

**SOCIAL DIMENSION OF  
INTEGRATION IN ESTONIA  
AND MINORITY EDUCATION  
IN LATVIA**

Vadim Poleshchuk

ECMI Workshops

“Social Dimension of Integration in Estonia”  
19-21 October 2001, Pärnu, Estonia

and

“Prospects of Minority Education in Latvia”  
1-4 November 2001, Daugavpils, Latvia

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) initiated the Baltic Project “Accession to the EU and National Integration in Estonia and Latvia” in order to encourage respective public discussions in Estonia and Latvia. The first seminar dedicated to general problems of integration took place in December 2000 in Tønder, Denmark<sup>1</sup>. In June 2001, ECMI workshops were organised in Narva-Jõesuu, Estonia, and in Liepāja, Latvia. The topic of the workshop in Estonia was “Multiculturalism and Minority Education” and in Latvia “Language Policy in Urban Environment”<sup>2</sup>.

The local workshops were intentionally focussed on education reforms and language policy. These are the two principal tools used by Estonian and Latvian authorities to promote society integration. However, local minorities and the international community have repeatedly expressed their concerns regarding the practical methods of using these tools. As a result, Estonian and Latvian language laws have been recently amended to meet international human rights standards. However, the practical implementation of professional linguistic requirements in both countries is still at the centre of attention of numerous experts and observers. Both countries have started reforms of minority education to ensure minority members' high level of state language proficiency. After a long debate, a bilingual model was adopted for minority secondary schools (10-12 grade) in Estonia. The transition would start in the school year 2007/2008. In Latvia, the transition to Latvian as the only medium of instruction in minority secondary schools will start in the school year 2004/2005. Since 1 September 1999, basic schools in Latvia started to implement models of bilingual education.

The discussion of these problems continued at the ECMI follow-up workshops in Pärnu and Daugavpils.

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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.

<sup>2</sup> See Poleshchuk, Vadim. "Multiculturalism, Minority Education and Language Policy", ECMI Workshops "Multiculturalism and Minority Education" 1-3 June 2001, Narva-Jõesuu, Estonia, and "Language Policy in Urban Environment" 8-10 June 2001, Liepāja, Latvia. ECMI Report # 10, Flensburg: ECMI, August 2001.

The ECMI Workshop "Social Dimension of Integration in Estonia" from 19 to 21 October 2001 in the Estonian resort town of Pärnu acquainted state officials, minority opinion leaders, NGO activists and young generation politicians with the findings of Estonian social scientists. Their studies had disclosed the inferior position of the non-Estonian population in the labour market. The participants discussed *inter alia* the factors that influenced minority members' opportunities on labour market, in business and those that may lead to their criminal behaviour. The problems of professional linguistic requirements were also dealt with here.

At the ECMI Workshop "Prospects of Minority Education in Latvia" from 1 to 4 November 2001 in Daugavpils<sup>3</sup>, Latvia, officials, politicians, including seven MPs, Russian-speaking opinion leaders, NGO activists and headmasters of minority schools of the region discussed the acute problems of educational reform in the country. The participants shared information and expressed their positive attitudes and concerns regarding certain aspects of official educational policies.

Both workshops were attended by representatives from Estonia and Latvia. This was of high importance given the similarities of their ethnic policies and political aspirations to become full-fledged members of the European Union. The involvement of international experts provided the participants with information about European standards and requirements in the field of minority protection.

The ECMI takes full responsibility for this report, which has not been reviewed by the workshop participants.

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<sup>3</sup> Daugavpils is a city near the border of Latvia with Russia and Byelorussia, the centre of Latgale, a historical region of Latvia. The first states in the Latvian territory were founded in this region and its population gave an ethnic name to the whole Latvian nation. Latgale has always had ethnically mixed population. Today, ethnic Latvians constitute ca 15 % of the population of the city of Daugavpils.

## **ECMI WORKSHOP**

### **“SOCIAL DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION IN ESTONIA”**

#### *Opening of the workshop*

**Mr Priit Järve**, Acting Deputy Director of ECMI, opened the workshop. He extended a special welcome to the participants who had been invited to a Baltic Project event for the first time, particularly to the young politicians representing different political parties of Estonia. He reminded that the first seminar of the ECMI Baltic Project was organised in December 2000 in Tønder, Denmark followed by the first local Estonian workshop in June 2001 in Narva-Jõesuu, which was dedicated to the problems of multiculturalism and minority education. This follow-on Estonian workshop in Pärnu was organised to deal with another important question—the social dimension of integration.

**Mr Margus Tammekivi**, Deputy Mayor of Pärnu, welcomed the participants of the workshop on behalf of the city government. He informed the participants that the authorities of Pärnu have been actively involved in the implementation of integration initiatives at the national and local levels. The city has its own integration commission. A special agreement has been signed with another Estonian city of Narva (97 % of Russian-speakers). Many interesting projects in the field of integration have been carried out in Pärnu during the last 2-3 years.

#### *First session*

**Ms Katrin Saks**, the Estonian Minister of Population Affairs, made a presentation on the social aspects of the State Integration Programme. She pointed out that in the social domain, Estonia has developed considerable differences between rich and poor. The lack of equality can be also seen between inhabitants of urban areas and those living in rural areas. Speaking about Estonians and non-Estonians, the Minister stressed that no significant differences in the purchasing power of these groups can be observed. At the same time, the level of unemployment among minorities is higher and she attributed this partly to their poor knowledge of the Estonian language. Thus, the emphasis that the State Integration Programme has put on language training is

understandable. According to the Minister, the representatives of minorities recognise the necessity to study the state language. She considered it very important to create equally good educational opportunities for Estonian and non-Estonian youth. Now, already up to 25 % of all students of Estonia are members of minorities.

Minister Saks was asked to comment on the recent developments in Tallinn where the police registered allegedly ethnically motivated fights between the gangs of youngsters. Minister Saks responded that this was not an ethnic conflict, but acknowledged the existence of social problems and lack of recreation infrastructure for youth in certain parts of the capital. Gossip and misinterpretation of facts by the media also played a negative role, she explained.

**Ms Maija Sakslin**, Institute of International Economic Law, University of Helsinki, presented the Finnish experience in combating minority discrimination in the social field. In Finland as a whole a climate of tolerance towards minorities has been created, according to her. In the social sphere, citizenship has little importance in relation to access to social benefits. In the political sphere, Finland has adopted a constitution that ensures the bilingual (Finnish-Swedish) and multicultural make-up of the country. There are special Swedish speaking municipalities and a monolingual (Swedish) region, namely the Åland Islands.

Many ethnic groups in Finland have specific problems of their own (e.g., sceptical attitude of the Roma community towards the official school system). Some groups (such as Swedes in urban areas) enjoy a better standard of living than other groups. There is a system of representative public funded organs, which have the purpose of ensuring a better understanding of the problems of minorities by Finnish authorities.

During the **discussion** the participants concentrated on the role of state language proficiency in labour opportunities of minority members. It was claimed that the existing requirements of language proficiency limit minority access to higher social positions. In the existing "areas of possible discrimination" risks of future conflicts can appear. One Estonian scholar criticised the popular approach that "democracy in Estonia exists as far as the state language requirements are fulfilled".



## *Second session*

The presentation of **Mr Vadim Poleshchuk** from the Legal Information Centre for Human Rights, Tallinn, was dedicated to the legal influence of citizenship and language requirements on the working opportunities of the minority population in Estonia. He pointed out that according to sociological surveys, the economic situation of minority members is generally worse than that of the majority population. Non-Estonians believe that their main risk factors when looking for a new job are related to health, citizenship and language. The first risk factor is universal and quite understandable. Citizenship influences the process in an indirect way: without Estonian citizenship, the majority of the non-Estonian population are not able to participate in the economy-related decision making process.

In Estonia, the command of the state language is officially recognised as an integral part of professional qualifications. Language requirements, if not justified in the public interest, should be regarded as an ethnically motivated component of labour market policies. The rule of a justified and balanced approach was incorporated into the Estonian Law on Language in June 2000. Mr Poleshchuk stressed that language requirements in the public sector are understandable if they are adequate. However, for example requirements for teachers of public and municipal schools (middle level) are excessively demanding. In the private sector, free market mechanisms can operate and the state should avoid unfounded interference there. Nevertheless, Estonia has established language requirements for all workers of the trade and service sector who deal with clients. Some requirements are not justified under the particular Estonian circumstances. For instance, high fluency in writing and oral Estonian is required from flight controllers who are almost totally working in English.

Mr Poleshchuk argued that language proficiency should not be included as a part of professional qualifications for most positions. The existing unbalanced and excessive requirements have forced Russian-speaking specialists into lower paying blue-collar positions in the labour market.

During the **discussion**, an Estonian official claimed that the level of Estonian language proficiency among non-Estonians is increasing, which suggests that very

soon the existing rules will not be regarded as rigid. Nevertheless, "the aim of the requirements is to regularise the use of language". Another participant asked a question about the situation of the older generations of non-Estonians whose ability to study language is limited for objective reasons. Some predominantly Russian-speaking regions (north-eastern Estonia) need a special approach. The language requirements should also meet the requirements of minorities (bilingual doctors, security notes in Russian, etc).

### ***Third session***

Ethnic relations in post-Soviet Estonian entrepreneurship were characterised by **Mr Rein Vöormann**, Institute of International and Social Studies (IISS), Tallinn Pedagogical University. His presentation was based on a special qualitative study commissioned by the Presidential Roundtable on National Minorities in 1997. Three groups of respondents participated in focus-group interviews (representatives of Estonian-owned, Russian-owned and mixed companies).

Respondents from all groups mentioned certain problems related to business: 1) lack of stable politics under the circumstances of a dynamic economy; 2) legislation does not favour entrepreneurship; 3) shortage of qualified specialists; 4) problems of the ethnically "other side".

Representatives of Russian firms felt even more insecure than their Estonian colleagues. They argued that the undeniable existence of two business communities ("Estonian"/"Russian") was stimulated by official ideology (in addition to the legacy of the Soviet era interethnic labour division and language barrier). Thus, Russian entrepreneurs could not compete with citizens (ethnic Estonians) in the beginning of the privatisation campaign, etc. Additionally, citizenship and language-related legislation undermined their efforts.

The study proved that businesspeople do not know too much about problems of the ethnically "other" business community. Almost all of them claimed that the choice of partners was determined by pragmatic considerations, not by ethnicity. However, the

difference in mentality, approach to work and poor Estonian language skills would make cross-ethnic cooperation less likely.

Representatives of all three groups agreed that their influence on politics is minimal and that they need a strong umbrella organisation, which will represent their interests irrespective of ethnicity and the field of activities. The open discussion of the future of the Estonian State and society was deemed necessary. The legislation should be more oriented to the real Estonian situation and relations with eastern markets (Russia) are to be improved. The official policies must support staff training.

**Ms Jelena Helemäe**, IISS, made a sociological overview of the influence of the command of the Estonian language on opportunities in the labour market.

In 1992, major structural changes in the Estonian economy began. The unemployment rate started its rapid growth was much higher among non-Estonians. Employment in the primary sector (manned mostly by non-Estonians) decreased while a significant increase of employment was observed in the tertiary sector (especially for ethnic Estonians). Since 1993, ethnic Estonians have been over-represented in public administration.

Since 1995, a stabilisation of the labour market has been evident and its vertical segmentation has crystallised Estonians prevail among managers and professionals, while the occupational status of minority members has been lowered. Since 1999, the occupational disadvantages of non-Estonians were converted into a noticeable loss of wages compared to Estonians. Non-Estonians have fewer chances to reach a higher wages quintile (see Table I in Appendix for details).

Concerning the risk of job loss, education was not an important factor for non-Estonians. In 1992-1994, the main losers on the labour market were non-Estonian women with advanced levels of education. Differences in labour market opportunities could be explained by the former interethnic division of labour and by the effects of language-related legislation. However, for example in Tallinn the unemployment level among non-Estonians fluent in Estonian was two times higher than the average unemployment level of Estonians (see Table II in Appendix).

In her presentation **Ms Ellu Saar**, IISS, informed the audience on how educational resources influence the working opportunities of different ethnic groups in the labour market. In 1999 the average level of education among Estonians and non-Estonians was quite similar. However, Estonians were over-represented in the higher occupational groups. At the same time the educational level of non-Estonians in these positions was higher.

In 1999, young non-Estonians with secondary, vocational and higher education had an unemployment level that exceeded by 1.5 to 3 times the unemployment among Estonians of the same age and educational background. For 30-39 year old non-Estonians with higher education the level of unemployment was 6 times higher (see Table III in Appendix for details). The language competence was very important for people with higher education who wanted to reach a better occupational status. However, there were still differences between Estonians and minority members fluent in the state language.

During the **discussion**, the workshop participants emphasised that in the beginning of the 1990s many well-educated non-Estonians left the country. The shrinking of youth working opportunities in Estonia, especially for non-Estonian youth with higher education, has been promoting their emigration. The lack of educational opportunities has also been influencing this process. Today, non-Estonians are under-represented among the students of institutions of higher education and many of them have to pay for their education.

#### ***Fourth session***

**Ms Anna Markina**, IISS, made a presentation on the ethnic aspects of the criminal situation in Estonia. Since 1991 the general level of criminality has been constantly growing. More than 80% of all crimes are those against property. The highest criminal rate has been registered in Tallinn, Narva and Ida-Virumaa County where non-Estonians live in large numbers or constitute the majority of the population. However, these regions are urban and highly industrialised and have a history of intensive

migration. In most countries such regions have a much higher criminal rate compared to traditional rural areas.

Criminal activity coefficients for Estonians and non-Estonians in 2000 were 0.81 and 1.35 respectively. Non-Estonians compose about 35% of the total population. Nevertheless in 1999 their percentage among offenders was 45.4. The same year they made up 57.3% of all inmates. The probability to receive a parole verdict was twice as high for Estonians than it was for non-Estonians.

The Estonian situation is not unique; Ms Markina referred to findings of Michael Tonry, who has studied the relationship between crime and ethnic or racial minority status. In every country the crime and incarceration rate of minority members exceeds those of the majority population. Hans-Jörg Albrecht, another expert, has argued that in general, the studies show no difference between majority and minority groups with the same socio-economic status. According to Ms Markina, “rather than convincing us that non-Estonians are dangerous and causing major crime problems, the provided data shows us that non-Estonians are a marginalised group in Estonian society.”

Ms Markina presented further findings by Hans-Jörg Albrecht. According to these, the crime rate for the second and third generations of immigrants is higher. It could be the reaction to the deprivation status of a minority group and to the conflict of values of majority and minority groups. If this is also the case in Estonia, the level of juvenile crime will grow in the next 5-15 years (the country now faces the consequences of the baby boom of the end of 80s).

In 2000, juveniles committed 14.4 % of all offences (20.1 % of larceny-theft, 23 % of burglary, 17.8 % of robbery, 28.9 % of car theft etc). Russian-speakers compose 45 % in this group. Fifty-five percent of all juvenile offenders were 16 or 17 years old.

Of all arrested juveniles in 2000, 22.4% had neither attended a school nor did they have a job. Simultaneously, the youth unemployment rate is growing constantly. Thus in the same year, the unemployment rate for 15-24 year old Estonians was 19.7%, for non-Estonians 30.7%. Another negative tendency observed has been the increased consumption by students of alcohol and illegal drugs.

**Ms Halida Agapova**, Narva Centre of Integration Initiative, described the situation in the Ida-Virumaa county (north-eastern Estonia) and the integration-related activities of the local NGOs. After the breakdown of the USSR, the economic situation in the region was rather unfavourable. The local industry previously oriented to the eastern markets (Russia) was stagnating and the unemployment rate started to grow. According to sociological surveys, unemployment is the main source of concern for the local population.

There are many different NGOs in the region (cultural societies of national minorities, sport clubs, social and women organisations, trade unions and special goal-oriented organisations). The NGOs have tried to establish good contacts with local and state authorities. Some of these attempts have been quite successful. However, the main problem that haunts the third sector has been insufficient financing.

During the **discussion**, participants shared their views regarding juvenile criminal activities. They stressed the importance of the third sector interference in this field. Many emphasised the interconnection of criminal activities with a low standard of living and unemployment, the latter being partly inflated by the professional linguistic requirements. Participants also discussed the problems of the official use of Russian as an internal working language parallel with Estonian in Ida-Virumaa. Such a possibility is foreseen in the Constitution and in the Law on Language for those administrative units where the minority composes a majority of the population and if self-governments of these units so appeal to the national government. A reference was made to a group of deputies of the Narva City Council which had called for adoption of a required petition to the national government. An Estonian official commented that Russian could not be considered as an internal official language unless the local state employees had reached a high level of state language proficiency.

### ***Fifth session***

**Ms Klara Hallik**, IISS, presented her vision of the integration process in Estonia based on the data of sociological research and policy analysis. According to her, the ethnic policies in Estonia in the beginning of the 1990s were designed to ensure

control over the minority population. At that time, it was seen by the Estonian political elite as the only way to guarantee the preservation of national stability and identity. This added the inequality of two communities in Estonia to the previous differences associated with the division of labour in economy.

In 2001, the respondents were asked about the essence of integration policies in Estonia. The term "assimilation" was still used by 17% of Estonians and 22% of non-Estonians. In fact, only pursuing reasonable social and educational policies can prove that assimilation is not being planned. In politics, this means that Russians' presence in electoral lists of the mainstream parties ceases to be decorative.

From the integration perspective, it is very important how people estimate their social position and opportunities. Thus, many non-Estonians consider that ethnic Estonians have more chances to reach a higher social position compared to minority members (90% of non-Estonian respondents versus 36% of Estonians), or to get a job that corresponds to profession (80% of non-Estonians versus 30% of Estonians). When minority members were asked why Estonians are over-represented in higher positions, 44% said that ethnic origin is the reason, 19% referred to "personal connections" and 17% - to Estonian citizenship. The answers of ethnic Estonians were quite different. Thus, 39% of them mentioned citizenship, 20% Estonian language proficiency and only 14% ethnic origin. Such differences are telling and should not be overlooked, Ms Hallik concluded.

### ***General discussion***

During the **general discussion**, a representative of Latvia made a short presentation of the situation in the country. It was claimed that in Latvia minority members do not participate normally in the decision making process. They are under-represented in the main state institutions. For instance, there are no non-Latvians in the Supreme Court or in the Council on Radio and TV. The educational reforms foresee for minority schools the transition to non-balanced bilingual (in basic school) and to monolingual education (in secondary school) in Latvian.

Many participants maintained that official bodies are well informed about negative consequences of some governmental policies. Some scholars rejected this assumption and stressed the role of modern myths in local political life. "Many politicians can see only what they like". One of the myths is the belief that the State language proficiency is the solution to all social problems. As worded by one of the participants, "the symbol of the Estonian integration policies is a well-known poster "Study language!" with a tied-up human mouth on it". Furthermore, according to sociological studies, educated minority members fluent in Estonian experience more difficulties than ethnic Estonians on labour market. Taking this into consideration, some participants claimed that there is a proven "evidence of structural discrimination in Estonia".

According to one of the participants, the fight against discrimination in Estonia is possible in the framework of implementation of the Council of the European Union Directive 2000/43/EC (the "Race Equality Directive" or "Directive"). It is not enough to have general declarations in the constitution and in other laws. For an efficient fight against discrimination special non-discrimination legislation should be adopted, the activities of the ombudsman in this field reinforced and all means of relevant propaganda activated. If Estonia wants to become a member of the EU it will have to do its best to guarantee equal treatment of all inhabitants irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

**Mr Priit Järve**, ECMI, who moderated the entire workshop, thanked all participants for their active and fruitful work. He expressed his gratitude to the Minister of Population Affairs and to the Head of the OSCE Mission to Estonia for participation, and to the Council of Europe for having provided an expert.



## ECMI CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the presentations, distributed materials and discussions at the workshop “Social Dimension of Integration in Estonia”, organised by the European Centre for Minority Issues from 19 to 21 October 2001 in Pärnu, Estonia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. This workshop was attended by Estonian officials, NGO and minority leaders, Estonian social scientists, politicians, representatives from Latvia and international experts. The social dimension of society integration was discussed. The workshop contributed to the exchange of information between Estonia and Latvia on these matters.
2. The participants of the workshop were informed about the positive role of official language training programmes aimed at lowering disparities between the majority and minorities in the labour market.
3. Representatives of the public sector and the third sector recognised certain obstacles on the way to social integration in Estonia. One of the main problems is still the insufficient level of the State language proficiency among minority members that limit their working opportunities. In addition, formal linguistic requirements for professions should be reviewed. It is necessary to ensure that their implementation is balanced and justified.
4. The participants were informed about the integration potential of the business community in Estonia. At the same time, in the labour market, disadvantages and wage loss for non-Estonians have been evident during the last 10 years. The language proficiency influences the working opportunities. However, fluency in the State language and relevant education do not help non-Estonians to achieve equality with ethnic Estonians. Therefore, Estonia needs an efficient legal system of protection against discrimination, as required by the Council of the European Union Directive 2000/43/EC (the “Race Equality Directive” or “Directive”).
5. In Estonia, the rate of criminal activities is higher among minorities. Partly this could be explained by their comparatively worse economic situation. The rate of juvenile criminal activities, including non-Estonian youth, could remain

high. Thus, the problems of juvenile unemployment remain of great importance.

6. Representatives of the third sector in Ida-Virumaa are doing their best to promote integration in different fields. There is an understanding of their problems by the authorities; however, there is still a lack of adequate financial assistance.

## **ECMI WORKSHOP**

### **"PROSPECTS OF MINORITY EDUCATION IN LATVIA"**

#### *Opening of the workshop*

**Mr Priit Järve**, Acting Deputy Director of ECMI, welcomed the participants and opened the workshop with the presentation of ECMI Baltic Project. He reminded the participants that after the first seminar which took place in December 2000 in Tønder, Denmark, ECMI organised a special local workshop in Latvia on language policies in the urban environment in June 2001. The workshop in Daugavpils is dedicated to the problems of minority education in Latvia. It is undeniable that the role of educational institutions in the process of integration could be decisive. Minority education is a challenging issue for both Latvia and Estonia. In this connection he gave a short overview of how the Estonian minority school debate has been unfolding, which legislative initiatives had been proposed and which relevant acts had been recently adopted.

**Mr Rihards Eigims**, Mayor of Daugavpils, delivered a welcome speech. He thanked the workshop participants for their interest in the problems, which should be solved in the process of society integration in Latvia.

#### *First session*

In the beginning of the first session **Professor Ineta Ziemele**, Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Sweden, and Graduate School of Law, Riga, gave an overview of human rights instruments related to minority education. Professor Ziemele referred to the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Art. 27), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (Art. 5) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

She also referred to documents adopted in the framework of the Council of Europe and of the OSCE in order to ensure stability and development in Europe. Art. 14 of

the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities encourages the State Parties to recognise the rights of minority members to learn their language, and under certain condition to be taught or receive instruction in minority language without prejudice to the learning of the official language.

Articles 11-14 of the Hague Recommendations Regarding the Educational Rights of National Minorities deal with the language of instruction in primary and secondary levels. In pre-school and primary levels the curriculum should ideally be taught in minority language. In secondary schools, a substantial part of curriculum should be taught in the minority language. Throughout this period, the number of subjects taught in the state language should gradually be increased.

In her presentation **Ms Eiženija Aldermane**, Head of the Latvian Naturalisation Board, put emphasis on the role of educational institutions in the integration of society.

In her opinion, integration is a challenge not only for minorities, but also for the majority. An integrated society requires common values and goals. At present there are not enough common values in Latvia, furthermore, the values of minority and majority can indeed even be antagonistic. We face the population's mistrust in the state bodies and the isolation of the local elite, according to her. There are many different lines of division: citizens/non-citizens, urban/rural, and poor/rich. Certain social groups are alienated and marginalised. Access to education for poor children is in fact limited. The problem of street urchins has unfortunately become topical.

Another challenge is adherence to the ideals of democracy. According to Ms Aldermane, it was a great mistake in the beginning of the 1990s to have removed all ideology from the school curriculum. As a result, pupils did not receive a proper civic education. Fortunately, this period is over. Today, knowledge on history and the constitution can be obtained in schools and it helps in the naturalisation process. However, schools should intensify their activities aimed at informing about naturalisation procedures and about the benefits of Latvian citizenship. Foreign donors have assisted the Naturalisation Board in publishing some naturalisation-related materials and organising special events.

During the **discussion**, the participants asked Professor Ziemele to comment on the nature of international human and minority rights standards. Professor Ziemele stressed that these standards are minimal requirements, and that official policy is not supposed to worsen the situation in this field. The notion of linguistic minorities is internationally recognised but the international standards do not elaborate in details the concrete structure of the minority school curriculum.

Russian participants<sup>4</sup> stated that the aim of the on-going reforms is the Latvianisation of minority education in the country. They referred to requirements of bilingual education in the basic school and to the insecure future of minority secondary schools (which will soon probably operate only in Latvian). Other Russian participants emphasised the important role of Russian in the educational system since Russian is in fact the second language of the country.

The former Minister of Education described the goals of the recently adopted Law on Education (1998). The objective was to unite society on the basis of language, not assimilation. The Law guarantees the opportunity to study in the minority language, but it also stipulates the requirement to obtain a high level fluency in the state language. In his opinion, the Law could not be regarded as discriminatory. Other Latvian participants claimed that Russian is now equalised with all other minority languages.

A representative of Estonia informed about the educational reforms in that neighbouring country. The transition to Estonian as the language of instruction in secondary school (grades 10-12) will start in the school year 2007/2008. However, according to the law up to 40% of the curriculum there could be taught in a minority language. Certain subjects will be taught in Estonian already in the basic school (grades 5-9). Additionally, education-related provisions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are obligatory for Estonia. However, this document has been ratified with a declaration that minority members are only those

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<sup>4</sup> In this part of the report the term "Russian participant" will be used as a synonym for a " Russian-speaking workshop participant from Latvia".

who have citizenship of Estonia. Many experts have questioned the applicability of this declaration.

### *Second session*

“Language in the system of education” was the topic of the presentation by **Professor Ina Druviete**, Institute of Latvian Language, University of Latvia. The aim of the official language policy in Latvia is a monolingual state and a multilingual society, she stated. Proficiency in the state language ensures minority members' equality in the labour market. There are, of course, certain linguistic rights of minorities, but knowledge of Russian could not be made compulsory for everyone in the country.

Latvia still lacks a hierarchy of languages with the state language on the top. However, some positive trends are registered regarding minorities' skills and attitudes relating to the state language, the position of which is stabilising. Nevertheless, there are still few economic incentives to use Latvian. The state must provide assistance to both state and minority languages. Bilingual education will help to improve the language situation in the country; any demagoguery in this regard should be avoided. Approaches to educational models ought to be flexible and the choices made at the school level are very important.

The interconnection of the command of language and integration was a topic of the study carried out in Daugavpils by **Ms Svetlana Djachkova**. She pointed out that the state language has different functions, being a means of economic and political integration. Language proficiency enables the accumulation of the necessary knowledge and understanding of other cultures. Language proficiency seen in this way could lower interethnic tensions.

During the last years, the importance of the state language has increased dramatically. However, only 41% of the respondents stated a high or middle level proficiency. Such results for the region of Latgale may be explained by the absence of the necessity to use the state language in everyday life. Naturalisation is also not motivating the learning of the language since the majority of Latgale inhabitants received Latvian citizenship by birth. At the same time, the lack of command of Latvian contributes to

the separation of the region from the rest of the country. Poor command of the state language limits the opportunities to participate in public discussion and leads to a very selective choice of sources of information. Persons fluent in Latvian are more positive in their attitudes to the country and have better access to the labour market. Ms Djachkova stated that special measures should be taken in order to stop the process of alienation of some groups of the population. The creation of a common information space and the development of voluntary integration-related initiatives would favour the process of integration.

In answer to questions of participants, Ms Djachkova stressed the importance of providing information in two languages in those self-governments where minorities are present in large numbers. She confirmed the existence of a negative tendency that certain social problems became the specific problems of minority members.

During the **discussion**, a workshop participant raised the question of possible discrimination of minority members in the labour market. Certain patterns of discrimination have been made public in Latvian scholarly literature. Russian participants claimed that, in practice, there is no equality between different ethnic communities. Other participants emphasised the necessity of state interference in cases where certain requirements could not be fulfilled due to objective reasons. The problem of mutual understanding of minorities and majority was discussed. Both ethnic "sides" were called to reconsider their positions and to be ready for a dialogue.

### ***Third session***

**Ms Evija Papule**, Head of Integration Division, Ministry of Education and Science, opened the third session. She made the presentation on official policies regarding minority education. She reminded that since the beginning of the 1990s, the school curriculum was changed and made similar for all schools of Latvia. New Latvian/Russian-language textbooks were published and the Central Examination System was set up. Since 1995, two subjects in the basic school and three subjects in the secondary school level of the minority school have been taught in Latvian. With the involvement of the UNDP experts, the programme of studying of the Latvian language has been elaborated. A decree of the Minister of Education and Science

obliged all teachers to obtain the certificate of the third (the highest) level of proficiency in Latvian.

In 1996-1997, the University of Latvia organised a study of minority education system in different countries. In 1997-1998, a special working group discussed the problems of the minority curriculum. In 1997-1999, a number of seminars were carried out to elaborate the topic. In 1999, four models of minority education were officially approved. Additionally any other programme (the fifth model) could be implemented by a minority school after the receipt of a licence from the Ministry of Education and Science.

According to the Law on Education (1998), secondary schools are to operate in Latvian. However, a transitional period was set up. Since 1999, 3 subjects in grades 1-3 should be instructed in Latvian. In basic schools, one of the bilingual models should be applied. In 2004-2008, a full transition to bilingual basic education will be carried out. After the tenth grade (secondary school level) all subjects will be taught in Latvian starting on 1 September 2004.

According to Ms Papule, one of the main problems is that parents do not have the necessary information about bilingual education. Bilingual educational methods are not used enough. It is necessary to motivate teachers to work in two languages. Today some teachers in minority schools receive additional payment for such kind of work. However, the training of teaching staff requires substantial financing resources.

The speaker assured that the Ministry tries to find the best solutions to all these problems. For example, there is the Consultative Board dealing with curriculum issues. A special brochure on bilingual education was published and distributed to parents. Training is organised for teachers to make it possible for them to study language and new educational methods.

**Mr Igor Pimenov**, the Association for Support of Russian Language Schools in Latvia, presented an alternative understanding of the school reforms in Latvia since 1991. He pointed out that when the Latvian Popular Front that came to power in 1990 it promised the preservation of the education in minority language to the electorate.



However, this promise was not kept in independent Latvia. In 1996, a programme on mastering of Latvian by the minority population (elaborated by the UNDP and Latvian experts) was accepted as a state programme. This document foresees the transition of minority secondary education to Latvian. In 1998, the Ministry of Education and Science adopted the programme of transition to Latvian as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. "A complicated ethno-demographic situation" in Latvia, which could be normalised by "the increase of the number of inhabitants that identify themselves as ethnic Latvians", was presented as one of the main reasons for such a transition. Russian schools in Latvia were called an obstacle to the mastering of Latvian and to integration. Consequently, the increase of the number of subjects taught in Latvian became the main objective. According to the programme, secondary education in the near future will be to at least 75% functioning in Latvian; bilingual education in basic schools will ensure it.

In practice, this ministerial programme has become the basis for state policy in the field of minority education. The only difference was that after the adoption of the Framework Document "Integration of Society in Latvia" the transition of minority education to Latvian became a "tool to unite the society". This approach was conformed in the "Strategy of Integration into the European Union", adopted by the Parliament on 9 February 2000. According to the Law on Education (1998), starting with the tenth grade, all studies will be in Latvian starting 1 September 2004. The Law on Basic Education that was adopted a bit later is more liberal. It allows amending the curriculum of minority schools with the subjects promoting minority identity.

The speaker claimed that the introduction of bilingual models in basic schools in summer 1999 was carried without necessary preparations. Additionally, there are no special patterns of curriculum for minority secondary schools offered by the Ministry of Education and Science because such schools will cease to exist in 2004. According to the statements of high ranked officials of the Ministry, there will be no considerable *cadre deficit* in minority schools. The number of pupils in Latvia is diminishing. Thus, unemployed Latvian teachers can substitute Russian colleges unable to teach in Latvian.

During the **discussion**, the results of the study carried out by the Daugavpils Language Centre were presented. The study tried to identify attitudes of grade10-12 pupils towards Latvian society and language. Thus, the feeling of belonging to the Latvian society was claimed by 26% of all respondents against 27% of those who said that they had none. Others could not answer this question. Thirty-seven per cent of all respondents enjoyed talking or practising in Latvian; others claimed a negative or neutral attitude. Forty-one per cent of all respondents claimed that studying a subject in Latvian caused a lack of interest in this subject. For thirty-eight per cent, learning Latvian does not matter at all. Most of the pupils estimated their level of Latvian as high.

A representative of the Daugavpils Language Centre criticised illegal public signs (signs in minority languages) and posters with mistakes that could be seen in the city. Such signs and posters, it was claimed, can not encourage the learning of Latvian.

According to a Russian participant, the planned transition to Latvian-language education in secondary minority schools does not take into consideration the problems of teaching staff and the average level of skills and abilities of pupils. A Russian MP stated that it would be extremely difficult to change the Law on Education in the parliament. One faction has already tried to do so 14 times. Nevertheless, the prolongation of the deadline (the year 2004) stated in the Law on Education is highly probable. On the other hand, massive non-implementation of the Law is also quite possible. Educational problems are over-politicised in Latvia. This delays the finding of a good solution to all-too-evident difficulties.

A Latvian official commented that specialised schools (schools for pupils with special needs) would experience the same wave of transition. An international expert argued that Latvianisation of minority schools would be tolerated from the perspective of international standards. Additionally, it could be anticipated that the Estonian model (60/40) would be recognised as justified by the Council of Europe. However, if the language proficiency is the precondition of access to important rights it will be the state obligation to ensure proper language training.

#### *Fourth session*

**Ms Livija Jankovska**, First Deputy Chairman of Daugavpils City Council, shared with the audience information about the problems of integration in Daugavpils. There are 130,000 inhabitants in the city, 31% of whom are stateless. In a special study, inhabitants of Daugavpils were asked how local authorities could promote the tempo of naturalisation. The problem of excessively high state fees was raised frequently here. The respondents also mentioned the need to organise free language training for all interested in it. Many advocated automatic granting of citizenship for those who have resided in Latvia for at least 5 years. The respondents often mentioned the necessity to create favourable social and economic conditions to prevent mass emigration from Latvia.

Altogether there were 1450 respondents; among them 606 received citizenship automatically, 229 by naturalisation. Half of the naturalised respondents experienced the following problems during the naturalisation procedure: financial difficulties, excessively demanding requirements of the language test and the test on the constitution.

Of 531 respondents without Latvian citizenship 423 (or 80%) claimed that they would like to naturalise. For 297 (or 56%), the main difficulty was of financial character, and 124 (or 23%) mentioned the tests on language and the constitution. Those who did not want to naturalise referred to the privileges while crossing the (Russian) border, citizenship of another state, etc.

**Mr Janis Dukšinskis**, Head of the Educational Centre of Daugavpils, made a presentation on minority education in Daugavpils. He said that minority education has been developing in Latgale since 1920. However, under the regime of President K. Ulmanis at the end of the 1930s, minority schools were suppressed. After the second World War, the number of pupils studying in Latvian has been diminishing. In 1988-1989, only 5,1% of all pupils studied in Latvian. The system of minority schools was restored after 1991. In the 2001/2002 school year, 82% of pupils studied in Russian-language schools.

These presentations were followed by the **discussion** with the participation of headmasters of several schools of Daugavpils. Some participants of the discussion argued that the transition from Russian mother tongue to Latvian as the language of instruction had not always been smooth. It has been especially difficult for pupils whose skills and abilities are below average. Others criticised the official approach to minority schools. They claimed that the school reform does not consider the multicultural character of Latvian society.

The participants discussed the very notion of minority school. Should it be a Latvian-language school with some additional minority identity-oriented subjects or should it be a school working in the minority language? Many Russian participants claimed that the quality of present bilingual education is rather low. In practice, a Russian-speaking teacher uses from time to time parallel to Russian rather poor Latvian to teach his/her subject to Russian-speaking pupils.

Latvian officials stressed the importance of language training for Russian-language teachers and the scientific analysis of the existing models of bilingual education. A representative of the Association for Support of Russian Language Schools in Latvia (LASHOR), informed about their initiative. LASHOR has offered its own models of bilingual education in which the native language dominates the process of education. These programmes have been presented to the Ministry of Education and Science for receiving a licence for the so-called fifth model of bilingual education.

### ***Fifth session***

**Mr Aleksandr Stepanov**, Integration Commission of Daugavpils, made a presentation on the linguistic aspects of secondary and higher education in Daugavpils. Mr Stepanov started with the assumption that language plays an important role in the national and European integration. Daugavpils has always been a multinational and multilingual city. The dominating ethnic group in 1897 was Jews, after the second World War it was Russians. The share of Poles remained stable (ca 15 %) while Latvians composed 2 % in 1897, 36 % in 1943 and 15 % in 1995. After 1991, the authorities promoted Latvian as the only official language. However, in

practice it was the suppression of local minority languages (mainly of Russian) by Latvian.

The language policies are reflected in the composition of the local school system. Thus, in 1985 there were 1 Latvian and 20 Russian secondary schools, in 2000 – 3 Latvian and 20 Russian secondary schools. In the year 2004, there should be 22 Latvian and 0 Russian secondary schools. These changes are unfortunately not supported by the introduction of developed educational methods and teaching materials.

One of the aims of the linguistic transition in secondary schools is to ensure further educational opportunities for minority members (state-funded higher education in Latvia is now in the state language only). However, in Daugavpils the conditions of the local higher educational institutions are rather poor. Thus, the number of students has increased significantly, while the staff has remained the same. Only ca 25% of the staff have academic degrees. Simultaneously, 30% of all students have to pay for their education. The libraries cannot offer qualitative materials and it is extremely expensive to buy them in bookshops. According to Mr Stepanov, the problem of extinction haunts local higher education, not the problem of choice of a medium of instruction.

The problems of integration, education and language proficiency in Rēzekne<sup>5</sup> were presented by **Mr Ivan Ribakov**, Rēzekne City Government. He noted that in 2000 ethnic Russians made up 50,7% of the total population of Rēzekne, while Latvians composed 43.7%. In practice, minorities have to use the state language only in contacts with officialdom. There are not enough motivation or financial resources for language training. Moreover, there is no strong motivation for naturalisation, because the stateless ("non-citizens") compose only 12 % of all city inhabitants.

For the time being, all schools in Rēzekne are still functioning. More than 60 % of all school graduates continue their studies in higher education institutions. Russian-speaking teachers have difficulties with the state language. However, any

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<sup>5</sup> Rēzekne is a relatively big town in Latvia not too far from Daugavpils.

amendments to existing educational laws should be balanced. In any case, the transition to Latvian as a medium of instruction must be irreversible. Answering questions of participants, Mr Ribakov acknowledged that the quality of bilingual education is still relatively low.

### ***General discussion***

During the **general discussion** many minority-related problems were touched upon. The representative of the Association for Support of Russian Language Schools in Latvia, summed up the information of Russian participants as follows:

1. the Ministry of Education and Science does not get objective information from schools regarding practical implementation of bilingual education;
2. the existing bilingual education is harmful to the quality of knowledge received in minority schools; in these schools the language proficiency is obtained at the expense of knowledge;
3. the level of proficiency in Latvian has been improved, but not trust in the state;
4. there is a lack of any reliable good practice on how to develop the methods of bilingual education.

Another Russian participant insisted that there should be schools of national minority necessary to reproduce the local Russian intelligentsia. The native tongue must dominate in the curriculum because the reality is perceived through language. The study of national literature is very important to inculcate morality and to make pupils familiar with national culture. It is especially the case with children of parents with a low level of cultural development: school is the only place where they can be acculturated. In short, the national minority school should be oriented to minority language and culture, giving simultaneously appropriate knowledge of Latvian language and culture, and cultivating Latvian patriotism.

Another Russian representative claimed that the insufficient results of educational reform could be explained by its forceful implementation.

Then a representative of the OSCE Mission to Latvia informed the audience about the assistance that this international organisation has provided to the educational reforms in Latvia (publishing of brochures, giving expert opinions, etc.). Participants from Estonia gave information about the functioning of the institution of higher education in the city of Narva (97 % of Russian-speakers) and about a project of cooperation between Estonian and Russian-language schools supported by the Integration Foundation of Non-Estonians.

At the end of the general discussion, **Ms Aldermane** proposed a number of conclusions based on the workshop proceedings:

1. it is extremely important to promote the dialogue between the two communities regarding all integration-related topics;
2. the existing difficulties must be solved taking into consideration objective characteristics of some groups of pupils (those unable to study foreign language, mentally underdeveloped, etc.) and regional peculiarities;
3. teachers still have language problems, even though they have had enough time to solve them; more attention should be paid to the future of pupils, not to the problems of such teachers;
4. the transition to Latvian as a medium of instruction in 2004 will not be reasonable if all schools are not ready for it;
5. a school should be a true centre of integration both for pupils and their parents.

**Ms Papule** informed the audience about the following:

1. the Ministry of Education and Science would like to encourage dialogue regarding the educational reforms; the feedback from minority schools is at the centre of its attention;
2. the elaboration of bilingual models, training materials, etc. will continue;
3. minority schools of Latvia have proved their vitality; it is very important to know about their problems and demands;
4. the amendment of the curriculum to respond to the problems of multiculturalism in Latvian-language schools will continue;

5. the Ministry will avoid any oppression in the process of planned gradual changes.

The Russian participants asked Ms Papule to continue the discussion of the goals of the educational reforms and the practical aspects of the work of minority schools.

**Mr Priit Järve**, ECMI, who had moderated the entire workshop, thanked the participants, including high-ranking Latvian officials and MPs, the representatives of the OSCE Mission to Latvia, of the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and of the Daugavpils City Government for their active involvement in the discussion of acute problems of minority education in Latvia at the workshop. He also expressed his gratitude to the Council of Europe for providing an expert.



## **ECMI CONCLUSIONS**

On the basis of the presentations, distributed materials and discussions at the workshop “Prospects of Minority Education in Latvia”, organised by the European Centre for Minority Issues from 1-4 November 2001 in Daugavpils, Latvia, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. This workshop was attended by Latvian officials, seven MPs, several NGO and minority leaders, headmasters of local Russian-language schools, representatives from Estonia and international experts. Problems of minority education in Latvia were discussed. The workshop contributed to the exchange of information between Latvia and Estonia on this matter.
2. The participants of the workshop were informed about the positive role of special training programmes organised under the supervision of the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry will continue to look for scientifically tested solutions to the existing problems of minority education.
3. The participants discussed the problems of the implementation of models of bilingual education in minority schools. They noted that the results of this implementation remain modest and are not reported truthfully to the Ministry of Education and Science.
4. Many participants advocated a more flexible approach to the pending transition of minority secondary schools to Latvian as the medium of instruction in 2004. Such a transition can not be efficiently carried out in many schools which lack appropriate conditions for such changes. An alternative approach is badly needed for Russian-speaking children with special needs.
5. Russian participants from Latvia expressed their concerns about the future of minority education in Latvia. They supported the idea of preservation of minority secondary school with the curriculum taught predominantly in the mother tongue accompanied by high-level teaching of the Latvian language. Such schools would pay special attention to the language, culture and history of the minority in addition to the study of Latvian culture and history.

**APPENDIX**

**TABLE I. Belonging to lower and higher quintile by ethnicity and command of Estonian, Estonia, %**

Place of residence	LOWER				HIGHER			
	Estonians	Non-Estonians			Estonians	Non-Estonians		
		All	Doesn't understand	Writes; domestic language		All	Doesn't understand	Writes; domestic language
Tallinn	18	24	33	14	40	17	16	21
Ida-Virumaa towns	13	18	20	...	19	13	12	...
Other towns	17	17	15	17	23	11	11	11
Country-side	21	28	...	24	16	8	...	...

*Source: Estonian Labour Force Survey 1998, 1999*

**Table II. Unemployment rate by place of residence, ethnicity and command of Estonian language, Estonia, %**

	Estonians	Non-Estonians		
		All	Doesn't understand	Writes; domestic language
<u>Place of residence</u>				
Tallinn	5	15	22	10
Ida-Virumaa towns	13	18	18	...
Other towns	8	10	16	...
Country-side	10	18	...	17
<u>Labour market cohort</u>				
Entered labour market				
before 1960	5	9	...	...
1966-1988	8	14	18	12
1989-1999	7	14	20	10

*Source: Estonian Labour Force Survey 1998, 1999*

**TABLE III. Share of unemployed by age, educational level and ethnic group, Estonia, %**

Age	Primary and basic education		Secondary education		Vocational education		Specialised and secondary education		Higher education		
	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	
15-19	53	57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
20-24	29	39	14	32	16	32	14	14	...	...	
25-29	19	38	7	21	15	25	8	10	4	13	
30-39	28	22	13	20	13	19	6	11	2	13	
40-54	20	17	11	21	12	18	6	15	3	9	
Over 54	10	16	2	6	9	8	4	5	1	6	

Legend: E – Estonians; NE – non-Estonians

*Source: Estonian Labour Force Survey 1999*