienation, the motivation to integrate socially, economically and politically creates additional motivation to learn and use the language.
- Although ethnicity is not a factor that can be directly linked to economic prosperity, and many members of ethnic minorities do not have much need to apply their Latvian language skills at work, the importance of Latvian in the job market is increasing, and insufficient knowledge of the language can have a negative effect on the choices and chances of job seekers.

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<sup>65</sup> Djačkova, S. "Valodas loma reģiona attīstībā [The role of language in the development of a region]." Master's thesis (2000), University of Latvia Sociology Department.

## II. LANGUAGE POLICY IN LATVIA AND LATVIAN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: THE CURRENT SITUATION

*“Linguistic integration is the one area in which the so-called consensus principle should not be applied, since different language collectives have different attitudes to language use in specific socio-linguistic functions... Consensus or compromise in the use of languages is incompatible with the principle of language hierarchy and, therefore, with guarantees for the continued existence of the Latvian language.”*

(Ina Druviete)<sup>66</sup>

*“All government institutions that directly or indirectly implement ethnopolitics must be open to a dialogue with minority organizations and promote the integration of society.”*

(“Ethnopolitics in Latvia” authors)<sup>67</sup>

The goal of this chapter is to evaluate the main measures that have been taken to improve proficiency and upgrade the role of the Latvian language:

- to examine how different institutions see the role of Latvian language proficiency in the integration of society;
- to examine how these measures have stimulated Latvian language training and the integration of society;
- to evaluate the supply-demand ratio of Latvian language training opportunities.

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<sup>66</sup> Druviete, I. “Valodas politikas loma sabiedrības integrācijas procesā [The role of language policy in the integration of society].” In: Vēbers, E. (ed.) Integrācija un etnopolitika [Integration and ethnopolitics]. Jumava (2000), p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> Apine, I., L. Dribins, A. Jansons, E. Vēbers, V. Volkovs and S. Zankovska. Etnopolitika Latvijā [Ethnopolitics in Latvia]. Rīga (2001), p. 38.

**Box 5.****What is language policy and the criteria for its analysis?**

Like any other policy, language policy, too, is “characterized by a sequence of specific goals, means and actions, and entails systematic political action involving various institutions and other agents.”<sup>68</sup> Public policy endorses and strengthens collective social values and places particular accent on the public nature of policy, on aspects such as accessibility, transparency, accountability, participation and others.<sup>69</sup>

F. Grin gives this definition of language policy: “Language policy is a systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare.”<sup>70</sup> During a debate on language policy for minority languages organized by F. Grin at the European Centre for Minority Issues in 2000, three criteria (implementation principles) were set out for analyzing language policy:

- Effectiveness (Is it possible to achieve the goals of a language policy? What is the link between the goal and the measures that must be taken?);
- Cost-effectiveness (What are the possible consequences of the measures that can be applied?);
- Democracy (Do all affected social groups participate in developing a language policy? In which way and through which institutions are language policy issues publicly debated? How is the public informed about language policy issues? How are different interests coordinated and taken into account in decision making?).

Language planning involves these key aspects: status regulation, language development, and planning of language training/use.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>68</sup> UNDP Latvia. Human Development Report 2000/2001, p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Aistara, G. “Kas ir sabiedriskā politika? [What is public policy?].” See <http://www.politika.lv/index.php?id=100487&lang=lv> (last accessed on May 5, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> Grin, F. “Evaluating Policy Measures for Minority Languages in Europe: Towards Effective, Cost-Effective and Democratic Implementation.” European Centre for Minority Issues. Flensburg, Germany, June 23–24, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Ager, D. *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*. Multilingual Matters LTD. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto, Sydney (2001), p. 6.

## 2.1. The State Language Law (1995-2000) and state language certification

Since the renewal of independence, the main goal of the official language policy in Latvia has been to reinforce the status of Latvian as the official state language and to guarantee the right to use the state language in all areas of life.<sup>72</sup> One of the key measures taken to achieve these goals was enactment of the State Language Law in 1999. Preparation of the draft law began in 1995 at the initiative of the State Language Centre, the Saeima Education, Culture and Language Committee and the Latvian Language Institute. The main arguments of the initiators were: “1) We must guarantee the right of the people of Latvia to communicate in Latvian in all areas of public life, including the private and the administrative sectors, thus ensuring the use of Latvian in everyday communication; 2) we must improve the protection mechanisms for the state language in a situation where it must compete with Russian and English; 3) we must create conditions for the integration of society on the basis of the Latvian language and put an end to the self-sufficiency of the Russian language.”<sup>73</sup>

The authors and supporters of the draft law supported the view that stricter requirements for use of the state language would improve the level of Latvian language proficiency, and this would promote the integration of society.<sup>74</sup> As I. Druviete, a Latvian Language Institute expert and one of the co-authors of the draft law, put it: “Unfortunately, economic factors favor and will continue to favor Russian and English. These languages are used by a great many people beyond our borders, and they fulfil the functions of international languages. All we can do is attempt to regulate competition between these languages with legal measures.”<sup>75</sup> The director of the State Language Centre, Dzintra Hirša, used a similar argument: “No language has ever been officially used anywhere if there is no need to use it, or if such a need has not been created.”<sup>76</sup>

This is why those who adopted the State Language Law made an increase in the use (not knowledge) of the Latvian language with the help of regulatory enactments their main goal. The need to regulate language use in private enterprises was underlined.

<sup>72</sup> In 1992, the Saeima adopted amendments to the 1989 Language Law, making Latvian the only official state language. The new law set out the levels of Latvian language proficiency that are required for carrying out professional duties in many professions in the public and private sectors.

<sup>73</sup> Valsts valodas politikas īstenošana Latvijā: Valsts valodas centrs 1992–2002 [Implementation of the language policy in Latvia: State Language Centre 1992–2002]. State Language Centre (2002), p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> Grīnvalds, D. “Sods vai gods [Punishment or honor].” *Rīgas Balss*, March 18, 1998.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Hirša, Dz. “Valsts valoda Latvijā: nevis dilemma, bet aksioma [The state language in Latvia: not a dilemma, but an axiom].” *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, February 18, 1999.

The supporters of the law felt that use of the state language by the ethnic minorities would not increase if motivation to learn the language were not provided by the law. I. Druviete said: “We risk ending up with an expensive but pointless process – just teaching and teaching Latvian. If there is no incentive to use the language for practical purposes, it is simply like pouring water into a leaking bucket – a vicious circle.”<sup>77</sup> Dz. Hirša underlined that the ground had already been broken for stricter regulation of the use of the state language because Latvian had already been the official state language for nine years, and everyone had undergone certification of language proficiency.<sup>78</sup> She also felt that “while the situation remains such that the Russian language can enjoy a certain degree of self-sufficiency, integration will not take place.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite serious criticism from a number of international organizations and local experts, the State Language Law was passed following the third reading.<sup>80</sup> However, the newly elected president, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, referred it back to the parliament for revision. Although international organizations (OSCE and the European Union) have found that the current version of the law generally complies with Latvia’s international commitments, concern has been voiced about implementation of the law, which will greatly depend on the interpretation of public officials.<sup>81</sup>

In August 2000, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted regulations for implementation of many of the provisions of the law (regulations on translation at public events, on language use in information, on orthography and gender identification of names and surnames, etc.). Both the law and the regulations took effect on September 1, 2000.

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<sup>77</sup> Grīnvalds, D. “Sods vai gods [Punishment or honour].” *Rīgas Balss*, March 18, 1998.

<sup>78</sup> *Diena*, February 10, 1998.

<sup>79</sup> Hirša, Dz. “Valsts valoda Latvijā: nevis dilemma, be aksioma [The state language in Latvia: not a dilemma, but an axiom].” *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, February 18, 1999.

<sup>80</sup> International organizations – first and foremost the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities for Minority Issues Max van der Stoep and the CBSS Human Rights Commissioner on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for the Baltic States Ole Espersen, as well as members of the European Commission and the European Council – criticized the draft law. The main objections concerned regulation of language use in the private sector: in private companies, at public events, in public information, etc. It was pointed out that these regulations failed to comply with Latvia’s international commitments and could prove to be a serious obstacle to Latvia’s membership in the EU. Muižnieks, N. and I. Brands-Kehris. “Latvia and the EU.” In: Kubicek, P. (ed.) *The European Union and Democratization*. Routledge (2003). (Prepared for publication.)

<sup>81</sup> The law now makes a more pronounced distinction between use of the state language in the public and private sectors. In accordance with the law, those who are employed in the private sector must know and use the state language if their work affects the legitimate rights of society – public safety, health, morals, health care, consumer rights, labour rights, safety at work, public supervision.

In August 2000, the Cabinet also adopted Rules on the Degree of State Language Proficiency Required for Discharge of Professional and Official Duties and on the Procedure for Testing Language Proficiency. In contrast to the previous regulations, following the recommendations of European experts each of the three language proficiency levels was subdivided into two additional levels – the A and B levels. In accordance with the new regulations, the level of state language proficiency required of the employees of private companies for the performance of professional duties is determined by the employer. In the case of self-employed persons, this is determined by the persons themselves. In private companies that have public functions or whose work affects legitimate public interests, the required level of state language proficiency is determined in accordance with a list that is included in the regulations. The list of professions and jobs in private companies that are affected by the law has been curtailed. The employers themselves must prepare a list of professions and jobs in their company, indicating the state language proficiency degree or level required for each. The employer can coordinate the list with the State Language Centre.

#### The effect of the State Language Law on integration of society and use of the Latvian language

The results of surveys that have been carried out over a longer period of time (see Chapter 1.1) lead to the conclusion that the new law has not significantly increased use of the state language in the last few years or the motivation of ethnic minorities to learn the language. An increase in use of Latvian at work (which was one of the main goals of the law) was already observed before the State Language Law was passed. Attempts to increase use of the state language in the private sphere with the help of laws and regulations have been unsuccessful and have simply increased political and ethnic tensions. In the end, the draft law was liberalized because it failed to comply with international human rights standards. Now, however, some of the original authors of the law consider the Cabinet regulations to be in contradiction with the principles of state language use in the whole territory of Latvia and doubt that they will be able to ensure an increase in the use of Latvian in all areas of public communication: liberalization of the law as well as “*the contradictory actions of international organizations do not benefit the status of the Latvian language or the integration of society.*”<sup>82</sup> Some experts feel that the law will not encourage use of the Latvian language because this has largely been left to the discretion of the employers.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Ina Druviere, University of Latvia professor, April 26, 2001.

<sup>83</sup> From discussions with Daugavpils experts (see Appendix).

Successful enactment of the law was handicapped by these main factors:

- The law was adopted by a small group of policymakers, without sufficiently informing or consulting ethnic minority organizations and the public in general. Amendments to the law and the Cabinet regulations were made under pressure from international organizations, which contributed to alienation of ethnic minorities from the political elite and convinced them that the state ignores the views and interests of its subjects.
- There was no agreement between integration and language policy experts on the best ways of implementing language policy, for example, the best way to strengthen the position of the Latvian language – with legislative or other measures. Many experts in Latvia – supporters of a civic society – expressed dissatisfaction with the initial versions of the law and the regulations, pointing out that an increase in the use of Latvian must be achieved with positive motivation and language training methods.

#### Box 6.

#### Views of Daugavpils residents on the State Language Law

**Has anything changed since the new State Language Law was passed?**

**Marija:** *Meetings take place in Latvian now. Everyone has started to speak Latvian, whether they are able to or not.*

**What is your attitude to this law?**

*... (laughs) What can we do?*

**Tatjana:** *Normal. I am pleased that corrections were made to the law, so that people who have category 3 do not have to take the test again in order to get category 5 or, what is it now, category 8. But if this hadn't been changed, what would we have had then? That is the highest category, after all. Everyone passed the test, but now we would have to repeat it. It could go on endlessly. Along will come someone new and think of something else to change. But it doesn't matter that meetings are in Latvian. Those who speak Russian will talk less, make it shorter.*

**Marija:** *They tried to scare us with this law. But it isn't at all that awful.*

**Tatjana:** *Maybe it depends on the colleagues and the atmosphere at work.*

**Nellija:** *I have nothing to say. I don't really know much about it.*

**Zinaida:** *The law doesn't work. Where I work, it doesn't work.*

**Marija:** *Where I work, everything is fine. Maybe it only works at DPU\*.*

**Zinaīda:** *The law isn't functional. I don't see any point to it. Things must be changed gradually. Do you know how much the officials who check how the law works make? A lot. There's system to it now. And that's the only thing that works. There will be laws on paper, but life will go on by its own laws. People will find a way of coping.*

**Why is there such a negative public opinion of this law?**

**Zinaīda:** *In some ways, the law is discriminating. You can't simply inject something into a person without producing antibodies. You can obey the law, but in your heart you are against it. Good produces good, but force produces counterforce. People have lost their self-respect. What is Me? It is awareness of yourself. The first thing, now, is to learn the language. Why don't people have any self-respect? Because they feel discriminated. You aren't free, you are immediately put in your place.*

Source: Excerpts from a focus-group discussion with Daugavpils residents in May 2001.

\* Daugavpils Pedagogical University.

### The role of state language certification in promoting Latvian language training

*"...progress in Latvian language training has been made due to the strict requirements of the law, i.e., the legal motivation to know and use... the Latvian language."*

(Ina Druviete)<sup>84</sup>

*"If I had the money, I would buy that certificate."*

*"As long as I live here, I will never start to speak Latvian. I don't think I will ever overcome this barrier because I sometimes use the wrong endings, the wrong prepositions. Although, I did pass the test for the 3rd category."*

(excerpts from interviews with Daugavpils residents)

State language certification policy has generally contributed to the improvement of Latvian language proficiency and consolidation of the status of the Latvian language, but it has not significantly improved the staying power of Latvian language skills or practical use of the language. The impact of certification policy on the integration of

<sup>84</sup> Druviete, I. "Valodas politikas loma sabiedrības integrācijas procesā [The role of language policy in the integration of society]." In: Vēbers, E. (ed.) *Integrācija un etnopolitika [Integration and ethno-policy]*. Jumava (2000), pp. 184–196.

society is twofold. On the one hand, passing the certification test helps people to find jobs or keep the ones that they already have. Passing the certification test remains one of the main motives for adults to learn Latvian. On the other hand, the test is an obstacle for those job seekers who for financial or other reasons are unable to prepare for the test: pre-retirement-age persons, unemployed persons, persons with low incomes. It is therefore important to consider possibilities of supporting the economic integration of such people through Latvian language training.

On May 25, 1992, the Republic of Latvia Council of Ministers adopted Regulations on State Language Proficiency Certification, which stipulated that all persons employed by government agencies or state-owned companies, whose professional duties include contacts with the population or dealing with official paperwork, and who have not attended Latvian-language schools, must undergo state (mandatory) language certification. The regulations set out the requirements for three different levels of language proficiency. These were applied in accordance with the office or profession of the employee. The Regulations on Permanent Certification Commissions that were adopted on April 14, 1993, stated that the state language test could be taken (voluntarily) by any person living in Latvia who required a state language proficiency certificate in order to carry out a specific job.<sup>85</sup>

A large part of the labor force in Latvia has successfully passed the state language test.<sup>86</sup> At the end of 2002, 56% of the respondents aged 15 to 75 whose native language is not Latvian had passed the language test; 43% had not taken the test and only 0.3% had failed the test.<sup>87</sup> The majority of the respondents (51%) had received the second-level certificate; 24%, the first-level, and 23%, the third-level certificate. The majority of those who had not taken the test were older people, but about one-third were in the 35–49 and 15–34 age groups. The majority of those who do not have a state language proficiency certificate are pensioners, housewives and unemployed persons. These people usually also have slightly lower incomes.

There is a discrepancy between the proficiency levels that are obtained in the test and respondents' personal assessment of their Latvian language proficiency: according to surveys, the majority of the respondents say that they know Latvian at the lowest

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<sup>85</sup> Valsts valoda Latvijā [The state language in Latvia]. State Language Centre. Riga (1992). In 2001, responsibility for the organization of state language proficiency certification was transferred from the State Language Centre to the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination (CCDE) of the Ministry of Education and Science, but control of the state language certification process remained in the hands of the State Language Centre.

<sup>86</sup> At the end of 2001, approximately 500,000 people had passed the state language certification test. Interview with Dzintra Hirša, director of the State Language Centre, September 25, 2001.

<sup>87</sup> "Valoda [Language]" survey, p. 25.

level.<sup>88</sup> This data and interviews with experts and residents suggest that actual proficiency levels are lower than certification levels. Language training is often an exercise undertaken to fulfil formal requirements, and the language skills that are acquired are usually not maintained or improved (see Box 7). Many of those who took the language test at the beginning of the 90s were employed in the public sector. The decline in the need to use Latvian was promoted by new employment opportunities in the private sector and an increase in unemployment.

Experts have different and sometimes even conflicting views regarding the impact of state language proficiency on Latvian language training and the integration of society. For example, University of Latvia professor Ina Druviete feels that state language certification has been the main language policy measure that has helped to strengthen the position of the Latvian language and stimulate Latvian language training.<sup>89</sup> According to Druviete, those who are economically motivated have already learned Latvian, have already obtained the state language proficiency certificate and, in this way, are already economically integrated into Latvian society. On the other hand, the director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, Nils Muižnieks, finds that language certification has, from the very start, increased alienation of the ethnic minorities from the state, failed to strengthened the desire of non-citizens to acquire citizenship, and served to promote corruption.<sup>90</sup>

#### Box 7.

#### State language certification: the views of a Daugavpils resident

*As to whether one must know Latvian – yes, certainly. Of course, a lot was spoiled at the very beginning, when society was divided into two parts, when there was such a negative attitude to Russians. People understood that they have to know Latvian. But they were forced to learn it, no one showed any consideration for them... You can't force anyone, it won't work. You take courses and then there is no one to talk to. There is your family, your friends, your job, and the courses are only 2–3 classes. You will learn something, but three weeks later, you won't remember any of it.*

Source: Excerpt from a focus-group discussion with Daugavpils residents, May 2001.

<sup>88</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 25.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with University of Latvia professor Ina Druviete, April 26, 2001.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Nils Muižnieks, director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, September 24, 2001.

More than half of those who passed the language test in 2001 were unemployed. There has been an increase in the number of persons who wish to take the test and who have no certificate for any level of Latvian language proficiency.<sup>91</sup> There has also been an increase in the number of persons who wish to take the second-level test. At the same time, the certification requirements are not offset by opportunities to learn the language since the demand for Latvian language training opportunities by far exceeds supply (see below).

All in all, the state language certification policy has promoted the improvement of Latvian language skills and strengthened the position of the Latvian language, but it has not served to significantly improve practical use and further development of these skills. This is partly because in many companies Latvian is used only to the extent that is required for carrying out professional duties.

Analysis of Latvian language training projects has shown that the requirements of the current state language test are often considered to be too complicated, especially for older people. There is also a lack of information about the requirements of the test. The CCDE is trying to solve this problem with the help of an information booklet.<sup>92</sup>

## 2.2. The National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT)

One of the most important mechanisms for the implementation of language policy has been the National Program for Latvian Language Training (1995–2006), which has made a significant contribution to the improvement of Latvian language proficiency and the dialogue with ethnic minorities. At the same time, the demand for Latvian language training is significantly greater than the capacity for satisfying this demand due to a shortage of qualified teachers and materials and a lack of coordination among various institutions.

In 1994, the Latvian government under V. Birkavs asked the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to set up and head a mission of experts that would help to develop and implement a national Latvian language training program. In 1996, the Ministry of Education and Science launched the National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT). The program receives financial support from the European Union, UNDP, and the governments of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, the

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with CCDE employee Dace Dalbiņa, December 20, 2001.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Netherlands, Canada, Norway, Great Britain and the USA. NPLLT has been under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Science since 2001. In 2001, the national budget contributed 428,000 lats to funding of the program; in 2002, 425,932 lats.<sup>93</sup> In effect, the government has assigned NPLLT a key role in the implementation of the language policy.

The principal NPLLT goal is “to consolidate society in Latvia by lessening linguistic segregation and promoting the evolution of common values.”<sup>94</sup> Today, NPLLT is the main government institution responsible for helping ethnic minorities to fulfil the Latvian language proficiency requirements anchored in the law. The program organizes various activities: courses, preparation of teaching materials, preparation of language programs for TV and radio, etc. The philosophy of the program comprises these main principles:

- language training on a voluntary basis,
- establishment of a more positive and benevolent learning environment,
- focus on the Latvian language as a modern and widely-used language,
- language training for practical use, not just for passing a test.<sup>95</sup>

NPLLT priorities have been the training of teacher-trainers (multipliers) and teachers, and the implementation of the bilingual reform: 70% of the funding for LAT 2 (Latvian as the second language) courses is spent on in-service training of LAT 2 teachers and minority school subject teachers. All in all, NPLLT has contributed to improvement of the educational system as far as language training is concerned by developing a methodological basis for Latvian language training, training multipliers and preparing teaching materials.<sup>96</sup>

Since 1997, NPLLT has invested approximately 30% of its financial resources for language courses in Latvian language training for adults. In the period from 1996 to 2002, about 50,000 members of various professional and social groups attended NPLLT courses (see Table 2). In 2002, NPLLT also organized Latvian language courses for the

<sup>93</sup> NPLLT Annual Report 2002. Riga (2003).

<sup>94</sup> “National Program for Latvian Language Training.” NPLLT Newsletter No. 3, 2001.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> “National Program for Latvian Language Training (NPLLT).” Newspaper *Izglītība un kultūra* [Education and Culture] insert. NPLLT materials.

parents of school students to improve their understanding of bilingual education. NPLLT's choice of target groups is based on the following principles:

- language proficiency of the target group will have a positive impact on as broad a spectrum of society as possible;
- improved language skills will keep more good professionals employed in the public sector;
- the requirements of different laws that restrict the job opportunities of persons with poor language skills will be fulfilled;
- the target group will function as a medium that fosters a positive attitude to and understanding of ongoing processes in Latvia among those who do not speak the state language.<sup>97</sup>

Table 2. Professional and social groups that have attended NPLLT courses, 1996–2002

|                                       | From 1996 to June 2001 | 2002         |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Schoolteachers                        | 15,413                 | 2,370        |
| Preschool teachers                    | 5,694                  | 1,093        |
| Employees of law enforcement agencies | 1,862                  | 432          |
| Medical personnel                     | 1,862                  | 603          |
| Army recruits                         | 950                    | 252          |
| Young people at summer camps          | 948                    | 316          |
| Local government employees            | 919                    | 216          |
| Youth                                 | 590                    | 338          |
| Unemployed persons                    | 476                    | –            |
| Latvian Railroad employees            | 284                    | –            |
| Disabled persons                      | 251                    | 15           |
| Journalists                           | 237                    | 31           |
| Interned juveniles                    | 144                    | –            |
| <b>Total</b>                          | <b>42,630</b>          | <b>5,913</b> |

Source: NPLLT Newsletter No. 3, 2001. NPLLT Annual Report 2002. Riga (2003).

<sup>97</sup> "National Program for Latvian Language Training." NPLLT Newsletter No. 3, 2001.

Although NPLLT embraces a broad spectrum of the adult population, the number of persons who have attended the courses is relatively small. As already mentioned, only 12% of the respondents whose native language is not Latvian and who have attended language courses have attended the NPLLT courses. The rapid decline in public awareness of NPLLT in recent years suggests that NPLLT teaching materials are not being widely used.<sup>98</sup>

It must be pointed out that NPLLT also attempts to make other forms of Latvian language training (besides language courses) accessible to the public: for example, with publication of the “Palīgā [Help]” textbook series complete with video materials, as well as dictionaries, workbooks and audiocassettes. NPLLT prepares language programs for television and radio, for the Internet, and in CD format. As was pointed out in Chapter 1, the fact that there is a growing demand for self-education books and language programs on television and the Internet must be seen as a positive development.

NPLLT has had a wide network of partners for development and implementation of the language policy, among them both governmental and non-governmental organizations. NPLLT has had good cooperation with several public organizations that provide help for people trying to learn Latvian: the Businesswomen’s Club, the Adult Education Association, the Association of the Disabled and Friends “Apeironi”. In cooperation with public organizations, NPLLT has financed the work of teachers and organized language courses. This model for dealing with language problems reduces the cost of the courses since administration and part of the financing is taken over by the public organizations. Cooperation with NPLLT is a guarantee for the quality of the courses. NPLLT teachers also take part in courses organized by the Latvian Folk School and the Latvian Adult Education Association. One problem that arises from cooperation with other educational institutions is the shortage of NPLLT teachers and their excessive workload, which can have a negative effect on the quality of teachers’ work.<sup>99</sup> Currently, there are about 1,200 teachers working for NPLLT, which is not enough for the situation in Latvia. This is one of the reasons why NPLLT is focusing on the training of multipliers.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> In comparison with 1997, when only 37% of the respondents knew nothing about NPLLT, by the end of 2002 this figure had risen to 58% (51% Latvians, 67% Russians and 60% other nationalities). This downward trend can partly be explained by the fact that in 1997 NPLLT had a larger number of presentations in connection with the contributions of foreign sponsors to the program. “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 18.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Aija Priedīte, director of the NPLLT Latvian Language Program Unit, December 20, 2001.

<sup>100</sup> “Tas akmeņainais ceļš no ‘viņi’ uz ‘mēs’ [The rocky road from ‘they’ to ‘we’].” *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, April 10, 2001.

NPLLT has also cooperated with the National Employment Service (see detailed analysis of NES in Chapter 2.7) and supported various language training initiatives for unemployed persons who are undergoing professional retraining and for young people. In an effort to address the problem of unemployment, NPLLT has tried to cooperate with the local governments in Liepāja and Ludza. Unemployed persons were given the opportunity to attend cost-free Latvian language courses, but, in return, were asked to take part in occasional community work (e.g., seasonal jobs, street maintenance, etc.). However, insufficient cooperation and lack of interest on part of the local governments put an end to this project.<sup>101</sup>

In view of the experience that NPLLT has acquired, it would be wise to expand this institution's role as an intermediary between government institutions, public organizations and the public. NPLLT should carry out consultative functions and inform the public about opportunities to improve Latvian language skills. According to the original plan, NPLLT is set to close down in 2006, so that it is important to start thinking about the future development and existence of a Latvian language training system.

### 2.3. The role of the ethnic minority education reform in Latvian language training and the integration of society

There is a good reason for making improvement of the Latvian language skills of minority school students a language policy goal: in the long run the educational system must become the main mechanism for Latvian language training. However, although it is true that changes in ethnic minority schools in regard to the Latvian language have contributed to improving students' language skills, a lot remains to be done. The effect of the education reform on the integration of society, on the other hand, has been less positive than anticipated, since the language of instruction in schools continues to be an issue that divides society. The education reform has not been launched in a sufficiently public manner and subsequently has not encouraged effective public participation in decision making

The main role in the integration of society and in Latvian language training has been assigned to the educational system. For example, the authors of the National Program for the Integration of Society in Latvia see children and youths as the main target group in the integration process and consider that the educational system should "guarantee

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Aija Priedite, director of the NPLLT Latvian Language Program Unit, December 20, 2001.

that both universal and typically Latvian values are imparted and passed on along with intercultural education and preservation of the cultural identity of the ethnic minorities.”<sup>102</sup>

In the 2002/2003 school year, there were 237.4 thousand students attending Latvian schools, 101.4 thousand enrolled in Russian schools, 1 thousand in Polish schools and 394 students in the schools of other ethnic minorities.<sup>103</sup>

In 1995, amendments were made to the Law on Education, which prescribed that, from September 1, 1996, two subjects at minority elementary schools and three subjects at minority secondary schools should be taught in Latvian. In 1995, an international committee of experts drafted a national Latvian language training program, which anticipated a gradual increase in the percentage of subjects taught in Latvian, from 10% in the first grade to 50% in grades 8 and 9. In 1998, the Ministry of Education and Science drafted a program for a gradual transition to instruction in the state language. An Integration Office was set up at the ministry's General Education Department and charged with supervision of bilingual education. In accordance with the transition regulations of the Law on Education that was adopted in 1998, the transition to bilingual education at ethnic minority general education schools was launched in the 1999/2000 school year. Schools can choose one of four bilingual education models proposed by the Ministry of Education and Science. These models prescribe the proportions of language use in class and the rate/intensity of the transition to use of the Latvian language. Pursuant to the Law on Education, from the year 2004, all minority schools financed by the government or local governments must start teaching subjects in Latvian in the 10th grade. The May 2003 amendments to the Regulations on National General Secondary Education Standards that were adopted in 2000 stipulate that each year, from September 1, 2004, starting in the 10th grade, the curriculum at ethnic minority schools must include no less than five subjects that are taught in Latvian. This does not include Latvian language and literature. Up to two-fifths of the total number of classes in each year's curriculum may be taught in the native language.<sup>104</sup>

Surveys show that the Latvian language skills of minority school students are better than those of other population groups: 25.7% speak Latvian fluently (11.8% in 1998), 44.9% at the middle level.<sup>105</sup> The experts who were interviewed admit that Latvian

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<sup>102</sup> National Program for the Integration of Society in Latvia 2001. *Integration of Society in Latvia*. Riga (2001).

<sup>103</sup> See: [http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/Statistika/Stat\\_2002\\_ISVD/visp\\_izgl.htm](http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/Statistika/Stat_2002_ISVD/visp_izgl.htm) (last accessed on November 23, 2003).

<sup>104</sup> Ethnic Minority General Secondary Education Program Model, approved by the Ministry of Education and Science, July 15, 2003, Instruction No. 341, p. 5. <http://www.izm.gov.lv>

<sup>105</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 61.

language proficiency among students is constantly improving (see summary of focus-group discussions in the Appendix). The reason for this trend is that the younger generation generally links its future prospects to knowledge of the state language. This attitude is supported by government policy and encouraged by parents. Well-prepared and productive application of bilingual methods helps students to learn Latvian – an observation that has been made at a number of different schools.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, about one third of school and university or college students still have poor Latvian language skills.<sup>107</sup> This is why they are often unable to fully demonstrate their knowledge at subject championships, which are held in Latvian.<sup>108</sup> Another indication of the insufficient language skills of young people is the fact that approximately 49% of school and university or college students feel that they would benefit from Latvian language courses and 59% would like to get help from private teachers (see table 4 in the Appendix).

The authors of the bilingual reform (the Ministry of Education and Science, NPLLT, experts and others) underline that bilingual education is an important integration mechanism, since it promotes the bilingual development of children from ethnic minorities and allows them to compete in the job market.<sup>109</sup> Surveys show that society in Latvia also supports the need for the bilingual education reform.<sup>110</sup>

Despite the government's investments in the education reform, experts have expressed fears that financial support for the reform is still insufficient and that the reform itself has been poorly prepared and managed.<sup>111</sup> Although the survey that was carried out in

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<sup>106</sup> Vēbers, E. "Reform of Bilingual Education." In: *A Passport to Social Cohesion and Economic Prosperity. Report on Education in Latvia 2000*. Soros Foundation – Latvia. Riga (2001).

<sup>107</sup> "Valoda [Language]" survey, p. 61.

<sup>108</sup> Zeļcermans, B. and N. Rogaļeva. "Minority Education Policies in Latvia: Who Determines Them and How?" In: *A Passport to Social Cohesion and Economic Prosperity. Report on Education in Latvia 2000*. Soros Foundation – Latvia. Riga (2001).

<sup>109</sup> Vēbers, E. "Reform of Bilingual Education." In: *A Passport to Social Cohesion and Economic Prosperity. Report on Education in Latvia 2000*. Soros Foundation – Latvia. Riga (2001).

<sup>110</sup> BSSI, Naturalization Board. "On the Way to a Civic Society" program. Sociological survey, November 2000. Report 2001. According to the survey, bilingual education is supported by 81% of the citizens and 74% of the non-citizens.

<sup>111</sup> It has been pointed out that greater attention was devoted to the training of bilingual teachers only in 2000, when the reform was launched. Vēbers, E. "Reform of Bilingual Education." In: *A Passport to Social Cohesion and Economic Prosperity. Report on Education in Latvia 2000*. Soros Foundation – Latvia. Riga (2001), pp. 77–87.

2002 showed that minority school teachers assess their level of preparedness for bilingual education as average or high, insufficient knowledge of Latvian and bilingual teaching methods is a serious problem.<sup>112</sup> In the past few years, as a result of growing public attention to the education reform, the government has stepped up its efforts to improve preparations for the reform. It has allocated greater budget funds to raising the salaries of Latvian language teachers who teach subjects in Latvian and also use bilingual education methods, to earmarked subsidies for the purchase of special literature for ethnic minority schools, and to support for bilingual education centres.<sup>113</sup>

More critical than the public attitude to bilingual education methods as such is the attitude to introduction of the state language as the language of instruction in general education schools by the year 2004. Many ethnic minority organizations do not associate improvement of the quality of education with the ethnic minority secondary school reform. There is widespread opinion that the reform is an attempt at assimilation, and that it will have a negative effect on the ethnic identity of the students and their knowledge of the native language and culture. Several ethnic minority NGOs are opposed to the requirement of the Law on Education for a transition to secondary school education in the state language from 2004 and demand that the state-financed Russian-language schools be maintained.<sup>114</sup> Several of the Russian schools do not really understand the purpose of the reform and do not support it. They argue that the reform has not been sufficiently prepared and that students will have problems learning subjects if they are taught in Latvian.

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<sup>112</sup> According to the 2002 survey, in their own assessment, more than one-third of minority school teachers have lowest-level Latvian language skills and only 10% have the highest-level, although all teachers at state schools are required to know Latvian at the highest level.

BSSI in cooperation with the Canadian International Development Agency, OSCE and SFL. *Analysis of the Implementation of Bilingual Education*. Riga (2002).

<sup>113</sup> For example, government financing for Latvian language teachers who teach subjects in Latvian and also use bilingual education methods was increased from 200,000 lats in 1999 to 808,368 lats in 2002. Ethnic minority schools have received 50,000 lats for the purchase of special textbooks. In cooperation with local governments, 7,000 to 10,000 lats are being invested in four bilingual education centres. In 2003, the government's budget for implementation of the education reform is 1,375 thousand lats (957,000 lats included in the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science plus a subsidy of 418,000 lats for NPLLT). See: <http://www.izm.gov.lv/lv/VID/mazakumtaut/jaunumi.htm>

<sup>114</sup> The most active organizations are the Support Association for Latvia's Russian-Language Schools, the Russian Community in Latvia, the Association of Russian Language and Literature Teachers, and others. The Ventspils Non-Citizens Council has also been actively trying to influence education policy on this issue. On April 12, 2003, 12 public organizations and a number of deputies from the For Human Rights in a United Latvia parliamentary faction set up a centre of operations for the protection of Russian schools. A number of protest initiatives against the education reform have been planned.

It should be noted that young people have greater Latvian language training and integration opportunities than the middle and older generations, thanks to the educational system. The Latvian language environment of young people is enhanced by opportunities to participate in activities that contribute to improvement of intercultural communication: language clubs, debating clubs, language camps, projects, publication of newspapers, etc. A number of governmental and public organizations are also involved in such projects: NPLLT, Soros Foundation – Latvia, the Foundation for the Integration of Society.

The Latvian language training process at professional and higher education institutions must also be evaluated. Although the Law on Education says that the language of instruction at state-financed professional and higher education schools is Latvian, it has been observed that students at professional (secondary vocational) education schools often have poor Latvian language skills.<sup>115</sup>

#### 2.4. The National Program for the Integration of Society and the activities of the Foundation for the Integration of Society

Latvian language training is one of the main priorities of the National Program for the Integration of Society (hereinafter, Integration Program). Nevertheless, the majority of the Latvian language training projects have not been carried out as part of the Integration Program or with the help of the Foundation for the Integration of Society (FIS), but with foreign and partial government financing. FIS activities to initiate and improve Latvian language training opportunities for adults can be considered a positive contribution. Whether or not these efforts bring the desired results will greatly depend on the chosen strategy, effective coordination of the activities of the responsible institutions, and available financing.

A Framework Document on the National Program for the Integration of Society was drafted in the summer of 1998.<sup>116</sup> The document was revised in the summer of 1999, following the public hearings that were held in the spring of that same year. In July 2000, the Cabinet approved the short version of the National Program and charged the

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<sup>115</sup> Observations of National Employment Service officials.

<sup>116</sup> The project was initiated by the Naturalisation Board (NB), various public and international organizations (Soros Foundation – Latvia, NPLLT, the OSCE Mission to Latvia, UNDP, etc.) and members of the Latvian intelligentsia, and drafted by a working group set up by the Cabinet of Ministers.

Ministry of Justice with its implementation. In November 2000, a Department for the Integration of Society was set up at the Ministry of Justice. The final version of the National Program for the Integration of Society was approved in February 2001. In October 2001, the Foundation for the Integration of Society (FIS) was established.

The long period of time that it took to adopt the program and agree on the mechanism for its implementation indicates that the National Program for the Integration of Society was not on the government's list of priorities. The integration policy was implemented largely due to pressure from interest groups in Latvia and foreign organizations. A number of integration projects were carried out even before FIS was established. Within the past year, however, the government has increased its support for integration. The main indication of this was the creation of the new post of Special Assignments Minister for Integration Affairs and a Secretariat in November 2002. This institution is in charge of implementation and coordination of the Integration Program and ethnic minority policy.

### The National Program for the Integration of Society

The Integration Program underlines that "one of the principal requirements for the integration of persons of other nationalities is Latvian language proficiency."<sup>117</sup> The "Education, Language, Culture" section of the document accents the need for a common language "both in a linguistic sense and in regard to development and understanding of a common system of values." The main goal of the language policy is defined as follows: "To develop a stable society which has a common state language – the Latvian language – and which ensures opportunities to use this language in public communication in the whole territory of the country, as well as support for the opportunities of ethnic minorities to cultivate and use their native languages in accordance with Latvia's laws and regulations." The Integration Program underscores the need to consolidate the state language status of the Latvian language, at the same time "respecting the rights of ethnic minorities to cultivate and preserve their language and culture as the basis of their ethnic identity." However, the program does not address the use of ethnic minority languages, nor does it include concrete measures for the protection of ethnic minority rights.

The program places emphasis on a consistent increase in the percentage of Latvian-speakers and acceptance of the status of the Latvian language by the ethnic minorities.

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<sup>117</sup> National Program for the Integration of Society. Riga (2001).

It points out the factors that hinder the improvement of Latvian language skills, in particular the passive attitude to use of the language on the part of the Latvians themselves. Three main areas are outlined for measures that must be taken in regard to language:

- **Establishment of a legal basis for language functions** in accordance with Latvia's international commitments, and improvement of legislation on ethnic minority rights, in order to "balance and stabilize the relationship between the state language and ethnic minority languages";
- **Promotion of the Latvian language as an instrument of integration in all manner of public communication;** publication of more "information materials for Latvian-language users – dictionaries, grammar textbooks, handbooks, etc. – and popular linguistic literature";
- **Expansion of Latvian-language communication networks** to establish contacts between speakers of different languages with the aid of positive stimuli.

The "Education" section of the program concentrates on **strengthening of the bilingual education system**. The goals set out in this section correspond to those set out in the 1998 Law on Education. Ethnic minority education is primarily focused on improvement of Latvian language skills, with the accent on transition to a "common education system." The Integration Program mentions insufficient Latvian language skills and poor education as reasons for **the inability of unemployed persons of other nationalities (ethnic minorities) to compete in the job market**.<sup>118</sup> It also points out that financial problems prevent many people from taking advantage of opportunities to learn Latvian.<sup>119</sup>

The Integration Program deals both with projects that are already underway and those that are only planned. Among the most important of the language-related projects included in the program are:

- Diversified NPLLT activities in the next couple of years;
- Latvian language training for persons who have expressed a desire to apply for citizenship (for details see Chapter 2.4). This project is being carried out by the Naturalization Board in cooperation with the Latvian Folk School and foreign donors;

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<sup>118</sup> National Program for the Integration of Society. Riga (2001), p. 41.

<sup>119</sup> Draft of the National Program for the Integration of Society. Riga (1999), p. 33.

- Development of a standardized adult education system for teaching Latvian, Latvian history and culture, and the basics of Latvia's constitutional and democratic system. This project was intended for the general public, but was not developed further. A possible candidate for implementation was the Naturalization Board in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, the Latvian Folk School and other public organizations and local governments. The project has not been carried out;
- Integration into the job market of unemployed persons of other nationalities. The project anticipated Latvian language courses for unemployed persons whose native language is not Latvian. The project was submitted to FIS by the Ministry of Welfare in November 2001, but was not approved (see Section 2.7, Activities of the National Employment Service).

### Implementation of the National Program for the Integration of Society

The Foundation for the Integration of Society<sup>120</sup> is the key mechanism for implementation of the Integration Program. FIS functions include raising, accumulating, administering and distributing funds; establishing criteria for assessing, preparing and submitting projects; posting project competitions; drafting proposals for the Cabinet on the necessary budget funds for implementation of the integration process, etc. The Foundation is financed by the government and local governments, donations from legal and natural persons, and revenue from commercial activities.

In 2002, the FIS budget comprised 447,000 lats, of which 282,000 were contributed by the national budget, but 165,000 came from EU PHARE funds. This year, the Foundation has supported 113 projects on which it has spent 312,947 lats, which includes 193,241 lats for ethnic integration projects.<sup>121</sup> In 2003, FIS will administer

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<sup>120</sup> The Foundation is administered by the Board, day-to-day affairs are carried out by the Secretariat, and integration projects are evaluated by one of the responsible committees (7 committees). The FIS by-law stipulates that the Foundation's budget resources are distributed by the Board, which is made up of the Minister of Education and Science, the Minister of Welfare, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development, a representative of the Latvian President, five local government representatives from Kurzeme, Vidzeme, Latgale, Zemgale and Riga, five representatives of non-governmental organizations. The Foundation's executive body is the Secretariat. Law on the Foundation for the Integration of Society, Sections 9 and 11.

<sup>121</sup> In December 2001, the FIS Board decided that, starting from the year 2002, 50% of the Foundation's funds would be granted to ethnic integration projects, 30% to social integration, and 20% to regional integration.

PHARE funds and the ACCESS program for building a civil society. In 2003 and 2004, funding from foreign sources will increase to 1,400,000 lats, and 600,000 will be contributed by the national budget.<sup>122</sup> It should be noted, however, that PHARE funding is not intended for the support of FIS Latvian language training activities.

Since the end of 2001, FIS has provided a relatively small amount of financing for the following activities, which are directly or indirectly connected with Latvian language training:

- a competition for teaching organizations at the beginning of 2002: Latvian language courses for persons wishing to apply for citizenship; the project was carried out with the participation of 250 naturalization candidates (see next section);
- a project competition for the second half of 2002: the model of an organization for providing FIS-funded Latvian language training for adults, available to the general public;
- support for NGO projects that involve ethnic integration;
- support for local governments for development of integration programs;
- support for student exchanges and school cooperation programs;
- a number of small projects connected with implementation of the bilingual education reform and Latvian language training in the educational system.

## 2.5. Latvian language training for naturalization candidates: the activities of the Naturalization Board and the Foundation for the Integration of Society

In view of the low Latvian language proficiency levels of non-citizens, Latvian language courses for adults who wish to acquire Latvian citizenship are among the most important measures for the promotion of naturalization, public participation and Latvian language training. This is substantiated by the great demand for the courses that have been initiated by the Naturalization Board and FIS in cooperation with the Latvian Folk School and foreign donors. However, whether or not these projects can be continued will to a great extent depend on the availability of government and foreign funds, and on the strategies of various institutions involved in such projects.

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<sup>122</sup> Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. Human Rights in Latvia in 2002, p. 23.

The Naturalization Board in cooperation with the Latvian Folk School (non-governmental organization) and foreign donors has been organizing Latvian language courses for naturalization candidates since 2000.<sup>123</sup> This initiative was launched as a pilot project in January 2000 by the Naturalization Board in cooperation with the US NGO Freedom House and the Latvian Folk School. In January 2000, approximately 800 persons with no previous Latvian language skills were enrolled in a 48-lesson Latvian language program. The cost-free lessons helped 78% of those who took the course to pass the Latvian language test. However, in Latgale the number of lessons was insufficient and only about 50% of those who took the course in Daugavpils, the Daugavpils District and the Krāslava District were able to pass the naturalization test.<sup>124</sup>

The aforementioned project was continued by the Naturalization Board and the OSCE Mission to Latvia in cooperation with the Latvian Folk School. The draft of the Latvian Language Intensive Training Program for Promotion of Naturalization was presented in the autumn of 2001. In 2002, approximately 2,000 persons were taught in accordance with their level of language proficiency. The courses had first- and second-level programs. The first-level program was intended for naturalization candidates with no previous knowledge of Latvian or poor Latvian language skills. This was an 80-lesson program and, after successful completion, the participants went on to the 60-lesson second-level program.<sup>125</sup> There were separate groups for those with previous knowledge of Latvian. All candidates were first tested to determine their language proficiency level and choose the appropriate program.<sup>126</sup> The great demand for these courses is well demonstrated by the fact that approximately 1,000 persons had signed up only one week after the courses were announced.<sup>127</sup> Funding for the project was 216,000 USD, provided by the USA, Sweden and Norway.

The project was submitted to the Foundation for the Integration of Society in November 2001, but was not approved. The main reason was the large project budget, and also the view that teaching should not be done by the same organization that does

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<sup>123</sup> Interview with Gaida Masaļska, Latvian Folk School director, April 11, 2002.

<sup>124</sup> Djačkova, S. "Valodas loma reģiona attīstībā [The role of language in the development of a region]." *Tagad*. NPLLT Newsletter, April 2000.

<sup>125</sup> At the end of 2001, there were 1,100 participants enrolled in these courses: 582 in the first-level and 528 in the second-level program.

<sup>126</sup> Stalidzāne, I. "Latviešu valodas intensīvās apmācīšanas ieviešana naturalizācijas procesa veicināšanai Latvijā [Introduction of Latvian language intensive training to promote the naturalization process in Latvia]." *Naturalizācijas pārvaldes vēstis*. Republic of Latvia Naturalization Board Newsletter No. 6.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Ilona Stalidzāne, deputy head of the Naturalization Board, December 19, 2001.

the testing, i.e., the Naturalization Board.<sup>128</sup> For this reason, in January 2002, Latvian language training for naturalization candidates was organized and financed through FIS (see Chapter 2.3).

At the beginning of 2002, FIS announced an open competition for organizations that provide language courses. A total of 32,000 lats (55,846 euros) were granted for the instruction of 250 persons without previous knowledge of Latvian to enable them to reach the proficiency level that is required for passing the naturalization test.<sup>129</sup> The competition was won by the Latvian Folk School, and the courses took place from May to December 2002. The courses were extremely popular among the ethnic minorities.<sup>130</sup>

At the end of 2002, FIS organized a competition for a Latvian language training model for adults in order to create an inexpensive and accessible Latvian language training system available to the general public, with focus not only on naturalization candidates, but on other target groups as well. The courses did not receive a direct subsidy from the national budget,<sup>131</sup> but the Council of the Foundation for the Integration of Society granted 125,000 lats from government-allocated funds (co-financing for PHARE projects, which is distributed by FIS and not the government up to the year 2004) to FIS Latvian language courses for adults in the year 2003 (implementation of the project will begin in October 2003).<sup>132</sup> In 2004, SIF expects to allocate 200,000 lats to the project. FIS has planned to continue work on this type of model in cooperation with Ministry of Education and Science experts.<sup>133</sup>

At the beginning of 2003, the Saeima allocated 50,000 lats to the Naturalization Board for Latvian language training for naturalization candidates. By the end of the year, the Naturalization Board expects to have taught 1,350 persons. Currently, the Latvian

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Kristīne Vāgnere, deputy director of the Foundation for the Integration of Society, Riga, March 28, 2002.

<sup>129</sup> The FIS Board reserved 20,000 lats (34,904 euros) from the 2001 budget and 12,000 lats (20,942 euros) from the 2002 budget for the project. FIS documents, guidelines for the project competition "Latvian Language Training for Persons Wishing to Naturalize," Riga, January 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Gaida Masaļska, Latvian Folk School director, Riga, April 11, 2002.

<sup>131</sup> In 2002, the FIS request for 200,000 lats from the national budget was rejected.

<sup>132</sup> A competition can be announced by state or local government educational establishments, other registered educational establishments, or adult educational establishments registered as legal persons or founded as local government institutions. The competition must observe specific quality criteria. See: The Foundation for the Integration of Society. Ethnic Integration Program. "Latvian Language Training for Adults" project competition No. 2003.E.5. guidelines for applicants, 2003.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Nils Sakss, director of the FIS Secretariat, March 25, 2003.

Folk School in cooperation with the Naturalization Board and UNDP, with the support of Great Britain and Sweden, is carrying out a project involving a 60-lesson program for 750 naturalization candidates with first-level Latvian language proficiency seeking to acquire second-level proficiency. No financing was found for teaching candidates with no previous knowledge of Latvian.<sup>134</sup>

Future projects for Latvian language training for naturalization candidates (and other adults) will to a great extent depend on available government and foreign financing. The framework document for Latvian language training in the years 2002–2006 that was prepared by FIS and the Naturalization Board anticipates an increase in the number of participants from 1,200 in 2001 to 5,000 in 2006.<sup>135</sup> According to FIS estimates, a total of 600,000 lats will be needed from the national budget. A model has been prepared for obtaining financing from various sources, among them the EU and other foreign donors. The expected decline in foreign financing once Latvia joins the EU<sup>136</sup> means that the government's financial support for Latvian language training for naturalization candidates will be increasingly important, as well as a clear strategy for the work of various institutions involved in language training.

## 2.6. The President's State Language Committee

The Latvian President's State Language Committee (SLC) was set up in 2002 with the goal of strengthening the positions of the Latvian language. It was established at the initiative of the Latvian president during a debate on abolishing Latvian language requirements for persons running for parliament. In accordance with the statute of the committee, it has been set up "to examine the situation of the state language in Latvia and prepare concrete recommendations for strengthening and improving the positions of the Latvian language – the state language – and ensuring sustainable development."<sup>137</sup>

In 2002, SLC received 78,423 lats from the national budget.<sup>138</sup> Among the projects supported by the Saeima are projects for development and popularization of the Latvian language (for example, creation of a Latvian language website, preparation of

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with Gaida Masaļska, Latvian Folk School director, Riga, May 5, 2003.

<sup>135</sup> The "Latvian Language Training for Persons who Wish to Naturalize" project. Riga (January 2002). FIS documents.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Statute of the State Language Committee. Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No. 186, May 14, 2002. See: [www.vvk.lv](http://www.vvk.lv) (last accessed on May 9, 2003).

<sup>138</sup> [www.vvk.lv](http://www.vvk.lv) (last accessed on May 9, 2003).

study programs, publication of the information material “Languages in Latvia” in six languages), projects involving terminology, studies (including studies on the attitudes of high school students to the transition to Latvian as the language of instruction, the use of languages among those working in the services industry), etc.

The first draft of the language policy strategy prepared by SLC (2003–2013) mentions the need to establish an institution for coordinating language policy. This institution would deal with both legal issues and questions involving language training and state language development. A working group has been set up to work on a plan for a State Language Agency under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science, anticipated as the institution that will be in charge of implementing the program. Plans include the organization of coordinated activities between the State Language Centre, NPLLT, the State Language Committee and the State Language Agency.

The strategy underlines the need to protect the rights of those who speak the state language, since these rights are currently not guaranteed. According to the authors, this will be the case only when “the majority of the people living in Latvia know at least enough Latvian for elementary communication. The self-sufficiency of a minority language is incompatible with the integration of society and the country’s internal stability.” The authors of the framework document focus on stimulating the use of the Latvian language and putting an end to the self-sufficiency of Russian. The importance of individual motivation (for the most part socio-economic) to learn a language and the integration of individuals with insufficient Latvian language skills are not addressed in this document. However, the strategy does include some goals for Latvian language training: for example, “to provide lifelong state language training opportunities for adults”; “to prepare a state language training program for the period from 2007 to 2013, anticipating this as a continuation of NPLLT”; and the promotion of cooperation among various institutions.

Although SLC plans to take charge of comprehensive coordination of language policy, the question is how SLC will be able to add to the efforts of other institutions that have been carrying out projects to promote Latvian language training for many years and have recently undertaken measures to improve cooperation. So far, SLC has not proposed any projects for Latvian language training for ethnic minorities. The question is also whether SLC will be motivated and able to get the support and cooperation of the ethnic minorities, considering their differing views on the priorities and means of integration. SLC is actually oriented towards support for the state language by restricting the use of other languages.

## 2.7. Activities of the National Employment Service (NES)

Despite NES efforts to improve the job market prospects of unemployed persons with the help of Latvian language courses, NES capacity for improving the language skills of those without a job is negatively affected by lack of funding and lack of coordination among the responsible institutions. Training is neither systematic, nor institutionalized, nor centralized. It is important to increase Latvian language training opportunities for the unemployed and to improve coordination among various institutions.

Since 1998, NES has been trying to promote Latvian language training for unemployed persons with the help of educational institutions and the Job Seekers' Clubs (which, in 2003, were renamed Activities to Promote Competitiveness (APC)). These NES activities were prompted by the Cabinet regulations that were adopted in 1996, according to which unemployed persons were entitled to receive support only upon presentation of a language certificate. In 1997, approximately 30% of the unemployed did not receive unemployment benefits because of this provision.<sup>139</sup> It was finally abolished under pressure from the population. However, an unemployed person still needs to present a state language certificate in order to be hired.<sup>140</sup>

- According to NES,<sup>141</sup> the number of persons who completed these Latvian language courses increased from 900 in 1998 to 1,135 in 1999. However, in 2001, the courses were completed by only about 320 persons; in 2002, by 220: 18 groups, with 12–14 persons in each group (4 groups learning for the third-level state language test, 7 for the second-level, and 7 for the first-level test).
- Latvian language classes are also included in professional training programs (for example, bookkeeping, secretarial skills). At the end of the course, it is possible to take the state language certification test at the level required for a specific profession. In 2002, only 51 persons were able to take advantage of this opportunity.
- Forty-lesson language classes also take place as part of the Activities to Promote Competitiveness. The main purpose of these classes is to help the unemployed learn basic Latvian in order to pass the first-level state language proficiency test and improve their chances of finding a job. The 40-lesson APC program is focused primarily on overcoming the language barrier. In 2002, a total of 1,736 unemployed persons attended these classes, and in the first quarter of 2003, 254.

<sup>139</sup> UNDP Latvia. Human Development Report 1997. Riga.

<sup>140</sup> Information supplied by the National Employment Service, May 9, 2003.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Due to lack of funding,<sup>142</sup> the National Employment Service is unable to organize language training for the majority of the unemployed persons who need it, or to provide a sufficient number of lessons. The demand for lessons significantly surpasses supply. For example, in Daugavpils, at the end of 2001, there were 700 unemployed persons on the waiting list for the language courses, but only 15 persons were accepted each month. As already mentioned, no more than 11,000 unemployed persons have a state language proficiency certificate (see Chapter 1.3). There is also a great number of unemployed persons who have the lowest-level certificate. For example, in Daugavpils, at the end of 2001, they represented 41% of the total number of unemployed persons (see Box 8).

In 2001, NES cooperated with NPLLT<sup>143</sup> within the framework of the PHARE national program for the year 2000. NPLLT organized language training for 20 groups of unemployed persons (60 lessons). Priority was given to young people and to those who already had a first- or second-level state language proficiency certificate (i.e., unemployed persons who have greater chances of finding a job). There was no such cooperation in 2002. Similar activities have been planned starting November 2003, as part of the PHARE national program for 2001.<sup>144</sup> It should be noted that NPLLT activities in this area embrace a relatively small percentage of unemployed persons. Statistics show that the number of unemployed persons (496) who have participated in NPLLT activities up to the year 2002 is significantly smaller than the number of those who would like to do so.

One of the possible projects for the future could be carried out as part of the National Development Plan. The priorities of this plan include measures to increase employment. Financing could be available from the European Social Fund once Latvia has joined the EU.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> APC receives funding from the government's social budget for professional retraining of unemployed persons, which is aimed at improving their prospects in the job market. Since NES is under the auspices of the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry also coordinates Latvian language training for the unemployed. In comparison with 2001, when language training for unemployed persons received 3.9 million lats from the national budget, in 2002 this figure was only 1.7 million – 2.3 times less than in 2001 (in accordance with amendments to the Law on Social Insurance), but in 2003 it will be 2.0 million. Information supplied by the National Employment Service, May 9, 2003.

<sup>143</sup> See a detailed analysis of the work of NPLLT in Chapter 2.2.

<sup>144</sup> The PHARE program anticipates the training of 25 groups of 15 persons (a total of 375 persons) in two-month courses for a period of two years, as well as combining a professional training program with a Latvian language course (18 groups of 15 persons: a total of 270 persons). See: Standard Summary Project Fiche, LE01.01.01. Promotion of Integration of Society in Latvia 2001 (Sector: Political Criteria).

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

The quality of the lessons is to a great extent dependent on NES ability to provide suitable teachers and on cooperation with other organizations. NES cooperation with other government institutions is also unsystematic. The example of the Daugavpils branch of NES shows that cooperation depends on what individual NGOs have to offer. There is also no clarity or agreement among institutions on which one should be responsible for training the unemployed: the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Employment Service, NPLLT, local governments, public organizations, other institutions or the individuals themselves? NES regional branches do not have the human resources for seeking alternative sources of funding. This could indirectly suggest that providing Latvian language training is, in the eyes of local NES branches, the responsibility of other government or local government institutions. The efforts of the “Latgales Gaisma” political party to resolve the problem show the discrepancy between supply and demand where language training opportunities for the unemployed are concerned (see Box 9).

Although Latvian language proficiency only partly affects job opportunities, and a certain percentage of the unemployed is not actively seeking to learn the language,<sup>146</sup> better language training opportunities for unemployed persons would help to reduce unemployment among the much higher percentage of the unemployed who are motivated to learn Latvian. In view of the huge numbers of people who would like to attend courses and the fact that 3/4 of those who do attend are able to pass the language test, Latvian language training opportunities for unemployed persons should be increased. What is needed is an institution that coordinates language training for the unemployed, while the Ministry of Education and Science or the Ministry of Welfare must develop a long-term strategy and allocate greater budget funds for these projects.

#### Box 8.

#### Daugavpils NES involvement in Latvian language training for the unemployed

*Main activities and objectives.* As elsewhere in Latvia, the purpose of the Daugavpils Job Seekers’ Club (JSC) is to help unemployed persons learn basic Latvian in order to pass the first-level state language proficiency test

<sup>146</sup> According to an NES survey carried out in May 2002, 45% unemployed persons who have no state language proficiency certificate gave the reason for this as “not necessary,” 41% said that they did not have the necessary language skills, and for 31% the reason was lack of money. The main obstacles to finding a job were named as lack of available jobs (50%) and lack of a state language certificate (36%). A certain percentage of the unemployed persons is not actively trying to learn Latvian or find a job, but a much higher percentage of the respondents does want to learn Latvian (40%) and a profession (28%). Information supplied by the National Employment Service, May 9, 2003.

and improve chances of finding a job. In 2001, due to cutbacks in funding, the organization of language courses in cooperation with private companies was brought to a halt. In December, only one group was planned for a third-level language course. This is why activities took place mainly at JSC.

According to the Daugavpils branch of NES, in October 2001 approximately 1,200 unemployed persons (17% of the total number of unemployed) did not have a state language proficiency certificate. Approximately 3,000 (41%) needed a second-level certificate in order to meet job requirements. Furthermore, many had a third-level certificate, but very poor Latvian language skills.

NES inspectors register the unemployed persons who would like to learn Latvian. The groups are put together with attention to current job openings. This improves the chances of those in the group to get a job after completion of the course.

Language teachers focus primarily on developing the conversational skills of their students. Teaching methods are adapted to the specific requirements of the group. There are not enough textbooks, these are borrowed from the library. Teachers themselves prepare and copy materials.

*Clients.* Many of the unemployed persons formerly worked in factories and, up to the year 1994, were not affected by state language proficiency requirements. These people often have no previous knowledge of Latvian. The situation has been aggravated by changes in ownership of the factories (“*And then the factory was bought by a German and a certificate was no longer necessary.*”) or shutdowns (“*The Stalkers company was founded three years ago. Courses took place at the plant, organized by the trade union. But when Stalkers was shut down, about 800 people were left without a certificate.*”).

Usually, the courses are attended by persons who have secondary school education, vocational education or elementary school education. Among the participants are also young people between the ages of 17 and 20 who have no work experience, pre-retirement-age persons, and persons who have recently moved to Daugavpils. There are several factors that motivate unemployed persons to participate in the courses: the desire to find employment, concerns about being crossed off the NES register and losing unemployment benefits, opportunity to attend cost-free classes. Some of the unemployed persons attend classes unwillingly because they “*find them a violation of human rights*” and feel that they are being “*forced to attend.*” However, there is generally quite a great demand for these courses – a waiting list of approximately 700 persons.

**Project results.** From 1999, when the language courses were started at JSC, until November 1, 2001, they were attended by 318 persons. 75% were able to pass the state language test and 40% have found a job. The figures indicate that such activities generally do help unemployed persons to find their way back into the job market, although they do not help to increase practical use of Latvian. One person who had attended the course says: *“Latvian is only needed to fill out different kinds of documents. In Daugavpils, there are no contacts with the Latvian language.”* It is also difficult to overcome the language barrier.

**Problems and recommendations.** NES management and employees say that the main problem is **lack of funding**, which does not allow a sufficient number of lessons (60 or even 120–200 instead of 40). Many participants also remarked that *“the program is rushed”* and recommended that **the courses should be extended**: *“They have to ‘run’ through the program, I can understand them... And the teacher is very good, too, tries to tell us everything. But we can’t keep anything in mind: as soon as we have started to understand, we are ‘pushed’ ahead again.”* Another recommendation from participants was that opportunities for conversations in Latvian during classes should be increased.

Both NES employees and those who attend the courses say that **the language certification test is too difficult**, especially the written answers and the essay, which has a time limit. The new test requirements have had a negative effect on the results. One of the participants explains: *“It used to be easier to pass the test. Now, there are very difficult assignments. I can understand and speak Latvian a bit, but I can’t write at all. I don’t even know the alphabet. I won’t be able to pass this test.”* Sometimes, **people find the course and the test pointless**, as evidenced by the following comments: *“After the course, we will forget everything, anyway.”* *“Half of the people in the city have bought their certificates, if I had the money, I would buy it too.”* *“The certificate should be given automatically.”*

Good results can also be undermined by **different levels of knowledge in a group**. Many of the participants have **no previous knowledge** of Latvian (*“They didn’t teach us the language at school,”* *“...only what was in the school program.”*). Age can also be a problem (*“You can’t learn a language at 55.”*). The government has recommended a larger number of groups, *“which would make it possible to differentiate participants according to proficiency levels.”*

Participants were also dissatisfied with *“the long waiting list for the courses,”* which sometimes meant waiting for as long as a year. Generally, dissatis-

faction could be felt not only with the fact that people had to attend the courses and learn the language, but also with the ineffectiveness of the courses, the requirements of the language test, and the hopelessness of finding a job.

Discussions with NES employees raised the question of who should be responsible for dealing with the language problem. The opinion was voiced that “*this is a national-scale problem and should be dealt with by the State Language Centre. NES should be providing retraining opportunities, not teaching the language.*” There was also the opinion that Latvian language training should be the responsibility of the local government, which should involve the Daugavpils University, high schools, secondary vocational schools, private companies. It should generally be the responsibility of the state. The observation was made that NES needs alternative funding, but that it lacks the human resources for seeking alternative sources of funds and drafting projects.

**Cooperation.** In 2000, the Daugavpils branch of NES cooperated with the Business Women’s Club (see Box 6), which offered to provide second-level language training for unemployed persons who have difficulties in overcoming the language barrier and speaking Latvian. NES provided the classrooms.

NPLLT also involved some unemployed persons in its project. However, NPLLT worked primarily with unemployed persons who had secondary vocational school education and a first- or second-level state language certificate.

Note: The case study was carried out in November 2001.

#### Box 9.

#### Latgales Gaisma (LG) involvement in Latvian language training for the unemployed

**Main activities and objectives.** Latgales Gaisma [Latgale’s Light] is a public and political organization, which received the highest number of votes in the 2001 local government elections in Daugavpils. In 2000, active party members (the party work coordinator and other members) started to organize

Latvian language courses for people who had expressed a desire to improve their language skills. The idea was born from the requests of many people for financial support for Latvian language courses. Many of these people were party members who had worked at the chemical fiber plant and had been laid off because they could not present a state language proficiency certificate.

Classes are held at party headquarters, in a room specially renovated for this purpose with the support of the party council. The party also pays for copying teaching materials. The teacher is a Latvian language teacher who is a party member and who works on a voluntary basis. Five groups with 25–35 participants in each group (a total of 174 persons) were taught in 2000. The groups were divided into 5–6 subgroups according to proficiency levels. There were 3 groups in 2001. Currently, there are 2 groups learning for the first- and second-level tests, and 1 group (5–6 persons) learning for their personal benefit. Each group attends two classes a week for a period of two months (32 lessons). The teacher admits that this is not enough and that the courses should be expanded in the future. In time, LG would like to set up a language lab for professional language training.

Some institutions in Daugavpils feel that the party is using the language courses to increase its popularity. However, the initiators of the project claim that their main objective is to help people who have problems finding employment: *“Politicians argue, deputies can’t reach a decision. And the problem remains unresolved, and this ‘wall’ that comes from the inability to understand each other just grows higher and higher.”* The initiators of the project also wanted to know whether people are unwilling or unable to learn the language. The party has concluded that the government does not provide sufficient opportunities for Latvian language training. The problem is particularly acute in Latgale, where there is a high rate of unemployment.

*Clients.* The organizers of the courses say that the first participants were people who had recently lost their jobs, but had not yet lost faith in their abilities. They still felt that they were needed. Many of the people had not previously learned Latvian.

People from different age groups attend the courses. Many are party members, but there are also many who are not. It is pointed out as a positive fact that there is currently a group of 5–6 people who are enrolled in the course simply because they want to improve their Latvian and not because they want to pass the certification test. There are plans to increase the number of such people. The organizers of the project underline that people want to

learn. There are different reasons for this, but they are mainly connected with employment. Usually, there are some (5 to 6) who stop attending classes, possibly because they have lost interest or have found a job.

The four participants who were questioned admitted that the main reason for taking part in the course was the need to pass the certification test in order to find a job (“*I have a first-level certificate, but what kind of a job can you get with that? Now, you need the second level everywhere.*”), or to keep a job: “*After I was laid off from the job at the factory, I got a cleaning job at a private company. I was hired without a certificate, and they aren’t asking me to get one. But I understand that I have to pass that test. The bosses often don’t know the language, so they often want to hire people who do.*”

**Project results.** Most of those who take the course pass the language certification test (e.g., 20 out of 23). The teachers also say that the courses stimulate interest in the Latvian language and a desire to continue learning.

However, the participants who were questioned say that the courses cannot improve the practical use of Latvian: “*The knowledge won’t be needed – what you need is the document. I would like to learn the language, but here, in Daugavpils, I have no contacts. It is difficult to watch a TV series in Latvian, reading newspapers is difficult too. The courses can’t provide the necessary environment.*”

**Problems and recommendations.** Cooperation with the certification commission at the Ministry of Education and Science, which was asked to explain the test requirements, was unsuccessful. “*They have to be more open. We asked them to explain the requirements, and they said: come prepared and then you will see. The government must help, it must explain the requirements. Recently, at a conference in Daugavpils, we invited a ministry official to come here and discuss possibilities for cooperation.*” The situation is complicated by the fact that, at the beginning of 2001, the certification commission was closed down and it was not possible to get information about the requirements.

The state language certification requirements are considered to be too difficult, especially the grammar assignments. The organizers voiced the opinion that the requirements should not be the same in all parts of Latvia. Language training should not be interrupted – it should be continued for adults as well. There should be programs at the state and local government level, with special attention devoted to the Latgale region. It should also not be permitted to turn language training into a business, solely for the purpose of making money.

## 2.8. Local government activities

In recent years, the role of the local governments in promoting integration has expanded. Since 1999, a number of local governments have set up working groups, councils or committees made up of representatives of local governments, educational establishments, government institutions and NGOs.<sup>147</sup> Some local governments have drafted or are drafting local programs for the integration of society (Ventspils, Daugavpils, Liepāja, Alūksne).<sup>148</sup>

The examples of local government activities in Box 10 show that many local governments have already established links between various municipal institutions for dealing with the problems of integration. This is largely the result of work on local integration programs. Cooperation between local institutions (educational establishments, public organizations) and local governments is important, and it is important to strengthen links between local governments and national institutions in order to deal with the problems of integration.

### Box 10.

#### Local government efforts to promote integration and Latvian language training

*The Ventspils local government.* In 1999, the Ventspils local government drafted its own program for the integration of society, with focus on education and language issues. The program includes a series of Latvian language training activities: Latvian language courses for teachers, school students and naturalization candidates; Latvian language preparatory courses for Ventspils University College applicants; projects, competitions, debating clubs, etc. Many of these activities take place with the financial support of the Ventspils City Council's Education Department and the participation of the Ventspils University College.<sup>149</sup> The Ventspils Program for the Integration of Society highlights the inadequate Latvian language skills of secondary school graduates, which limit opportunities to attend universities and colleges, and the inadequate Latvian language skills of ethnic minority

<sup>147</sup> In May 2002, there were 17 such local government integration councils or working groups in Latvia. In some regions or cities, a specific person has been charged with coordination of integration issues.

<sup>148</sup> Naturalization Board materials.

<sup>149</sup> Ventspils Non-Citizens Consultative Council materials.

school teachers, which limit their capacity to teach subjects in Latvian.<sup>150</sup> The Ventspils local government has a Non-Citizens Consultative Council, which has one vote in all local government decisions. The Consultative Council has showed active interest in the bilingual education reform, demanding better preparation of the reform and a more gradual pace of implementation.

*The Daugavpils City Council* has also launched its own integration activities. The City Council has established a Commission for the Integration of Society, which has already carried out a population survey and is working on a local integration program. According to Daugavpils City Council officials, the greatest problem with Latvian language training is the absence of a Latvian environment. The City Council supports the activities of debating clubs for adults, the Interest-Related Education Centre and the Centre for Children and Juveniles. The City Council has supported retraining of unemployed primary school teachers who have graduated from the Daugavpils Pedagogical University to enable them to teach Latvian in kindergartens. The number of Latvian language classes at ethnic minority schools is being increased, but it is also considered important that students have the opportunity to be educated in their native language. A lot of attention is paid to cultural events and the development of minority schools. The Latvian- and Russian-language media are viewed as an important instrument for the integration of society.<sup>151</sup>

*The Liepāja City Council.* The integration of society has been included in the development strategy for the city of Liepāja that was drafted in the year 2000. Improvement of Latvian language training and the Latvian environment have been included in the “Human Resources” chapter of the strategy.<sup>152</sup> Liepāja City Council plans for the integration of society include support for youth integration camps, debating clubs, cultural associations, and the organization of twice-yearly project competitions for young people. The Liepāja suburb of Karosta has a Karosta Information and Culture Centre, which seeks to improve links between the population and the local government, increase public awareness of community affairs, inform about job opportu-

<sup>150</sup> Ventspils Program for the Integration of Society. Ventspils (2000).

<sup>151</sup> Presentation of Daugavpils City Council official Livija Jankovska at the seminar “Language Policies in an Urban Environment,” June 8–10, 2001, in Liepāja. (Organisers of the seminar: European Centre for Minority Issues, Naturalization Board, Daugavpils City Council.)

<sup>152</sup> Liepāja City Development Strategy. Summary. Liepāja City Council. Liepāja (2000).

nities and promote public participation. There is a high rate of unemployment in this suburb and many of the city's development problems are more acute than in other parts of the city. The City Council, in cooperation with NPLLT and the Karosta Information and Culture Centre, has organized cost-free Latvian language courses. In 2001, 40 people attended these courses, although the number of those who wished to do so was around 150. The organizers of the courses have observed that the City Council's offer of language courses motivates people to learn the state language and helps to overcome alienation. They have concluded that "integration and Latvian language training must take place at the grass-roots level."<sup>153</sup> Obstacles to improving Latvian language proficiency are usually lack of motivation, absence of goals and a shortage of information, which are intensified by social problems and isolation.<sup>154</sup>

Note: The case study was carried out in November 2001.

## 2.9. NGO role in language policy and integration of society

The experience of some NGOs that seek to promote inter-ethnic communication and Latvian language training shows that such organizations can play a big role in the integration of society since they are better aware of the needs and possibilities of certain parts of the population. However, important prerequisites for NGO activities are their capacity, ability to obtain funding, and cooperation with government and local government organizations. The activities of such NGOs should be supported by the government and the local governments, and they should be more closely involved in efforts to achieve language policy goals.

Many of the NGOs have people of different nationalities among their active members. Some of the organizations try to involve such people by organizing projects, competitions, camps. A number of these organizations have an additional goal – to promote

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<sup>153</sup> Presentation of the coordinator for social infrastructure development projects at the Liepāja City Council Development Office, Ineta Stadgale, at the seminar "Language Policies in an Urban Environment," June 8–10, 2001, in Liepāja. (Organisers of the seminar: European Centre for Minority Issues, Naturalization Board, Daugavpils City Council.)

<sup>154</sup> Presentation of Liepāja City Council deputy chairman Tāļivaldis Deklauss at the seminar "Language Policies in an Urban Environment," June 8–10, 2001, in Liepāja. (Organisers of the seminar: European Centre for Minority Issues, Naturalization Board, Daugavpils City Council.)

Latvian language training. For example, NPLLT and Soros Foundation – Latvia support different projects such as language camps, cooperation between schools, etc. One positive example is the NGO “Es un Mēs [I and We]” in Daugavpils. For several years now, this organization has been organizing events for young people of different nationalities – charity concerts, camps for creative children, and other events that take place in Latvian and Russian. The organization also publishes materials in both languages. These projects promote the integration of both participants and partners (orphanages, children’s shelters), and stimulate Latvian language training.<sup>155</sup> Many of these organizations have close cooperation with policymaking institutions involved in the integration of society, as well as local governments and foreign foundations. Such organizations and projects are usually managed by Latvians.

Some NGOs organize cost-free or inexpensive Latvian language courses. Usually, these courses are a means towards achieving the goals of the organization (for example, protection of women’s rights, support for underprivileged social groups, adult education, promotion of naturalization, etc.). NGO examples show that there is considerable demand for such courses: in some organizations, the number of those who would like to attend is three times higher than the number of those who complete the courses. The participants come from different backgrounds, but the majority of those who sign up are people who do not have a certificate for the necessary level of language proficiency, people who are having problems finding a job, or people who would like to apply for citizenship. Usually, these are people with low incomes, who are unable to pay for language courses.

NGO activities are closely linked to local conditions, in particular the language environment. The example of the Resource Centre for Women “Marta” shows that many of the organization’s clients are motivated to improve their practical Latvian language skills in order to overcome the psychological barrier to using the language (see Box 11). This has a lot to do with better practical opportunities for using the language – in Riga, as compared to, for example, Daugavpils – and with the job market: in Riga there is a greater number of persons employed in the private sector, who wish to improve their language skills.

One positive example for cooperation with government and local government agencies is cooperation between the Latvian Business and Professional Women’s Association and the local governments in Viļāni and Rēzekne. Here, the local governments cover approximately 1/4 of the costs of Latvian language courses.<sup>156</sup> The Resource Centre for

<sup>155</sup> Interview with “Es un Mēs” president Daina Kursite, November 1, 2001.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Maija Morozova, executive director of the Latvian Business and Professional Women’s Association, December 19, 2001.

Women “Marta” cooperates with the Ministry of Welfare (exchange of information and consultations) and with NPLLT, which covers the costs of the language teachers. The non-governmental organization Latvian Folk School has successfully cooperated with the State Language Centre and the Naturalization Board in organizing language courses. From 1989 to the beginning of 2002, the Folk School had taught about 23,000 persons and prepared a large number of teaching materials.<sup>157</sup> The NGO “Civic Initiative XXI” has closely cooperated with the Naturalization Board and FIS to prepare its clients for naturalization.

There are several advantages to the courses organized by NGOs. They bring people together on a voluntary basis, and this stimulates personal initiative and development of a civil society. A side effect of such activities is the opportunity for people to make contacts and raise their self-confidence – important for those looking for a job. Public organizations understand the needs of the local community and adapt to these needs. Their goal is not only to find financing for their projects, but also to satisfy the needs of their community.

When considering public organizations as partners in Latvian language training, two factors to pay attention to are the quality of the courses that they offer and the target groups. For example, there are not many organizations that specialize in language training for persons with no previous knowledge of Latvian.<sup>158</sup> The activities of an organization might not be focused on passing the language test. The difficulties that such organizations may have in obtaining financing and providing programs for a broad spectrum of participants should also be kept in mind. However, it is quite important that such activities continue to develop because grass-roots initiatives could play a significant role in integrating society and satisfying the needs of the population in regard to Latvian language training.

As already mentioned, the majority of people who have attended Latvian language courses have attended courses organized by private schools or other establishments (see Chapter 1.1). It must be pointed out, however, that the quality of these courses is not always equally high.<sup>159</sup> One factor that negatively affects quality is focus on the state language proficiency test. Observations and interviews indicate that language courses

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<sup>157</sup> Āboltiņš, R., A. Pabriks and E. Vēbers. *Sabiedrības integrācija: atsvešinātības pārvarēšana* [Integration of society: overcoming alienation]. (2001)

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Jānis Kahanovičs, deputy director of the Naturalization Board, February 7, 2002.

<sup>159</sup> This is substantiated by observations and by the fact that 21% of the respondents who have attended Latvian language courses are not satisfied with their quality. BSSI, Naturalization Board. “On the Way to a Civic Society” program. Sociological survey, November 2000. Report 2001.

frequently do not promote development and sustainability of active language skills. Many of the courses do not provide opportunities for improving professional knowledge, nor do they cater to individual needs (see summary of focus-group discussions and analysis of Latvian language training projects in this chapter). This is also one of the reasons why courses are not widely exploited as a means of learning the language. Lack of financial resources and time also prevent many people from upgrading their language proficiency levels.<sup>160</sup> In such circumstances, it is extremely important to support and diversify Latvian language training opportunities, with consideration for the demands of the population. Good and well-organized courses can provide a stimulus for continuing language studies and a desire to use the language. The experience of a number of the public organizations is proof of this (see, for example, Boxes 9 and 11).

#### Box 11.

#### Resource Centre for Women “Marta” involvement in Latvian language training

*Main activities and objectives.* The Resource Centre (hereinafter, Centre) was established in 2000. In 2000 and 2001, a project for setting up a network of “Marta” Resource Centres for Women throughout Latvia was carried out by the Swedish Women’s Association “Martha” in Finland, the Businesswomen’s Club and the Women’s Rights Institute. The main goal of the project is to promote the integration of unemployed women and women with low incomes, to ease social tensions. The Centre provides consultations, courses and seminars, and engages volunteers for work at the Centre’s office.

The Latvian language courses started in 2000. The main initiators and supporters of the project were the partners from the Finnish organization, who had realized what a problem the lack of Latvian language skills could pose for women in Latvia. The courses were also supported by local companies. A major role in organizing the courses has been assumed by the president of the Businesswomen’s Club, Irina Pētersone. This club has been involved in Latvian language training since 1994 and has acquired much experience in organizing courses and finding partners for cooperation.

Initially, 6 groups had been planned for 2000, but due to the great demand, there were 20. The project was supported by the Businesswomen’s Club, with PHARE and NPLLT funding for teachers’ salaries. Qualified teachers from other organizations have also been involved in the courses. During the

<sup>160</sup> “Valoda [Language]” survey, p. 44.

time of the case study, two groups were being taught (in Riga). One-and-a-half to two-hour classes took place twice a week for a period of three months (48 lessons). The teacher who was interviewed explained that she tries to teach the vocabulary needed for everyday communication, which is followed by grammar exercises. If there is a demand, the course is adapted to the requirements of the language proficiency (certification) test.

The clients pay 5 lats for the course, which covers the costs of copying materials. According to the project manager, courses that are entirely cost-free reduce motivation to attend. There are plans to raise the fee to 18 lats.

Although this project has been concluded, the Centre is seeking financing for continuing the courses. For example, this year the Centre has received financing from a private individual in Finland, from NPLLT and from the Swedish Culture Foundation.

In response to the wishes of participants to continue learning Latvian, the Latvian conversation club "Daina" was established in 2000. The main goal of the club is to overcome the psychological barrier to speaking Latvian. The club meets once a week for 2 hours. Club activities are supervised by two teachers: a Latvian language teacher and a social worker. The conversations are on topics of particular interest to the participants, and the only language used is Latvian. The number of participants is not constant or limited. There are usually about 12 to 20 women. Many women continue to attend club meetings after completing the language course. Some of the participants are women who are on the waiting list for the courses, and employees of the Centre encourage them to start by attending the club meetings if they already have some previous knowledge of Latvian. The club does not have a strict program, there is "*always something new*": new topics, songs, audiocassettes. Grammar exercises are sometimes included at the wish of the participants.

*Clients and their motivation.* The majority of the participants who attend the courses and the club are women with low incomes, unemployed women, housewives, Russians, residents of Riga. Among them, there are also businesswomen, women who work in the private sector and repatriated Latvians. The participants usually belong to the middle and older generations.

The main motives for participation are the desire to find employment and improvement of qualifications. The majority of the clients wish to prepare for the language proficiency test, often for a third-level certificate, or for the naturalization test, or simply to improve their conversational skills (this is particularly important for women who work in the service industry). These

courses are usually chosen because they are cost free (for a symbolic fee). Another important motive for participation is the opportunity to make contacts and enjoy a positive environment.

The participants of the “Daina” language club wish to overcome the psychological barrier to using Latvian and to develop their language skills after the courses. There are several motives: passing the state language test, the naturalization test, being able to use the language in a shop, in contacts with public officials (“*Latvians have a more positive attitude if I try to speak Latvian.*”), finding a job. The middle and the older generations (in the majority of cases, unemployed women, housewives, some pensioners) come more frequently. The head of the club says, “*They are not really actively seeking a job, that is not a pressing issue. At this age it is generally hard to find employment.*” However, many of the participants (on the average, aged 30 to 50) admit that their motivation is the desire to get a third-level language certificate and find a job. Many of the women have small children and have been unemployed for several years.

For some of the women, the main motive is communication: “*They help us to understand that you can grow and make progress. Learning the language is not even that important. I simply relax here.*” It is easier to join the club. Some of the women had tried unsuccessfully to get enrolled in the NES courses.

**Project results.** In the years 2000 and 2001, 180 women attended the courses and 521 expressed a desire to attend. At present, there is a waiting list of 671. As one of the project managers explains, the quality of these courses is very high: “*We have the best cost-free courses in Latvia.*”

The courses give many of the participants encouragement to continue learning, for example, in the “Daina” language club. Another important factor is the opportunity to communicate and make contacts in an extremely casual and positive atmosphere, which raises the women’s self-confidence.

The participants of the language club successfully overcome the psychological barrier. According to them, the language courses do not help to improve conversational skills. They provide more profound knowledge, but the different levels of language proficiency within a group can be a problem. Neither do the courses for naturalization candidates improve conversational skills: “*Their goal is to prepare you for the tests, and the requirements are lower than those for the third category.*” On the other hand, “*the private companies only teach you to pass the test,*” “*they only give you what you have paid for.*” “*Here, it is cheaper, and there is a different attitude.*” The language club also stimulates the use of Latvian in everyday communication.

*Problems and recommendations.* The project managers spoke of financial problems that arise from uncertainty about funding. According to them, government support would be desirable. The government should support the NGOs that teach Latvian, and cover at least 30% of the costs for offices and salaries. A standard Latvian language training system should be coordinated and qualitative. The government should provide financial support for the NGOs and pay for advertising (information) in the media.

The requirements of the state language proficiency test are considered to be too difficult. It is particularly difficult to pass the 2B-category test: “*That is meant for intellectuals.*”

It has also been recommended that the groups should be divided up into smaller groups, according to language proficiency levels, and that the courses should be extended. Many of the participants lack grammar skills.

The opinion has been voiced that Latvian language training should be left to public organizations: “*Because people are afraid of government structures, even the use of local government facilities for classes has an alienating effect.*”

Note: The case study was carried out in November 2001.

## 2.10. Corporate and private sector activities

The corporate and private sector has not taken a particularly active part in the language policy development and implementation process. Although many people have attended Latvian language courses at their place of employment,<sup>161</sup> in recent years companies have organized Latvian language training activities less frequently, and many company owners feel that this is a matter of individual choice.<sup>162</sup>

As already pointed out, Russian is used a lot more in private companies than in government-owned enterprises. The Latvian language proficiency levels of employers are comparatively lower than, for example, those of salaried employees. Some companies, especially in Latgale, solve the language problem by hiring Latvians or people with good

<sup>161</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>162</sup> Druviete, I., D. Baltaiskalna, V. Ernestsonne and V. Poriņa. *Latvijas valodas politikas analīze: ekonomiskie aspekti* [Latvian language policy analysis: economic aspects]. University of Latvia Latvian Language Institute, Riga (2001).

language skills.<sup>163</sup> At the same time, Latvian language proficiency is an important factor when hiring employees. There are cases where lack of Latvian language skills has been the reason for firing an employee, but this depends on the attitude of the employer.<sup>164</sup>

Language policies and language use in private companies are closely linked to the functions and priorities of the companies. Language proficiency and motivation to learn the language are closely linked to the position of an employee within the company. In addition to organizing courses themselves, employers may pay for employees to attend Latvian language courses or try to improve the Latvian language environment in their company. This trend can be observed in the example of the Daugavpils branch of the Baltijas Tranzītbanka (see Box 12).

It would be important for government institutions and public organizations to encourage the involvement of private companies in Latvian language training and integration projects. For example, the Businesswomen's Club has provided a positive example of how local companies can be involved in the organization of Latvian language courses (see Box 11).

#### Box 12.

#### Efforts of the Baltijas Tranzītbanka Daugavpils branch to regulate language use

*Main activities and objectives.* The Daugavpils branch of the Baltijas Tranzītbanka bank (BTB) was established in 1993. At present, the branch has 36 employees. The ethnic structure of the staff reflects the ethnic structure of the Daugavpils population – about one-third of the employees are Latvians. The current director, a Latvian, was appointed in 1994. At that time, the employees had poor Latvian language skills, despite the fact that they all had the required language proficiency certificate.

From 1995 to 1997, **company Latvian language courses** were organized at the bank. Attendance was on a voluntary basis. The director's objective was to help employees acquire basic knowledge of Latvian, but – primarily – to ensure that all employees were able to correctly process all bank documents.

<sup>163</sup> Djačkova, S. "Valodas loma reģiona attīstībā [The role of language in the development of a region]." *Tagad*. NPLLT Newsletter, April 2000.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Dace Dalbiņa, CCDE official. It must be pointed out that, in accordance with the new Cabinet regulations, the Latvian language proficiency levels that are required for carrying out professional duties by persons employed in private companies are determined by the employer.

The director has attempted to create a **Latvian environment in each department**, by assigning one or two Latvians to each. This makes work easier because those who are not Latvians can always ask the Latvians for help if something in Latvian is unclear. At work and in informal communication between those who are not Latvians and those who are, both Latvian and Russian are used. However, the Latvians speak Latvian mainly with the colleagues that know the language.

Generally, **language proficiency requirements depend on the position that is held**. For example, the cashier is not really required to speak Latvian. The **management periodically urges** the employees to speak Latvian. **Lately, meetings have also been held in Latvian and Russian**, and practically all employees understand Latvian. **The Daugavpils branch of the bank also covers the costs (in full or partly) of employee language training in private language courses.**

The need for employees to know Latvian is dictated by the need to “*maintain the image of the institution,*” the need “*to understand the client, to make sure the client won’t laugh.*” “*That’s not a language problem, that’s poor client service.*” Knowledge also broadens horizons: “*You have to read, for example, the economic press, work with clients, with Riga, show respect for the clients.*”

The management at this branch of the bank feels that no special language training activities are needed at the moment: “*Proficiency improves all the time. People learn on the job.*” And lately, the bank’s new employees have been predominantly young, educated people, graduates of the Daugavpils University Economics Faculty, with good Latvian language skills.

*Main results. Factors that promote Latvian language training among employees.* The management admits that “*the Latvian language skills of the employees could be better, although the proficiency levels meet certification requirements. For example, an accounts operator who deals with clients can answer in Latvian, but is not able to explain things in detail. There is progress. They are all able to process documents, you can rely on all of them. Speaking is a bigger problem.*” In general, however, Latvian language skills are claimed to be better at this bank than at many other banks in Daugavpils.

According to those who were interviewed, the **courses have provided basic knowledge and have stimulated people to continue learning on their own.** “*One or two courses cannot give results. They have been more or less a formality.*” “*The courses didn’t help much, I don’t even remember what was taught. They told us to ‘continue learning on our own,’ but there is no time for that.*”

Generally, the level of Latvian language proficiency is determined by the extent to which it is needed for work and by the position that is held. The senior executives have better language skills and they are more motivated to learn and speak Latvian: they have greater financial responsibility, higher salaries, and they have to be familiar with more of the procedures. This branch of the bank does its own bookkeeping, which is not done by other companies in Daugavpils.

The job is the main motive for people to improve and use their language skills. The greatest incentive for learning and using Latvian comes from **the need to speak Latvian**: *“I doubt whether I would know the language at this level if I didn’t work for BTB. Since I have to work with clients, I have to speak Latvian.”* The usual pattern for improvement of Latvian language proficiency is: **the desire to work for an organization → need to improve (use) knowledge → desire (readiness) to improve (use) knowledge → improvement (use) of knowledge**. This is illustrated by accounts of how some of the employees have learned Latvian. For example, Marina (department head, ca 35 years old) has been working chiefly with documents that are in Latvian since 1998. The operations of the bank have expanded. There are Latvians among Marina’s colleagues. Latvian is the predominantly used language in her department. Jeļena (bookkeeper, ca 35 years old) received help from colleagues who explained instructions. Jeļena was allowed to leave work earlier to attend language courses that were paid by the bank. The management makes an effort to speak Latvian. Meetings are also held in Latvian. Oļeg’s (department head, ca 30 years old) Latvian language proficiency has been affected by work with clients: 50% of the clients are Latvians. It is true, however, that his appointment as head of the department is partly owing to good knowledge of English, a good education and work experience. Up until then, he had also acquired good basic knowledge of Latvian by attending courses, but had had little experience in using the language.

**Lower ranking (service sector) employees** have poorer conversational skills than the senior executives. They are also not as motivated to learn and use Latvian: *“They do not wish to speak. They haven’t learned the language, have no practice, are afraid to speak.”* Lack of time and absence of a Latvian environment are the reasons often mentioned by employees for their failure to learn Latvian.

One of the director’s acquaintances says that a major role was played by the attitude and activities of the director in dealing with the language problem: *“He did not emphasize the fact that you would lose your job if you didn’t know the language. He helped people, he appealed to them, he said, in Latvia we will*

*be speaking Latvian, let's do it together."* At the same time, it must be pointed out that, currently, Latvian language proficiency is a compulsory requirement for new employees at this branch of the bank. And, as one employee remarked, "*When staff was cut back, the first ones to be laid off were the employees who did not have the required Latvian language skills*" – an indication that Latvian language proficiency does play a rather important role in this company.

Note: The case study was carried out in November 2001.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

- Although Latvian language proficiency levels are improving, the majority of those who belong to ethnic minorities still have poor or no knowledge of Latvian. Under the influence of demographic and socio-economic processes and for other reasons that have not yet been sufficiently examined, regional differences in Latvian language proficiency levels are increasing.<sup>165</sup> However, the attitude toward the Latvian language and the motivation to learn it have not significantly changed, and there is still a huge and differentiated public demand for Latvian language training opportunities.
- The effect of language proficiency on the integration of society is not unequivocal. On the one hand, insufficient Latvian language skills are an obstacle to integration inasmuch as they reduce the possibilities and motivation of non-citizens to acquire Latvian citizenship, and limit communication and participation opportunities. At the same time, improvement of Latvian language skills does not always help ethnic minorities to overcome alienation, but the motivation to integrate socially, economically and politically does create a motivation to learn and use the language.
- Although ethnicity is not a factor that can be directly linked to different levels of economic prosperity, and part of the population has no need for use of Latvian at work, Latvian language proficiency is playing an ever-increasing role in the job market. Insufficient Latvian language skills limit both the choices and the competitiveness of job seekers. From the aspect of integration and human resources, it is particularly important to improve the competitiveness of the unemployed and other risk groups, and to stimulate their integration into the job market by supporting Latvian language training initiatives.
- The main “problem groups,” the ones that have the greatest difficulties in fulfilling language policy requirements, are non-citizens: members of the middle and older generations; unemployed persons and job-seekers, among them young people with

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<sup>165</sup> Surveys show that the number of people who speak Latvian is declining in Latgale, Kurzeme and Zemgale, but increasing in Riga and Vidzeme.

secondary education; housewives and women on maternity leave; low-income and other risk groups.

- Data obtained from surveys carried out over a longer period of time allow the conclusion that legislation regulating the use of language has not promoted either a significant increase in use of the state language in recent years or the motivation of ethnic minorities to learn the state language. This applies to both the State Language Law and to other regulatory enactments that restrict the use of other languages.<sup>166</sup> A number of interviews show that the leading personal motives for learning and using Latvian are employment, career and professional development. The place of employment is the main social environment in which use of the Latvian language is consistently increasing. A much more effective way for government institutions to “influence” personal motivation would be to popularize the advantages of language proficiency and to improve opportunities for language training instead of accenting the need to protect the Latvian language. Personnel policies aimed at a more ethnically mixed staff, especially in the public sector, could help to overcome both language and alienation problems.
- The state language certification test has provided considerable stimulation to learn Latvian, but it has not significantly improved the sustainability or the practical application of Latvian language skills. Economic motivation to learn and use a language is stimulated both by individual career plans and by corporate efforts to improve competitiveness and prestige.
- The wishes of adults to learn Latvian can often not be fulfilled. There are several reasons for this: limited need for use of the language, which is determined by the social environment in a number of areas where the state cannot regulate language use; financial problems; language-use customs and stereotypes on the part of both Latvians and ethnic minorities, which do not facilitate learning and use of the language. Motivation to use a language can increase along with changes in social connections, values and customs. One way of improving motivation is to improve Latvian language training.
- Although several government institutions are involved in Latvian language training for adults,<sup>167</sup> as well as local governments and non-governmental organizations, the

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<sup>166</sup> Concrete examples are the provision of the State Language Law that regulates the use of the state language in communication with local governments, and the language restrictions imposed on the electronic media.

<sup>167</sup> Primarily, NPLLT, the Naturalization Board, the Foundation for the Integration of Society, the National Employment Service. The Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Justice and the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Integration Affairs are also responsible for various aspects of coordination of the state language training process for adults.

demand for Latvian language training opportunities by far exceeds the supply. The main problems are connected with uncertainty about sources of financing and the relatively meager financial resources that are available for language training, as well as a lack of coordination among the responsible institutions. FIS efforts to initiate and expand Latvian language training for adults must be assessed positively. Whether or not these efforts bring results greatly depends on whether or not there is a clear and coordinated strategy for adult language training, coordination of the functions of the institutions that are involved, and sufficient financing.

- Although changes in regard to use of the Latvian language in ethnic minority schools have to some extent helped to improve the language proficiency of students, there still remains a lot to be done. The education reform has had a limited impact on society at large, and this has been predominantly negative. The language of instruction at general education schools is currently still an issue that divides society in Latvia. The education reform has not been carried out in a sufficiently public manner and has not promoted effective public participation in decision making.
- The efforts of public organizations that support Latvian language training initiatives or offer language courses and promote inter-ethnic communication have had positive results. It is therefore important to encourage the activities of these public and private organizations and increase their capacity. It must be pointed out that a number of international organizations have also had a big role in promoting Latvian language training: the European Union, UNDP, Soros Foundation – Latvia, the OSCE Mission to Latvia, and the governments of numerous countries. However, the potential decline of foreign financing once Latvia joins the EU means that government initiative and support will be increasingly important.
- An analysis of the attitudes and activities of ethnic minority organizations shows that they often tend to consider the policy implemented by government institutions to be contrary to the interests of the ethnic minorities. To some extent this is connected with a lack of trust in government institutions that is common for both Latvians and ethnic minorities. It is also connected with the uncertainty of the ethnic minorities, especially the Russian minority, about the status of their language inasmuch as this has not been clearly defined. And to some extent, this tendency is also connected with insufficient cooperation between government institutions and ethnic minorities. Absence of effective communication between ethnic minorities and the state promotes the politicization of ethnic minority organizations, above all in regard to language as a key symbol of ethnic affiliation.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Government

- To avoid duplication of the activities of various organizations and better satisfy the need for Latvian language training opportunities, the government should consider a long-term strategy for promotion of Latvian language training for adults, which would include clarification of the role of various institutions and an assessment of potential target groups, sources of financing and size of the necessary financial resources.
- Since EU PHARE and other foreign financing will be declining, the government should secure long-term financial support for institutions that are directly involved in promoting Latvian language training for adults – primarily, LNPLLT and the Foundation for the Integration of Society.
- The government should promote greater differentiation of Latvian language training opportunities and accommodation to the needs of the population. Special attention should be paid to supporting training opportunities that:
  - help people to prepare for the state language certification and naturalization tests;
  - are available to persons with low incomes, unemployed persons, immigrants and other underprivileged social groups;
  - focus on development of active language skills for professional requirements.
- The future role and functions of NPLLT should be reassessed, anticipating that the program will continue even after 2006. In view of the experience and the methodological base that NPLLT has acquired in regard to Latvian language training for adults, this institution's role as intermediary between government institutions, public organizations and the public should be expanded in the next few years.
- Representatives of ethnic minority organizations must be involved in the different aspects of development and implementation of the language policy.

- Greater responsibility must be assumed for the protection of all languages used in Latvia, and legislation on ethnic minority rights must be improved. The widely debated restrictions on the use of minority languages must be reviewed to determine whether or not they promote Latvian language training and use and effective participation, and whether they are conform with international standards.

## National Program for Latvian Language Training

- NPLLT should consider possibilities of expanding its clientele (see above) by organizing additional courses or cooperating with other organizations that provide language training.
- NPLLT should expand cooperation with other institutions that are involved in Latvian language training: the National Employment Service, local governments, public organizations, etc.
- In addition to focusing on youth as a priority target group, NPLLT should also find ways of providing greater support for other population groups that need such support in order to escape social isolation.
- Ethnic minorities should be better informed about NPLLT activities, available teaching materials. Non-traditional modern language training methods must be popularized (use of the Internet, language programs on TV and radio, etc.).

## All government, local government and non-governmental organizations involved in implementation of the language policy

- There must be close cooperation between organizations involved in planning and assessment of Latvian language training. Cooperation must be achieved between institutions at the national, municipal and local levels to resolve problems involving Latvian language training and the integration of society.
- The involvement of local governments, educational establishments, public organizations and private companies in Latvian language training must be encouraged since these institutions have a better understanding of the needs of the population and could assume part of the responsibility for implementation of the language policy.
- When creating quality control mechanisms for education, project competitions should stimulate Latvian language training initiatives at the local level. Such initiatives

should also be encouraged among professional groups, with the involvement of different professional associations.

- The quality of Latvian language training should be improved, for example, by promoting cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science, the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examination, NPLLT and private and public educational establishments in the organization of seminars or consultations.
- The work of consultative organizations that provide information on Latvian language training opportunities (public organizations, local governments, state language commissions and other institutions) must be supported.
- The Ministry of Education and Science should reassess the requirements of the written part of the state language certification test.

## APPENDICES

### 1. Methods of collecting information

The following **methods of collecting information** were used to achieve the goals of the project:

1. Document analysis (political documents, sociological and political studies, statistics and other data).
2. Non-standardized interviews with researchers and other experts, representatives of government institutions and public organizations.
3. In order to define the problem and to better understand the behavior of ethnic minorities, two focus-group discussions were organized in Daugavpils<sup>168</sup>:
  - discussions with local experts (officials from the Naturalization Board, the Daugavpils City Council, the Daugavpils University, the National Program for Latvian Language Training, school officials);
  - discussions with the local population – members of ethnic minorities.

The purpose of the discussions was to obtain the views of the participants on the following Latvian language proficiency and language training issues:

- the need for Latvian language proficiency in Daugavpils;
  - factors that stimulate or inhibit learning and use of the Latvian language (with special focus on objective and subjective factors: opportunities (supply) and motivation (demand));
  - future prospects and opportunities for Latvian language training.
4. Analysis of Latvian language training projects in Daugavpils and Riga (4 projects, included in the text).<sup>169</sup>
  5. Observations at conferences and seminars.

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<sup>168</sup> The focus-group discussions took place in May 2001, with 10 participants at each discussion. The discussions were organized in cooperation with the Daugavpils branch of the Naturalization Board.

<sup>169</sup> Project analysis comprised: interviews and discussions with project managers, project participants (clients), teachers and cooperation partners, as well as analysis of documents.

**2. Personal assessment of Latvian language proficiency**  
*(percentage of respondents whose native language is not Latvian; n=912)*

|  | Third level | Second level | First level | Do not speak Latvian |
|--|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| <b>All respondents</b>                   | 14.2        | 25.5         | 48.3        | 11.9                 |
| Russians                                 | 12.1        | 27.5         | 48.8        | 11.6                 |
| Other nationality                        | 16.8        | 19.3         | 49.8        | 14.1                 |
| Latvian citizens                         | 19.9        | 33.1         | 40.1        | 6.9                  |
| Non-citizens                             | 9.9         | 19.7         | 54.6        | 15.8                 |
| Females                                  | 15.2        | 26.6         | 47.2        | 11.0                 |
| Males                                    | 13.1        | 24.2         | 49.6        | 13.0                 |
| 15–34 years                              | 16.6        | 36.4         | 43.3        | 3.7                  |
| 35–49 years                              | 11.8        | 26.2         | 50.3        | 11.7                 |
| 50–74 years                              | 14.1        | 14.8         | 51.3        | 19.9                 |
| Riga                                     | 10.2        | 29.2         | 48.8        | 11.9                 |
| Other cities                             | 17.2        | 20.0         | 52.3        | 10.6                 |
| Villages, rural areas                    | 19.3        | 29.3         | 35.4        | 16.1                 |
| Vidzeme                                  | 32.6        | 25.9         | 34.1        | 7.4                  |
| Kurzeme                                  | 14.7        | 11.3         | 55.6        | 18.4                 |
| Zemgale                                  | 24.4        | 29.7         | 42.8        | 3.0                  |
| Latgale                                  | 7.8         | 21.2         | 55.2        | 15.8                 |
| Unfinished secondary school              | 14.0        | 19.8         | 47.7        | 18.5                 |
| Secondary school or vocational education | 14.6        | 24.4         | 49.6        | 11.4                 |
| Higher education                         | 13.2        | 36.3         | 44.7        | 5.9                  |
| Self-employed (entrepreneurs)            | 15.1        | 38.6         | 39.9        | 6.4                  |
| Salaried employees                       | 14.4        | 29.6         | 48.5        | 7.5                  |
| Unemployed, looking for a job            | 13.2        | 19.6         | 53.3        | 13.9                 |
| Retired                                  | 10.6        | 10.2         | 53.1        | 26.2                 |
| School and university students           | 25.7        | 44.9         | 28.3        | 1.1                  |
| Housewives                               | 8.2         | 7.8          | 64.4        | 19.6                 |

Source: NPLLT, BSSI. “Valoda [Language]” survey (November 2002 – February 2003).

**3. Desire to improve Latvian language proficiency**  
*(percentage of all respondents whose native language is not Latvian; n=914)*

|  | Would you like to improve your Latvian language skills? (answer "yes") | Are you having problems with learning Latvian? (answer "yes") |
|--|--|---|
| All respondents                          | 65.2   | 44.5  |
| Russians                                 | 63.9   | 55.1  |
| Other nationalities                      | 66.5   | 54.2  |
| Latvian citizens                         | 64.1   | 62.8  |
| Non-citizens                             | 66.1   | 50.0  |
| Females                                  | 66.3   | 54.1  |
| Males                                    | 64.0   | 57.1  |
| 15–34 years                              | 82.2   | 60.6  |
| 35–49 years                              | 76.8   | 55.7  |
| 50–74 years                              | 39.9   | 50.7  |
| Riga                                     | 70.9   | 47.5  |
| Other cities                             | 62.3   | 62.2  |
| Villages, rural areas                    | 55.2   | 62.9  |
| Vidzeme                                  | 42.5   | 76.7  |
| Kurzeme                                  | 62.5   | 63.5  |
| Zemgale                                  | 69.5   | 61.6  |
| Latgale                                  | 66.5   | 54.3  |
| Unfinished secondary school              | 47.8   | 50.3  |
| Secondary school or vocational education | 68.7   | 55.8  |
| Higher education                         | 74.2   | 61.0  |
| Under Ls 30*                             | 65.3   | 62.8  |
| Ls 31–50                                 | 67.9   | 59.2  |
| Ls 51–70                                 | 65.2   | 45.6  |
| Ls 71 and more                           | 78.3   | 62.4  |
| Employers (entrepreneurs)                | 78.8   | 70.9  |
| Salaried employees                       | 73.1   | 57.9  |
| Unemployed, looking for a job            | 71.6   | 57.5  |
| Retired                                  | 30.7   | 49.1  |
| School and university students           | 84.0   | 63.2  |
| Housewives                               | 83.7   | 19.5  |

Source: NPLLT, BSSI. "Valoda [Language]" survey (November 2002 – February 2003).

\* Income per family member.

4. Language training methods that respondents would be prepared to use (*percentage of respondents whose native language is not Latvian and who wish to improve their Latvian language proficiency; n=642*)

|                                   | Language courses | Private teachers | Self-education books | Language programs on television |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| All respondents                   | 48.6             | 32.6             | 22.3                 | 25.6                            |
| Latvian citizens                  | 46.0             | 37.5             | 20.9                 | 23.3                            |
| Non-citizens                      | 50.5             | 28.9             | 23.4                 | 27.4                            |
| Females                           | 52.5             | 35.3             | 22.6                 | 26.6                            |
| Males                             | 44.0             | 29.3             | 22.0                 | 24.5                            |
| 15–34 years                       | 48.7             | 46.0             | 16.9                 | 17.7                            |
| 35–49 years                       | 52.9             | 29.1             | 22.9                 | 25.7                            |
| 50–74 years                       | 41.2             | 12.5             | 31.7                 | 40.5                            |
| Riga                              | 50.4             | 36.7             | 19.6                 | 21.6                            |
| Other cities                      | 49.5             | 33.6             | 23.5                 | 26.5                            |
| Villages, rural areas             | 38.0             | 11.9             | 30.2                 | 39.7                            |
| Vidzeme                           | 37.2             | 27.0             | 31.4                 | 38.2                            |
| Kurzeme                           | 65.1             | 22.8             | 17.0                 | 12.0                            |
| Zemgale                           | 37.9             | 17.9             | 38.4                 | 35.5                            |
| Latgale                           | 48.2             | 34.7             | 20.0                 | 29.5                            |
| Unfinished secondary school       | 46.6             | 40.2             | 16.3                 | 25.7                            |
| Secondary or vocational education | 50.3             | 31.2             | 22.2                 | 25.7                            |
| Higher education                  | 44.5             | 30.9             | 27.6                 | 25.2                            |
| Under 30 lats*                    | 54.4             | 38.7             | 27.7                 | 29.2                            |
| 31–50 lats                        | 45.5             | 26.5             | 16.4                 | 27.1                            |
| 51–70 lats                        | 54.6             | 30.2             | 25.3                 | 30.7                            |
| 71 lats and over                  | 50.9             | 32.4             | 22.1                 | 19.6                            |
| Self-employed (entrepreneurs)     | 49.4             | 41.6             | 41.7                 | 5.5                             |
| Salaried employees                | 50.1             | 28.9             | 23.2                 | 24.3                            |
| Unemployed, looking for a job     | 51.1             | 33.4             | 10.9                 | 21.6                            |
| Retired                           | 34.6             | 7.5              | 32.3                 | 50.5                            |
| School or university students     | 49.2             | 58.8             | 17.6                 | 17.1                            |
| Housewives                        | 59.4             | 42.7             | 13.7                 | 29.3                            |

Source: NPLLT, BSSI. “Valoda [Language]” survey (November 2002 – February 2003).

\* Income per family member.

## 5. Summary of focus group discussions with Daugavpils residents and experts (data available up to May 2001)

### *Which languages should Daugavpils residents know?*

Before examining views on the need for Latvian language proficiency in Daugavpils, it would be useful to take a look at what those who took part in the discussions have to say about the languages that Daugavpils residents should know. On this point, there was hardly any disagreement between the experts and the residents. All agreed that every person should know his or her native language, the state language and, in the situation that is specific for Daugavpils, the Russian language, plus one or even two foreign languages for integration into the European Union.

The question of Russian and Latvian language proficiency in the unique ethnocultural situation that is found in Latgale or, more precisely, in Daugavpils provoked the most intensive debates. The residents felt that “knowledge of Latvian is an absolute must. We live in Latvia, we have to know Latvian” because “it is required everywhere, now. The main requirement is not English or professional skills, but knowledge of Latvian. And life demands this, that’s how it is.” But in regard to the Russian language: “We can’t run away from Russia, here. It’s right next door. And contacts... you have to know Russian as well.” Or: “Knowing only Russian is enough for communicating with family, friends, but definitely not for work.” It is clear that people are aware of the need to know Latvian, although it is possible to get by with Russian alone.

The experts had similar views: “You have to know the state language, too. It is my opinion that in Daugavpils, considering its ethnic structure and environment, it is still possible to get by without the state language, but only at a certain level. If you don’t have close contacts with other agencies, you can still get by without knowing the state language” because “Latgale is a unique region, where Russian will prevail and function as the language of communication for at least the next 10 years.”

### *The importance of Latvian language proficiency*

The participants felt that the main reason why Latvian language proficiency was important was their **current job or future job opportunities**. The residents felt that: “Latvian is necessary, of course, even in Daugavpils, because it means a stable income, certainty about the future in regard to employment.” Or: “If you want to improve your qualifications, etc., attend courses, for example, you run into problems. All of the courses are in Latvian.”

However, some experts disagreed about the situation at work, saying that “state language proficiency is compulsory at government institutions. But in the private sector... the last law or the latest amendments say that Latvian language proficiency is not required here. It depends on the boss.” This means that Latvian is not as necessary for those who work in private companies. The only thing that all experts agreed on was that **if the job involves contacts with clients**, knowledge of Latvian is absolutely necessary.

All participants, experts and residents, agreed that Latvian is also necessary for “speaking with officials, communicating with government agencies.”

The next factor that prescribes a need to know Latvian is the desire to apply for **citizenship**. However, a distinction must be made here between knowing and using the language. To become a citizen, it is enough to know the language, but this does not mean that it will be used in everyday communication.

During the discussions about the need to know Latvian, the question of integration was also raised. The residents felt that “**integration** into a Latvian environment will not be possible without knowledge of Latvian.”

Both experts and residents considered **access to objective information** to be the most important aspect of integration. The experts agreed that “people who do not know a language well enough, and usually this is Latvian, live in a closed information space,” and this is a problem for integration. “This is the main problem in connection with the Latvian language, and it also slows down the integration process. All the rest doesn’t particularly help, of course, but it doesn’t bother much either. And this segregation of information creates other problems too – unwillingness to understand other viewpoints, unwillingness or inability to look at something from the other side – and this, in turn, isolates, and hinders integration.” Segregation of information was discussed mainly by the experts, the residents made little mention of this. The experts underlined that “the media does a lot to generate a negative attitude, especially in Daugavpils.”

The conclusion is that a person living in Daugavpils must know both Latvian and Russian if he or she wants to live a fulfilled life and not simply survive. Failure to know Russian can create problems with the community, but failure to know Latvian can create problems with government institutions and agencies, with local governments, and at work. One of the experts said: “If we are talking about simply getting by, then maybe Russian is enough. But if you want to live, take part in social life and other things, you need Latvian. The more you know, the more you will be able to do, the more interesting your life will be.” One of the Daugavpils residents had a similar opinion: “Knowing two languages broadens your information space, you can obtain an unlimited amount of high-quality information.”

### *Problems caused by inadequate knowledge of Latvian*

Both experts and residents agreed that inadequate knowledge of Latvian is primarily a **problem for the middle and older generations**. “It’s a generation thing. With the younger generation, we don’t see any problems. The younger generation speaks four languages: Latvian, Russian, English and sometimes German or French. Some even take Spanish, right here in Daugavpils.” Or: “Those who graduate from secondary school go to Latvian Universities. They adapt very quickly and after about six months it doesn’t matter to them in which language they answer. Or after a year. After a certain length of time, some sooner, some later, they adapt. They really don’t have any problems, and the level of language proficiency is improving as well.”

As far as citizenship problems are concerned, the experts felt that “here, we must talk about specific age groups. For example, for young people the biggest problem isn’t Latvian, but the fee. Particularly for young people. If a person is already settled in life, then the bigger problem is the state language.” The residents also agreed that “the people with the biggest problems are those between 40 and 50. The situation is such as it is. But the next generation knows Latvian, feels at home in a Latvian environment, they won’t have any problems.”

Part of the middle generation also has no problems with learning and using Latvian, but many residents complained that “now, **when writing a patient’s diagnosis**, you can write a whole page in Russian, but in Latvian no more than a quarter-page. You don’t have the words to describe how critically ill a patient may be. In Russian you can write more: what occurred, why the patient feels the way he does, what has become worse. In Latvian, you can’t.” Or: “Last year there were even special medical courses. The literature was all in Latvian. Of course, if it had been in Russian, it would have taken much less time to read. And then, at work you have to read everything in Latvian too. Whether you want to or not.”

The problem of **dealing with government agencies** was mentioned as well: “We feel uncomfortable, of course. For example, I went to the Passport Department to get a passport for my daughter. Everything is in Latvian. I thought, why should I waste people’s time and get on their nerves. I started to speak Russian. If I spoke good Latvian, I would be able to explain everything quickly.” It is also difficult to **get necessary information**: “It is bad that information is in only one language, Latvian. Advertisements, public announcements. Even if it would be easy to add the same [information] in Russian. For example, at the polyclinic, people don’t know anything, so they wander around looking for all kinds of things.”

#### *At which level should one know Latvian?*

Another topic that was discussed was the level of Latvian language proficiency. The experts distinguished between **functional knowledge** of Latvian (functional phrases that are needed for a person’s specific area of work, for carrying out official duties, for contacts with clients) and knowledge of Latvian that is linked to **social connections**. One of the experts claimed that “a language must be known at the level that is required by a person’s social and not just professional connections. Social connections are much more extensive. These are also the connections that involve the community. For example, if you want something from the city council, this is no longer a professional question.”

The residents agreed that the required level of language proficiency depended on one’s job, but they also felt that it was important that **people speak Latvian at all**, even if they make mistakes, and “it doesn’t matter at what level.” They also thought that “**people must decide for themselves**” at what level they should know Latvian. One of the Daugavpils residents found that “Russian-speakers **will never know enough** Latvian. They will always have to improve it. Even if it is only gradually. Language laws change. Once they know conversational Latvian, they will pay more attention to technical terminology in Latvian. A language develops. If a language is stagnant, there is no longer any point to it.”

#### *Which groups of the population have a particular need to know Latvian?*

Another question was, which groups of the population have a particular need to know Latvian. Both experts and residents devoted most of their attention to the generational aspect and to people’s professional profiles.

The experts said that pensioners, older people, did not have to know as much Latvian, “they can easily pick up their pension at the post office without knowing much Latvian, they can get by without Latvian. But, here again, we have the question of living or just getting by....”

In both discussion groups, the participants agreed that **young people** must know Latvian. “Young people, the ones who are concerned about their future, they should all know [the language], at least try to get the highest, the very highest level.” Of course, there are those who “don’t learn their subjects very well, either in Russian or in any other language. They simply can’t learn anything very well. So, it depends on a person’s talents, too.” But, one way or the other, the residents of Daugavpils felt that young people must know Latvian because this will give them better chances of finding jobs and integrating.

People who work in **government agencies**, lecturers at universities and teachers must also know Latvian. The residents found that “if you work at a factory and only talk with your boss about your salary, then you possibly don’t need Latvian. But if you work at an educational establishment, a kindergarten or a cultural institution, you must know Latvian.”

### *The most effective ways of learning Latvian*

In the discussion about how people learn Latvian, the experts described various possibilities: different courses, classes at school, extracurricular activities for children, courses for adults, and the activities of different non-governmental organizations. Some claimed that it was possible to learn Latvian simply by reading newspapers.

The residents, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on **contacts with Latvians**, with a Latvian environment. Some of the participants described how they had learned Latvian: “I know the professional vocabulary, I talk with my students. Perhaps this is because I don’t have too many complexes. I’m not that young anymore, the students are like my children. I learn from them, too. It also helps that I hear Latvian at the university. I listen and I talk, and no one has ever made any critical comments. They respect me. And what helped me were not courses of any kind, but conversations, contacts in a Latvian environment.” Or: “I have been working at the Daugavpils Pedagogical University for 10 years and that has helped me a lot, especially the last two or three years, when the students began speaking Latvian.” And: “I must say that what helped me most were contacts throughout my life. I have always lived in this environment. There were Latvians in my class, and I spoke Latvian at the institute as well. I don’t know, it just gradually happened. There were no problems or any need to make a special effort to learn Latvian.” Another woman said: “I speak Latvian at work with the children, simple phrases like ‘go over there,’ ‘get me that’. I have lots of contacts with Latvians: men, women friends.”

Of course, many people have attended **courses**, children learn Latvian in **kindergartens**, young people – at **schools and universities**. Nevertheless, all this is not considered to be as effective as simply being in a Latvian environment. The second most effective and the most popular way of learning Latvian is through **the media, the printed press and books**. The Daugavpils residents said that “you can read newspapers... if the children bring something home, you can take a look at that too, maybe a magazine for children.” One woman, for example, “translated the materials needed for work, watched TV series in Russian and read the Latvian subtitles” and learned Latvian in this way.

*What promotes learning of Latvian?*

When analyzing the factors that promote learning of Latvian in Daugavpils, both residents and experts mentioned **economic conditions and work**. The experts said that “a person considers his or her job situation. A **well-paid job** will automatically motivate people to learn everything that the job requires,” “you have to have a professional interest: a job, a better salary.”

The residents also felt that **better job opportunities** for those who know Latvian encourage those who do not to learn the language. Daugavpils residents said that “solving the economic problems will also solve the language problems. There will be jobs where if you know Latvian you will have a good salary.” Young people are also motivated to learn Latvian by the desire to **find a better job, get a better education**. One woman even proposed that “if two people work at the same job for the same salary, let the one who knows Latvian get a bit more. Then people will want to earn more and this will provide additional motivation.”

According to the experts, motivation to learn Latvian is also stimulated by “**a person’s personal goals**. These provide motivation to do something, to change something in your life.” “**A greater sense of insecurity**” on the part of those who do not know the language also encourages people to improve their Latvian language skills.

A factor that is no less important is the **attitude to the Latvian language and to Latvia**. There are some people who “simply have this kind of love that even Latvians sometimes don’t have. Nowadays, there are many Latvians living in Latvia who don’t love this Latvia at all.” Latvia’s image, a patriotic upbringing, attitude to Latvia – all these are factors that affect Latvian language training.

The residents felt that **a positive attitude on part of the state and various national programs**, cost-free courses, etc., were also important. One woman said: “I would be very happy and I would be able to make huge advances in learning Latvian if the state helped. I haven’t heard about any cost-free Latvian language courses. I would attend them with the greatest pleasure.”

*What are the obstacles to learning Latvian?*

The residents claimed that the main factor that made it hard to learn Latvian was **lack of a Latvian environment**. “The worst thing is that we don’t have an environment where we could use Latvian. It is interesting that when I am at the sanatorium in Riga, all around me I hear Latvian, and when I am asked something in Russian, I automatically answer in Latvian. This is the importance of the environment. In Riga, you can hear a lot more Latvian. In Daugavpils, almost everyone is Russian. I even took courses when I was working, I am retired now. We would talk at those courses, it seemed that we knew a lot. But the moment you close your notebook and go outside, everything is Russian again, and you forget everything.” One woman who worked as a doctor said: “I don’t have any people with whom to speak [Latvian] here in Daugavpils. I work as a doctor, I speak with patients every day. Since Latvian was made a requirement, there have been only three or four people who wanted me to speak Latvian with them.”

The experts, on the other hand, found that the main factor was people’s **lack of purpose**, especially in the case of older people. “In regard to the older generation, it appears to me that either they have already fulfilled their goals or they are not setting themselves any goals for the future.”

And when comparing the people who lived in Latvia before independence with those who have come here less than 10 years ago: “If someone has lived here for a long time, he will think, why should I go anywhere, try to prove anything, why? But someone who has come recently knows very well why he has come here. He wants to integrate and he must do so. This is a stimulus.”

Both the experts and the Daugavpils residents who took part in the discussions agreed that **the attitude to Latvian** was often another obstacle to learning the language. According to one expert, “there are those who know Latvian and there are those who don’t. Among those who know Latvian, there are those who want to speak Latvian and those who don’t.” There are also people who understand that Latvian is necessary, but who don’t want to learn the language, “they don’t try to learn, they try to get by in other ways, and here we see the attitude to the language.”

The experts felt that **opportunities to get a higher education and then a job in the private sector with only Russian** are also an obstacle to learning Latvian. They reduce motivation to learn Latvian because there is no need to do so. However, some of the experts claimed that a positive attitude to teaching Latvian and to the need for knowing the language could be observed at the private higher education establishments. One of the residents expressed the view that motivation is negatively affected by “**mentality**, the Russian mentality or the Slav mentality, which tends to blame the state, the situation, anything but oneself.” Efforts to learn Latvian are also thwarted by **the attitudes of close persons**. As one of the Daugavpils residents explained, “we are normal people, after all, and we understand that it is necessary – when we see how our children are learning and how well they are doing. But when my oldest son, who goes to school in Riga now, hears me say a couple of phrases in Latvian, he says, ‘mamma, I understood everything, but you really shouldn’t bother.’”

Motivation to learn is also affected by the **attitude of Latvians**. But on this point, the experts and the residents had somewhat different opinions. The experts underlined that Latvians, with their **unwillingness to speak Latvian with people of other nationalities**, frustrated the efforts of such people to learn the language. But the Daugavpils residents talked more about how Latvians should not **react so aggressively to language mistakes or correct mistakes** in people’s speech, although they did mention the fact that Latvians in Daugavpils were more likely to speak Russian than Latvian. The residents also underlined that many Latvians refused to speak Latvian with them. The opinion was voiced that **Latvians do not want Russians to learn Latvian**, so that they would be unable to compete in the job market.

Latvian language training is also hampered by **lack of financial resources** for attending language courses or for organizing high-quality and specialized courses. Many of the residents complained about the **poor quality of courses** and about the fact that the courses are usually intended for beginners or for those who want to obtain a language certificate or citizenship. There is a huge **lack of special courses** for members of various professions. There is also a **shortage of good teachers**, because not everyone who knows Latvian is also able to teach it well. Teachers must attend special courses.

The opinion was also voiced that “in a certain way, the law is discriminating. You can’t simply inject something into a person without producing antibodies. You will obey [the law], but in your heart you will be against it. Good produces good, but force produces counter-force. **A person feels discriminated**. You aren’t free, you are immediately put in your place.” It is not just the Language Law, there are other things in this country that also have a negative effect on

Latvian language training. As one woman put it, “I feel that **this country doesn’t need me**. I am nothing. This country doesn’t want me to integrate. An official competition was announced for the best essay on how to rid Latvia of...”

The experts were also concerned about the **non-existence of a dialogue between people**, which hinders both integration and Latvian language training. “People don’t want to listen to each other, listen to different views, those of one side and those of the other. The means by which things are explained are also quite important. We must start with a more intensive dialogue, listen to the views of the other side.”

### *Future prospects for the language policy and Latvian language training*

At the end of the discussion, when talking about future prospects for the language policy and Latvian language training, all participants agreed that a single language law or more severe penalties would not serve to improve the situation in Daugavpils. “**To speak Latvian, one must understand that the language is necessary, but this cannot be accomplished by force.**” Many of the Daugavpils residents felt that “of course, a lot was spoiled at the very beginning, when society was divided into two parts, when there was such a negative attitude to Russians. People understood that they have to know Latvian. But they were forced to learn it, no one showed any consideration for them. That was sad. You can’t force anyone, it won’t work.” Or, as another woman said: “Then, suddenly, it turned out that I was unacceptable simply because I spoke Russian. Even the state began to consider me unacceptable. Now I have hang-ups about this.” Now, however, there is a situation where “on the one hand, you have already learned something and, on the other hand, you understand that Latvian is necessary. There is not so much pressure any more. Now, the Latvian language has become more interesting, people learn, they understand.”

The Daugavpils residents admitted that “we want to understand each other and talk to each other. People should be given more freedom and greater opportunities.” But in regard to the future, it is also important to talk about different opportunities for learning Latvian. It is extremely important to organize a great variety of **courses that meet the demands of the population**. “I need to be able to get answers to concrete questions that I ask. But all of the courses here are focused on getting a certificate or preparing for naturalization. I don’t need that. I need to be able to express my thoughts in a foreign language. At work. I never speak [Latvian] anywhere else, so I don’t need conversational Latvian.” is how one of the Daugavpils residents, a lawyer, explained her needs. The residents want to see **different types of courses**, and it must be clear from the beginning, before signing up, for whom they are intended and what will be taught. There must be a contract, which specifies what one will have to do and what will be taught in order to obtain a certain level of Latvian language proficiency. There must be people who have experience with the teaching methods. Teaching methods are very important. **Experienced teachers and good textbooks** are needed. Special courses for learning special terminology and skills are needed. The quality of teaching materials must be improved because, at present, “there is not any good self-education literature. The quality of the textbooks is bad. There are lots of them, but the quality is terrible.” **Smaller groups and classes** are needed. In order to learn a language, **it is necessary to talk in class**. “If there are 24 people in a class, it is doubtful whether they will all get a chance to talk.”

In view of the fact that watching television is one of the most effective ways of learning Latvian, it would be good if there were a **greater number of interesting films and programs in Latvian on television**, and more interesting programs for learning Latvian. **The government must support the activities of NGOs** that are involved in increasing opportunities for learning Latvian. “There are many areas in which personal initiative can be useful. Certain groups of people can be active in non-governmental organizations, but **for education, we really need additional funding** from the government and from sponsors. Schools need it for various projects. The Children’s and Youth Centre no longer gets any funding at all for its courses.”

There are fewer problems with children and youths. “Those who are over 40 are the ones who have problems. But it would be good if **camp**s could be organized for children. To allow Latvian to become their second native language.” For adults, it is more difficult to create a simulated environment. According to the experts, “there is no point in trying to change the environment, this is not possible. Instead, we must **try to change the attitude, to create that positive attitude.**”

The experts also explained that “this year, the government will be contributing financial support. And this is very good news – that the government understands that it must begin to invest, and, pray God, that this trend continues, because foreign donors will only provide money as long as the government does so as well. If the government doesn’t stop giving money, neither will the foreign donors. It is not only the activities that are connected with language and language training that must be changed, it is everything.”

According to the experts, “some kind of **stimulating measures for Latvians** should be carried out **to induce them to speak more Latvian**. Then there wouldn’t be these problems with special Latvian language training. We would be able to use the language in everyday communication, I think that that would help a lot.”

It is also important to develop a separate **integration program for every region**, with consideration for the region’s ethnocultural distinctions, and to upgrade the National Program for the Integration of Society.

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