



EUROPEAN CENTRE  
FOR  
MINORITY ISSUES

# **MULTICULTURALISM, MINORITY EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY**

Vadim Poleshchuk

ECMI Workshops

“Multiculturalism and Minority Education”  
1-3 June 2001, Narva-Jõesuu, Estonia

and

“Language Policy in Urban Environment”  
8-10 June 2001, Liepaja, Latvia

ECMI Report # 10

August 2001

ECMI Report # 10

European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

Director: Marc Weller

ECMI gratefully acknowledges the generous support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany.

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Published in August 2001 by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)

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## INTRODUCTION

In December 2000, the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) organised a seminar in Tønder, situated in the German-Danish border region, where prominent politicians, scholars, NGO activists and minority leaders from both Estonia and Latvia discussed the problems of minority education, linguistic policies, the role of NGOs and developments in minority-related legislation.<sup>1</sup> It was the first event in the framework of the ECMI Baltic Project “Accession to the EU and National Integration in Estonia and Latvia”. The ECMI Workshop “Multiculturalism and Minority Education” from 1 to 3 June 2001 in Narva-Jõesuu, in the Estonian north-eastern Ida-Viru County<sup>2</sup>, was a follow-up event aimed at local grass-root activists who were given the opportunity to follow presentations of local and foreign experts and state officials and to share their experience of integration-related activities in Estonia. The ECMI Workshop “Language Policy in Urban Environment” from 8 to 10 June 2001 in Liepāja<sup>3</sup>, Latvia, was a follow-up event aimed at representatives of local self-governments with a predominantly Russian-speaking population. The representatives were given an opportunity to follow presentations of local and foreign experts and state officials and to share their experience of integration-related activities in a bilingual urban environment.

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<sup>1</sup> See Poleshchuk, Vadim. "Accession to the European Union and National Integration in Estonia and Latvia" Tønder, Denmark, 7-10 December 2000. ECMI Report # 8, Flensburg: ECMI, February 2001, 41 pp., appendix.

<sup>2</sup> The Ida-Viru County is located in the Estonian-Russian border region with a predominantly Russian urban population (cities of Narva, Narva-Jõesuu, Sillamäe, Kohtla-Järve, Kiviõli, etc.).

<sup>3</sup> A city on the western coast of the country, where Russian-speakers constitute the majority of the population. Nearby there was a large Soviet naval base.

## **ECMI WORKSHOP**

### **“MULTICULTURALISM AND MINORITY EDUCATION”**

#### *First session*

**Mr Priit Järve**, ECMI Senior Analyst, opened the workshop with the presentation of the ECMI Baltic Project. Taking into consideration the recommendations of the Tønder Seminar 2000, the Estonian meeting was dedicated to the problems of multiculturalism and minority education. ECMI had invited to Narva-Jõesuu those Estonian residents who deal with integration problems on a day-to-day basis.

**Ms Marjana Domini**, Member of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention on National Minorities, gave a short presentation on recent developments in the domain of minority rights. The Framework Convention is a relatively weak instrument; however it explicitly promotes multicultural diversity, being a textbook on European standards in this regard. Language seems to be one of the most important components of minority identity. The Framework Convention regulates the use of minority languages in education, in contact with officials and in public life. The use of minority languages involves certain problems on the national level (minority language as a second language and as a factor for building identity) and on the community level (communities themselves are not homogenous). Quite recently, new difficulties have been caused by increased migration and urbanisation: today, European minorities are not regionally concentrated. State identity is not a majority identity any longer. The Framework Convention demands that it should be a collection of different identities and values. Additionally, this question also has a ‘Euro-integration’ aspect. Each community of the EU faces the necessity to adapt to a life within bigger communities. The experience of national minorities, of the Small Europe, could be very useful there. In any case, there should be a clear differentiation between assimilation (full unification of a smaller group with the mainstream one) and integration (social participation of a smaller group and its common values with the majority). Each state is a laboratory of integration and the main goal is to avoid pressure on smaller groups.

**Dr Francois Grin**, ECMI Deputy Director, concentrated on the economic aspect of minority education. His presentation was based on the study of educational reforms in

the Basque Country, Spain. According to Dr Grin, minority education is not only a negative state obligation (non-interference), but also a positive one; language is the most important component of minority education; linguistic diversity should be promoted, as is required by the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. In the Basque Country, two educational models were compared: monolingual and bilingual (i.e. in Spanish and in Basque). It was calculated that the bilingual model is only 4-5 per cent more expensive than the monolingual one. Additional financing will be reimbursed while after the introduction of the bilingual model, the decline in course repetitions and drop-out rate is registered. To sum up, bilingual education is rather inexpensive and extra costs are covered by other material benefits. The efficiency of a chosen educational model can also be proved by such indicators as salaries, criminality and the health condition of the population in certain regions.

The Estonian Minister of Population Affairs, **Ms Katrin Saks**, stressed that the ‘price’ is not always the most important argument for making decisions. “The maintaining of the Estonian Republic which, according to the Constitution, is to protect Estonian language and culture, could also be claimed very expensive”. Education is one of the priorities of the current governmental coalition. The most important one is to work out a proper educational model. According to Ms Saks, up to one third of all Russian children have been sent to Estonian-language schools by their parents although the government offers them other models (minority schools, Sunday schools, etc.). The main reason to start a reform of minority education is that the minority members themselves are not satisfied with the situation today when their children still do not speak Estonian.

### ***Second session***

**Ms Kai Võlli**, Adviser of the Department of General Education, Estonian Ministry of Education, presented to the audience some figures to characterise the prospects for the school year 2007/2008 when Russian Gymnasiums (secondary schools) should use predominantly (at least 60 per cent) Estonian as the language of instruction. The tendency is that, following the negative natural growth of the population, the number

of pupils will be diminishing. In the school year 1996/1997, 5.1 per cent of all first grade pupils in Estonian-language schools were from non-Estonian families. The number of teachers of Estonian as a foreign language reached 796 in 2000/2001 (in 1993/1994, there were only 472). In recent years, the number of pupils in Estonian-language schools has increased. In Russian-language schools, the opposite tendency could be observed. For the needs of education, ca. 4.9 per cent of the GDP is spent annually. In 2000, there were 183,451 pupils in basic schools of Estonia, and 32,390 in gymnasiums. In 2007/2008, there will be 118,263 pupils in basic schools and 33,527 in Gymnasiums. The *Law on Basic School and Gymnasium* demands that a teacher should be able to work in a heterogeneous multicultural environment. At least some subjects will be taught in Russian-language schools in Estonian, starting with the year 2003. One of the most important tasks of the Ministry is to ensure appropriate training of teachers. Answering to the questions from the audience, Ms Völli confirmed that Russian teachers without appropriate language proficiency could be regarded as persons who do not fit their position. She stressed that many Estonian schools, not only Russian ones, experience the problem how to attract younger teachers. The Ministry recognises that the requirements for the year 2007/2008 will cause the problem of finding new working places for many Russian teachers.

**Mr Hanon Barabaner**, Rector of the Sillamäe Institute of Economics and Management, presented a minority view on the Estonian educational system. Mr Barabaner started with recent positive changes: the ratio of Estonian language proficiency among minorities is almost three times higher today than it was ten years ago; plans to abolish Russian-language Gymnasiums have been substituted with the 60/40 model (i.e. from 2007, 60 per cent of all subjects in minority Gymnasiums will be taught in Estonian, the others – e.g. in Russian); Russian private institutions of higher education have started to receive accreditations (such as the Institute of Mr Barabaner). However, some negative trends should not be neglected. In the first place, the use of the Russian language is diminishing following deliberate official measures. Consequently, Russian minority education becomes increasingly expensive. The social consequence is also worrying. Thus, many Russian children in Estonian-language schools suffer from psychological stress. In the second place, there is no rational explanation of the ratio of 60/40. Mr Barabaner argued that the Law should demand from educational institutions the final result (Estonian language proficiency)



and that Russian-language schools should be free to decide the way how to achieve this goal. Any major mistake in minority education, being a highly delicate issue, can result in marginalisation and radicalisation of non-titular ethnic groups.

### ***Third session***

**Ms Elsa Grechkina**, Director of the private Gymnasium “Polüloog”, gave a bilingual presentation on the Open Curriculum project supported by the *Foundation of Integration of Non-Estonians*<sup>4</sup>. The project is based on a certain theoretical basis and designed to promote Estonian and Russian teaching activities. Several presumptions are taken into consideration: Estonian society is not monoethnic; the normalisation of interethnic relations is not limited to Estonian language training; for the last 10 years, integration has not appeared to be a large-scale event. There have been some changes in education as well. First of all, each school has to work out its own curriculum. According to Ms Grechkina, the development of the school system in Estonia ought to be based on “human dimension” requirements. The updating of the curriculum is a rather complicated process which needs to take different factors into account. After a detailed analysis of the current problems of schools in a social context, the Gymnasium "Polüloog" organised a special training for teachers. The main target groups have been teachers of social studies and languages.

The Manager of the *Estonian-Canadian Language Immersion Project*, **Mr Peeter Mehisto**, made the audience familiar with the first results of his project, which is dealing with Russian-language pupils. The aim of the project is to ensure the pupils’ advanced level in Estonian and an age-appropriate proficiency in Russian, a functional knowledge of a third language, a grade-appropriate level of academic achievements and an understanding of minority and majority cultures. In the school year 2000/2001, 134 first grade pupils participated in the project. In the year 2001/2002, 134 second grade and 225 first grade pupils in Kohtla-Järve, Maardu, Narva, Tallinn and Valga will be involved. In the language immersion classes of the first grade, all subjects are taught only in the ‘majority’ language, in the sixth grade,

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<sup>4</sup> The *Foundation of Integration of Non-Estonians* is an NGO-type institution founded by the Government to deal with integration-related projects.

44 per cent will be studied in Estonian, 44 per cent in Russian and 12 per cent in a third language. In the beginning, teachers use mimics and gestures while working with the class. In the framework of the programme, the *Language Immersion Centre* was set up. The Centre was busy elaborating a curriculum, preparing and publishing special textbooks and materials. The programme is running successfully. Answering to the questions, Mr Mehisto pointed out that the ratio of pupils and teachers is 26.5 to 1. First academic results will be available in two years when those participating in the programme will pass the first state exams. Mr Mehisto emphasised that the proficiency in several languages is a great advantage for pupils. However, the resources of the project are rather limited. This teaching model requires additional funding during the first stage (textbooks, internships, etc.). In the long run, however, it seems to be inexpensive. Minister Saks commented that another problem is specially trained staff.

### *General discussion*

During the general discussion, **Mr Rafik Grigorjan** pointed out that minority rights are based on human rights. It is very important to avoid assimilation and not to exert pressure on minority identity. **Mr Imants Trofimov** argued that language training and the ability to study in Estonian-language schools depend on individual psychological characteristics. The geographical aspect is very important as well. **Dr Francois Grin** emphasised the importance of choice of the parents concerning language use in this regard. **Ms Irina Golikova** shared with the seminar her concerns regarding the practical aspects of the introduction of the 60/40 model. **Ms Katrin Saks** stressed that the Government's intent is to improve language training in different ways. **Mr Vadim Poleshchuk** argued that the so-called "free will assimilation" (Russians in Estonian-language schools) is a reaction to official linguistic policies. He stressed the importance of the development of equal treatment-oriented legislation in Estonia and of the promotion of relevant activities of the local ombudsman office. **Ms Katrin Saks** informed the participants that a branch of the ombudsman office was recently opened in the Ida-Viru County. **Mr Vjacheslav Vasin** from Latvia argued that integration issues have only been touched upon so far in both Estonia and Latvia: there is not yet a thorough understanding of the problem. **Ms Kai Völli** stressed that it

is necessary to promote dialogue between Estonian-language and Russian-language schools during the educational reform. **Ms Elsa Grechkina** argued that the Integration Programme 2000-2007 is a framework document. It is up to the interested parties to promote those activities that meet their particular goals. There should be no over-regulation of the process. Ms Grechkina supported the idea of a “single dictionary of Estonian culture” which would include the mutual elements of the majority and minority ethnic groups. **Mr Boris Kolchanov** from Latvia was asked to compare Latvian and Estonian school reforms. In Latvia, a transitional period for Russian-language Gymnasiums will end in the school year 2004/2005. Afterwards, all Gymnasium level education will only be in the state language. On the level of basic schools, a minority education model can be implemented. The share of subjects in Latvian differs from model to model. However, Latvian will not be taught as a foreign language: it will be used as a means of instruction. Similar to Estonia, the government of Latvia has adopted the integration programme with the emphasis on Latvian language training.

### *Closing session*

Opening the closing session, **Mr Priit Järve** summarised the main issues of concern that were expressed by the workshop participants. 1. Are Russian-speaking parents free to choose the language of instruction for their children under present Estonian circumstances? 2. Concerning Russian-speaking children in Estonian schools, there are many psychological difficulties, which should not be overlooked. 3. The language immersion project appears to be a rather controversial issue for many participants. 4. The Estonian/Russian language ratio (the 60/40 model) proposed for minority Gymnasiums in Estonia was regarded as arbitrary by many participants, who questioned the necessity to introduce such strict requirements to the curriculum. There were also many technical questions related to this model without clear answers.

During the closing session, all the above-mentioned problems were discussed anew. Some participants presented to the audience negative examples of Russians in Estonian-language schools, others gave positive ones. Several participants argued that official language policies should not force minority members to learn or use Estonian:

rather, these policies should promote the prestige of the state language. Some Russian teachers claimed that Russian schools *en masse* are not ready for the year 2007; another teacher expressed the idea that the third sector should develop its activities in schools in the interest of integration. An Estonian state official confirmed that the authorities are aware of the problems concerning the school reform. Solutions ought to be found in the framework of the state integration programme. A Latvian participant stressed the point that recent school reforms in both countries will limit the pupils' access to Russian-language sources of information. A representative of the Ukrainian Community in Estonia told the participants about the plans to open courses on Ukrainian culture.

The representatives of six centres for community integration initiative shared their experience with the audience. This all-Estonian network of independent NGOs was set up in order to lower social and linguistic tensions by supporting different grass-root activities. Most of the centres deal with language training; some of them provide the public with legal assistance. The activities of the centres have been relatively successful. However, they have limited effect because of insufficient financing. Additionally, the participants recommended the adoption of regional integration programmes by those self-governments where minorities constitute a large share of the population

## **ECMI CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the presentations, distributed materials and discussions at the workshop “Multiculturalism and Minority Education”, organised by the European Centre for Minority Issues from 1 to 3 June 2001 in Narva-Jõesuu, Estonia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. This workshop was attended by Estonian officials, NGO and minority leaders, representatives from Latvia and international experts. Issues of multiculturalism and minority education in Estonia were discussed in the context of national integration. The workshop contributed to the exchange of information between Estonia and Latvia on these matters.

2. The workshop noted that some positive developments had taken place in the areas discussed. The notion of multiculturalism has entered the political discourse. The state programme “Integration in Estonian Society 2000-2007” enjoys state funding. Several NGOs have been created on the initiative of citizens to support national integration. The Estonian language proficiency among the minorities is much higher today than it was ten years ago. Plans to abolish Russian-language Gymnasiums in 2000 have been substituted with the “60 per cent curriculum in the state language and 40 per cent in other languages” model to be introduced in Russian-language schools starting from 2007. Russian-language private institutions of higher education have started to receive accreditations. Innovative teaching methods of language immersion are applied in a few Russian-language schools.
  
3. It was also noted that the Russian-speakers view the current state and perspectives of minority education in Estonia with a certain concern. They have not seen any rational explanation of the 60/40 ratio of the proposed new curriculum. The readiness of many Russian-language schools for this curriculum in 2007 remains low. The growing practice of Russian-speaking families to send their children to Estonian-language schools has produced controversial results – there are children who have psychological and educational problems. It was recommended that these problems be given special attention, subjected to careful investigation and, if need be, psychological counselling be provided.
  
4. The workshop noted that the existing regional differences in the ratio of Estonian-language and Russian-language schools and the different capacities of the schools to implement the new curriculum make the development of regional integration programmes an urgent task. It was recommended that the integration-oriented NGOs (centres for community integration initiative) could be involved in the development and implementation of these regional programmes by local authorities.

## ECMI WORKSHOP

### “LANGUAGE POLICY IN URBAN ENVIRONMENT”

#### *First session*

**Mr Priit Järve**, ECMI Senior Analyst, opened the workshop with a presentation of the ECMI and the ECMI Baltic Project. Then **Mr Tāļivaldis Dekalaus**, Deputy Mayor of Liepāja, delivered a welcome address. In Liepāja, the share of ethnic Latvians fell to 49.5 per cent during the last decades. According to Mr Dekalaus, the Latvian language was and should be a uniting factor for the city inhabitants. Drawing parallels with the Tower of Babel, he claimed: “For a common goal – a common language. For centuries an ancient Baltic language has been dominating there.” Mr Dekalaus expressed his hope that the workshop would help to find a way to empower the position of Latvian in the city. In her greeting address, **Ms Eiženija Aldermane**, Head of the Latvian Naturalisation Board, stressed the importance of a state language for society integration. According to Ms Aldermane, even new emigrants have expressed their concern over the lack of understanding between Latvian- and Russian-speakers. The language situation varies in different regions of Latvia: in some areas, it is the minority language which should be supported, in others, it is the state language. A proper language policy is very important for the development of civic society. According to the recent sociological study “On a Way to a Civic Society – 2000”, the majority of non-Latvians claimed that they are unable to fulfil the language requirements for becoming Latvian citizens. Consequently, language training should be reinforced.

In his presentation, **Professor Kjell Herberts**, Åbo Akademi, Finland, highlighted the international experience of language policy in multilingual cities. There are about 6,700 living languages in the world; half of them will die out within the next 30-40 years without educational/institutional support (this is not a topical problem for Europe). Frequency of use and the status of a language has become much more important under the conditions of merely transparent borders. The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities* (1992) clearly supports linguistic diversity. Today, the idea of a pure ethnic state is not working when only Iceland seems to be a monoethnic country. Each State

is looking for its own solution in the sphere of language regulation, based on history and traditions, status and the demographic situation of minorities, challenges of urbanisation, etc. Furthermore, multi/bilingual situations do not remain static: changes follow migration, educational trends, modifications of traditions, trans-border cooperation, etc. Thus, in South Africa there are 11 official languages, in Canada – two. In Finland, there are three types of language regulation (for monolingual and bilingual districts and special norms for the Saami minority). In Switzerland, each canton has its own linguistic policy. The capital of Belgium – Brussels – is officially a bilingual city, etc. The preconditions for a successful language policy are flexible language regulation plus a positive attitude. Refusal of diversity, not diversity itself, could be a reason for conflict.

During the discussion, many questions were addressed to Mr Dekalaus regarding the acceptance of the inhabitants' applications to local self-government: according to the law in force, such applications should be done only in Latvian. Mr Dekalaus informed the participants that the local authorities in Liepāja ensure the translation of applications in the office of self-government before formal registration (free of charge for applicants). They will continue doing so as long as it is deemed necessary. However, there is no intent to publicise this practice. Mr Dekalaus stressed that the local authorities are not interested in the minorities' assimilation. Professor Herberts explained that they were all witnessing the very beginning of the process of recognising minority rights. In the UN, these rights are treated as individual rights (exercised in groups). There is no panacea for all countries and regions regarding language policy. Sometimes, official multilingualism is the result of political struggle of minorities, as for example in Canada. **Mr Falk Lange** from the OSCE HCNM Office agreed that in the EU, human and minority rights norms are less developed than in the Council of Europe or in the OSCE.

### *Second session*

**Professor Ina Druviete**, Institute of the Latvian Language, stressed the socio-linguistic aspect of language policy in big cities. We live in a recognised language diversity, she explained. In Latvia, the current language policy measures are defined

by the necessity to ensure integration on the basis of the Latvian language (however, certain measures should protect minority languages as well). The knowledge of two or more languages is a great advantage, but Latvian should be one of them. Urbanisation is an irreversible process. As a result, we have to deal with more emigrants, tourists, *Gastarbeiter*, i.e. with an increased number of languages in big cities. However, in urban environments and in the countryside, Latvian authorities should pursue the same language policy, i.e. official monolingualism. Some limitations for the public use of foreign and minority languages (such as in signs) are necessary to promote the use of the state language. There is no balance in the use of Latvian and Russian in some spheres of public life, e.g. in the economy. Thus, legal regulation is indispensable to ensure a better position of the Latvian language. The speaker argued that it would have a negative effect to grant the Russian language an official status and to lower the Russian-speakers' motivation to study Latvian. She is convinced that absolute linguistic comfort is impossible. The most important thing is to avoid a situation in which language conflict develops into a confrontation along ethnic lines.

Answering to the questions, Professor Druviete claimed that the Latvian language policy is 95 per cent in accordance with the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (hereinafter in the text – *Framework Convention*). Its ratification is desirable with reservations regarding Arts. 9, 10 and 11. For example, a widespread use of a minority language in street advertising could endanger the stimulus to study the state language. In the future, Russian should lose its functional role in the official domain, but not in the sphere of culture. In education, bilingualism should be regarded as a normal phenomenon. Professor Druviete was sure that Latvian language legislation is not repressive. She argued that the Latvian language could practically and symbolically unite the Latvian society under the conditions of globalisation.

In her presentation **Ms Aija Priedīte**, Ministry of Education and Science, stressed the interconnection of language teaching and language policy. For many governments, the period after World War II was a very challenging time regarding language policies due to political and economic mass migration, the fast development of means of transportation and information, the development of individual rights, cooperative and globalisation ideas, etc. Soon after World War II, the governments continued their



assimilative policies, which eventually became more liberal. The introduction of English as a *lingua franca* has had a strong impact on the situation. After World War II, 20 per cent of the population in Latvia (who had perished or emigrated) was substituted with Soviet migrants. At that time, Moscow tried to promote Russian as a *lingua franca* in all spheres. Like many other Eastern European countries, Latvia was effectively isolated. Additionally, Soviet officials were not interested in efficient language training, as a foreign language was regarded as a potential channel of uncontrolled information. “The simplification of a very complex and sensitive language policy issue, elimination of the individual and the psychology of full belief and trust in all-powerful laws is the painful heritage of Soviet instruments of power.” Ms Priedīte also outlined the National Programme of Latvian Language Training (NPLLT). The programme is based on the premises that Latvian is a state language which is not too difficult to study and that language training should be user-friendlier, target-group-oriented. The organisers tried to employ positive motivation, which had been too often overlooked before. It took some time to convince the officials that NPLLT was supporting the state policy and that it should not be rejected as “too liberal”. In the year 2001, the Cabinet supported the programme with the sum of USD 700,000.

Answering to the questions, Ms Priedīte informed the participants that the share of State funding in the budget of NPLLT has reached 40 per cent in 2001. The Programme itself consists of four major parts: 1) training of teachers to enable them to teach in Latvian; 2) other programmes for teachers; 3) Latvian language training for special target groups; 4) integration activities (language camps, co-operation of schools, publishing of materials including the newspaper “Bridge”, etc.). 70 per cent of all funds are spent on projects related to teaching. Language courses have been organised by NPLLT for ca. 22 thousand participants. More than 100 teachers were trained to teach in Latvian. Ms Aldermane informed the participants about the language-training programme of the Naturalisation Board. It is aimed at those who want to naturalise. The programme has been very efficient. For the next year, language courses are planned for at least 2,000 participants.

**Ms Tatjana Liguta**, University of Latvia, gave a presentation on language relations in the country as local Russians see them. She stressed her support to the idea of one

state language and the necessity for all minorities to know Latvian. However, it is not a normal situation that officially, Russian is considered a foreign language. According to sociological polls, the percentage of minority members who want Russian to be a second state language has increased. In the beginning of the 1990s, this idea was supported only by radicals. It is a reaction to very severe linguistic policies. Russian should receive a certain limited status in the official and economic domains. It would be a demonstration of respect for a language minority which includes 36 per cent of the population. For less educated and older Russians, the right to use their mother tongue could be of vital importance. The Russian language in Latvia is becoming more and more simplified, primitive. The knowledge of Latvian by Russians has improved (it is more advanced among the younger generation) while many Latvians are 'losing' their Russian. Nevertheless, the attitude to the Russian language has started to improve. It is worth emphasising that the attitude to a language (and culture) is defined by the attitude to the people concerned. Unfortunately, the Russian intelligentsia of Latvia seems to be excluded from active public life. Moreover, the Russian community lacks the opportunity of a normal regeneration of its intelligentsia in Latvian higher educational institutions. Of course, appropriate Latvian language training is necessary. However, it does not presuppose the liquidation of Russian-language secondary schools. The curricula of minority schools should be oriented toward the Russian language and culture. A consensus concerning the reform of the minority school is far from being reached. The introduction of a bilingual model was unprepared and should remain under strict control.

### *General discussion*

During the general discussion, the participants tackled different problems related to the bilingual education of minorities in Latvia. The quite insignificant Latvian experience in this domain (compulsory bilingual education for minorities was introduced on 1 September 1999) and the planned abolishment of secondary school education in Russian from 2004 were juxtaposed to the Estonian plans of a school reform presented by **Mr Vadim Poleshchuk** (in Estonian minority Gymnasiums (secondary schools), 60 per cent of all subjects will be taught in Estonian from 2007, the others – in other languages; in Estonia, this is a highly controversial issue). Some

participants expressed concerns that Latvian schools are not encouraged to elaborate their own models of bilingual education (which is formally permitted). **Mr Igor Pimenov** stressed the crucial role of the mother tongue in education for the preservation of minority identities. **Mr Vladimir Sokolov** emphasised that a bilingual society does not mean a divided society.

**Ms Aldermane** summarised other school-related proposals as follows:

1. In 2004, too many Russian-language secondary schools and schoolchildren will be unprepared for studies in Latvian only. This problem should be examined in detail by municipal and national authorities.
2. In bilingual classes, special teacher's aid (assistant teacher) is required to work with pupils who have problems with their studies (including language-related difficulties).
3. Schools should become true centres of integration. They should actively promote integration of both schoolchildren and their parents in order to avoid parents-children alienation in minority families.

Additionally, **Mr Boris Kolchanov** proposed:

1. The "2004 requirement" should be abolished as unrealistic. A new deadline (e.g. 2010) should be introduced instead.
2. The Estonian model (i.a. 60 per cent of all classes in secondary schools to be given in the state language) should be discussed.

The workshop participants paid special attention to the language situation in the big cities of Latvia (in most of which Russian-speakers constitute a majority<sup>5</sup>). **Ms Līviņa Jankovska** (Daugapils) informed the participants about the difficulties experienced by the directors of local kindergartens and schools, who lack professionals able to teach pupils in proper Latvian. Another difficulty is the absence of a state language ambience. According to **Ms Rita Zommere** (Rēzekne), many Russian-speakers send

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<sup>5</sup> According to the 2000 census, Latvians constitute a majority in the big cities only in Ventspils and Jelgava (51.5% and 50.9%, respectively). Ethnic Russians (i.e. excluding other Russian-speakers) constitute 55.2% of the whole population in Daugavpils, 50.7% in Rēzekne and 43.8% in Riga. *Source*: Press release of 07.11.2000 of the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

their children to Latvian-language schools. **Ms Ineta Stadgale** (Liepāja) told the audience how the local self-government is trying to improve the information of the population through special info-centres. During her short presentation, **Ms Vera Šengelija** (Ventspils) stressed that learning of the state language should not hinder the study of other subjects. The different individual characteristics of the pupils are to be taken into account. **Ms Alla Pogrebņjak**, a representative of the Estonian town of Paldiski, shared her experience of the normalisation of life in this former Soviet naval base with the participants.

During the discussion, many participants emphasised the peculiarities of the integration process in big cities. **Mr Guntis Dambergs**, MP, pointed out that the individual approach and the role of self-governments should not be underestimated. **Mr Miroslav Mitrofanov**, MP, stressed the importance of NGOs' involvement in the future activities of the Integration Foundation (to be founded soon by the Government). Many participants asked to solve the problem of the use of language in official applications submitted to local self-governments. **Mr Kolchanov** recommended the adoption of new legal provisions in this regard. To his mind, active participation of non-citizens in local elections would contribute to the society integration. **Ms Aldermane** summarised the other proposals as follows:

1. Mass media should work more actively in the sphere of integration. The information of the Russian-speaking population is far from being satisfactory.
2. Special programmes are to be worked out to meet the needs of the elderly.
3. Big cities require special integration policies.

At the end of the general discussion, representatives of NGOs gave short presentations of their organisations and problems. **Ms Gaida Masaļska** from the Latvian Folk School (LFS) explained that her organisation has been oriented towards the adult population since 1989. LFS organises teachers' training, language courses and civic studies. **Ms Kristīne Briede** from the Liepāja Karaosta Culture and Information Centre K@2 is working in the Karaosta district of Liepāja, which has been a military base until recently. Only 24 per cent of the all population of the district are citizens of Latvia. The organisation disseminates information (e.g. on naturalisation procedures)

and works with the youth. K@2 is also proud of its language courses for the unemployed. The representatives of both organisations reported about the lack of financial support on the part of the authorities.

### ***Session in Karaosta***

The Karaosta session started with a discussion on teachers' aid. **Ms Aldermane** pointed out that this proposal requires that analyses are made in different municipalities. Then, their summarised results should be discussed in governmental institutions. There are many unemployed kindergarten tutors in Latvia who can start working as teachers' aids.

**Mr Mitrofanov** recommended on his behalf:

1. to analyse the existing Latvian legislation in order to identify amendments required to conform to the *Framework Convention* and to ratify the Convention;
2. to introduce legal definitions of 'national minority', 'minority language' and 'minority school';
3. to take measures in order to prevent official hate speech;
4. to elaborate an official concept of minority/majority relations; to work out the Law on National Minority;
5. to abolish the "2004 requirement"; to elaborate and propose new models of bilingual education for minorities; to organise a conference on bilingual education.

The discussion on the above-mentioned proposals highlighted the absence of comprehensive minority-related policies in Latvia. A foreign expert stressed that the *Framework Convention* should be ratified and related legislation adopted while avoiding any subsequent negative changes in the minority situation. Many "Russian" participants argued that the "2004 requirement" was not in the interest of the Latvian society and could be a basis for its future disintegration.

**Mr Mitrofanov** offered some recommendations for local self-governments:

1. to study a real situation in municipal schools, taking into consideration the “2004 requirement” and proposed models of bilingual education;
2. to encourage large self-governments to adopt their own integration programmes and to organise their own integration centres and foundations;
3. to encourage cooperation of schools and local NGOs with the Integration Foundation;
4. to promote multiculturalism by organising municipal projects’ contest.

**Ms Irina Vynnik**, Latvian TV, emphasised the importance of the development of a dialogue between Latvian and non-Latvian communities. The state should abolish unreasonable requirements in the cultural domain, such as limits on the use of minority languages on radio and TV.

## **ECMI CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the presentations, distributed materials and discussions at the workshop “Language Policy in Urban Environment” organised by the European Centre for Minority Issues from 8 to 10 June 2001 in Liepāja, Latvia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. This workshop was attended by Latvian officials, NGO and minority leaders, international experts and representatives from Estonia. In the context of national integration, issues related to language policy in Latvian cities were discussed. The workshop contributed to the exchange of information between Estonia and Latvia on these matters.
2. The workshop noted that several big cities in Latvia require special integration and language policy measures. Special programmes are also required to meet the needs of the elder population. It was proposed that large self-governments adopt their own integration programmes and organise their own integration centres and foundations.

3. The workshop emphasised that urban schools should use their capacity to promote integration of both schoolchildren and their parents avoiding parents-children alienation in minority families. It was recommended that the cooperation of schools and local NGOs with the Latvian Integration Foundation (to be launched soon) should be encouraged and multiculturalism be promoted by organising contests of special projects.
4. It was deemed necessary to study the real situation in municipal schools, taking into consideration the “2004 requirement” and proposed models of bilingual education as well as to work out and introduce new models of bilingual education for minorities. In bilingual classes, special teacher’s aid was considered necessary for the work with pupils who have problems with their studies (including language-related difficulties). It was recommended that municipal and national authorities examine this problem in detail before financial solutions are proposed. In this context, it was recommended to organise a conference on bilingual education.
5. It was noted that by 2004, too many Russian-language secondary schools and schoolchildren would be insufficiently prepared for studies in Latvian only. There were proposals to adopt a new deadline of 2010 and to abolish the “2004 requirement” as unrealistic. It was also proposed that discussion of the Estonian model of a minority secondary school (only 60 per cent of the curriculum in the state language) might be useful for the development of a Latvian policy of integration through education.
6. The workshop proposed to analyse the existing Latvian legislation to identify amendments required to conform to the *Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities* and to ratify the Convention. In this context, it was considered necessary to work out the *Law on National Minorities* and to introduce legal definitions of ‘national minority’, ‘minority language’ and ‘minority school’ into Latvian legislation.

7. It was also noted that the mass media should work more actively in the sphere of integration. The information of the Russian-speaking population remains far from satisfactory in this regard. Proposals were made to take measures in order to prevent official hate speech.