

**LOST IN TRANSLATION? THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE FOR
THE POLITICAL MOBILISATION OF ETHNIC RUSSIAN
MINORITIES IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA**

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between language and political participation in the study of minority representation in Estonia and Latvia. The differences between the levels of mobilisation of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia present a puzzle that has yet to be explained. Language is a factor that has traditionally been ignored by scholars of political participation. However, this thesis argues that it is key to understanding different patterns of minority representation in Estonia and Latvia. This thesis argues that the higher level of titular language proficiency among Russian minorities in Latvia has given them a distinct advantage over Russian minorities in Estonia. This is because government legislation affords the titular languages an elevated status in both countries. No such concessions are made for minority languages such as Russian. Firstly, this thesis explains why the Russian minorities in the two countries have different levels of titular language proficiency. Secondly, it reveals why language proficiency is a necessity for those who wish to participate in parliamentary politics. It uses a wide range of government legislation including citizenship laws, constitutions and language laws to demonstrate that linguistic proficiency is not only required for citizenship, but also for participation in parliamentary politics. This thesis ultimately reveals that the introduction of just one official language in two countries with such large minority groups has served to automatically disadvantage a significant proportion of the population from participating in politics and that differences between the two countries are likely to remain for some time unless Russian is introduced as a second official language.

1.0 Introduction

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the political mobilisation of ethnic Russian minorities in the former Union republics has been minimal. However, the electoral success of a predominantly ethnic Russian party Harmony Centre (or, *Saskaņas Centrs*) in Latvia in 2011 demonstrated that ethnic Russians (the largest minority group in Latvia) were starting to emerge from the shadows. In the Latvian parliamentary elections of 2011, Harmony Centre obtained 31 of the total 100 seats available and consequently became the

largest party in the country in terms of votes and seats. In previous elections, the share of seats held by Harmony Centre had been gradually creeping upwards from 17 seats in the 2006 parliamentary election and to 29 seats in the 2010 parliamentary election.¹

However, in neighbouring Estonia, the success of ethnic Russian minorities in parliamentary politics has been very limited. This is despite the fact that the size of the minority group is almost as large as in Latvia and the political systems in the two countries are almost identical. Although there are minor parties in Estonia that align along ethnic-Russian lines (for example, Russian party in Estonia, or *Vene Erakond Eestis*), none of these parties hold parliamentary seats. In Estonia, just nine seats in the 101-seat parliament belong to minorities.² This is a striking difference between two countries that, from a comparative perspective, are otherwise very similar. The literature fails to provide an explanation for why this might be.

As early as 1989, the titular populations (in other words, the nationality groups after which the republics were named) in Estonia and Latvia took steps to secure the status of their native languages in government legislation (titular languages). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the momentum has continued to grow and the titular languages have continued to feature prominently in key pieces of legislation. At the same time, the Russian language has been sidelined and has been increasingly regarded by the titular populations as a foreign language. Although language is not traditionally thought to influence political mobilisation, this thesis will demonstrate that language is central to the study of the political mobilisation of minorities in Estonia and Latvia.

According to the 1989 census, 14.9 per cent of Russian-speakers in Estonia spoke the titular language. In Latvia, 22 per cent of Russian-speakers could claim knowledge of the titular language.³ This gap in language proficiency between the Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia is still evident today. The first question that will be addressed by this thesis is: why is there a difference in the level of titular language proficiency between Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia? This thesis will argue that the difference can be explained by the fact that ethnic Russians in Latvia are more like an indigenous minority, whereas in Estonia they bear more similarities to an immigrant population. The key factors that have led to this difference include the duration of settlement, settlement patterns, and historical relationships. In

¹ Harmony Centre, <http://www.saskanascents.lv/lv/par-mums/> date last accessed 08/06/2012

² Freedom House Report: Estonia 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/estonia> Date last accessed 27/04/2012

³ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 87

addition, etymological similarities between Latvian and Russian should not be ignored because they have also contributed towards the higher level of language proficiency witnessed among ethnic Russians in Latvia.

The second question will address why linguistic proficiency is relevant to the study of minority representation in Estonia and Latvia. It will ask: Why does linguistic proficiency in the titular language influence the political behaviour of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia? This thesis argues that the higher level of titular language proficiency among Russian minorities in Latvia is responsible for the greater instance of minority participation in Latvia. It will argue that the prominence of language in legislation (for example, citizenship laws, constitutions and language laws) demonstrates that linguistic proficiency determines whether or not individuals have the capacity to mobilise. It concludes that without knowledge of the titular language, opportunities to mobilise are very limited.

The focus throughout this thesis will be on parliamentary elections. The participation of minorities in local government council elections and European Parliament elections is not within the scope of this thesis as different rules apply in the two countries at these levels. For example, in Estonia, citizenship is not required to stand as a candidate for a local government council. Moreover, the Estonian Constitution grants language rights to minorities for use in local government institutions. In Latvia, minorities are not granted either of these rights.

The following chapter will provide a literature review on political participation, with a focus on the study of minority participation. Chapter three will outline the case selection. Chapter four will explain why there is a difference between Estonia and Latvia in the linguistic proficiency of Russian minorities in the titular languages. Chapter five will discuss why knowledge of the titular language is relevant to the study of political behaviour in Estonia and Latvia. Finally, Chapter six will provide a conclusion and identify areas for further study.

This study is relevant to a range of fields including the study of minorities, scholars of political mobilisation and to students of linguistics.

2.0 The study of political participation

The study of political participation is a popular topic that has been explored in depth in the literature. One of the dominant paradigms in the study of political mobilisation has emphasised socio-economic status as one of the key factors that determines whether or not an individual engages in politics. In general terms, it is argued that the higher the economic

status, the more likely it is that an individual will participate in politics.⁴ The importance of socio-economic status will feature in many of the frameworks that will be discussed in this chapter. However, explanations for political participation are not limited to socio-economic factors. Other articles in the extensive body of literature on this subject have identified factors ranging from gender to the role of mass media and others have even presented a psychological dimension to political participation.⁵⁶⁷ In addition to the analysis of individual factors, attempts have been made to construct models that combine the traditional resource-based models with other factors. For example, Verba and Nie argue that the process of politicisation is primarily shaped by attitudes that result from social characteristics such as socio-economic circumstances, education and race. However, they also add an additional element to the equation which argues that institutional structures affect the extent to which an individual will be able to participate in politics.⁸ This thesis will argue that language is an aspect of these institutional structures that is often overlooked. Parry, Moyser and Day present a similar model to Verba and Nie in which resources and background play a role, but where they argue that the current context of issues (for example, the closure of a neighbourhood school) plays a significant role in prompting political mobilisation of an individual.⁹

The body of literature surrounding the study of minority participation in politics is more limited. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to identify explanations that are valid for both titular populations and minorities. For example, Leighley and Vedlitz study the applicability of competing models of political participation for Anglos and three different minority groups in the United States (African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Mexican-Americans). They find that three models are able to predict participation across each of the four ethnic/racial groups, namely socio-economic status, psychological resource, and social connectedness.¹⁰ Socio-economic status comes as no surprise given the fact that it has dominated the broader

⁴ Leighley, J. (2001) *Strength in Numbers? The Political Mobilisation of Racial and Ethnic Minorities*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p.5

⁵ Jennings, K. (1983) *Gender Roles and Inequalities in Political Participation: Results from an Eight-Nation Study*, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 3, p. 364

⁶ McLeod, J.M. (1999) *Community, Communication and Participation: The Role of Mass Media and Interpersonal Discussion in Local Political Participation*, *Political Communication*, Vol. 16, No. 3, p. 315

⁷ Miller, A.H. (1981) *Group Consciousness and Political Participation*, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 3, p.494

⁸ Verba, S., Nie, N. (1972) *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*, New York: Harper and Rowe, p.19

⁹ Parry, G., Moyser, G., Day, N. (1992) *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, p. 21

¹⁰ Leighley, J., Vedlitz, A. (1999) *Race, Ethnicity, and Political Participation: Competing Models and Contrasting Explanations*, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol.61, No.4, p. 1110

study of political participation. Psychological resource refers to political interest, political efficacy, trust in government and civic duty. Finally, social connectedness can be divided into psychological aspects (e.g. alienation, estrangement, prejudice, and apathy) and structural or behavioural factors (e.g. organisational involvement, church attendance, home ownership and marital status).¹¹

Others have developed frameworks that are specifically geared towards explaining the political participation of minority groups. Perhaps one of the most useful frameworks that has been presented to date was that by Karen Bird. In *The Political Representation of Visible Minorities in Electoral Democracies*, Bird presents a conceptual framework to help explain patterns of visible minority representation. Her work draws on Political Opportunity theory which can be defined as ‘consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics’ and is used widely by sociologists and political scientists to explain the successes and failures of social movements.¹² It is a popular theory because it can be applied to a wide variety of empirical investigations. As Meyer argues, the theory ‘affords researchers considerable latitude in tailoring the concepts to the case at hand’.¹³

Although the focus of Bird’s model is on visible minorities,¹⁴ it is nevertheless relevant to the study of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. Most of the minorities that currently hold parliamentary seats in Estonia and Latvia are members of political parties that were set up along ethnic lines and candidates therefore make themselves visible as a minority by identifying themselves with parties that are known for being pro-Russian. In addition, many of the factors in Bird’s model are not specific to the study of visible minorities but are also relevant to minorities in general and, to a certain extent, to the broader study of participation. This is clear from the amount of overlap between Bird’s model and other models of political participation discussed in earlier paragraphs of this chapter. One example of this which is particularly relevant to this thesis is the emphasis on institutional factors in Bird’s model. As mentioned above, this also features prominently in Verba and Nie’s model.

¹¹ Leighley, J., Vedlitz, A. (1999), p. 1095

¹² Tarrow S. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press. 2nd ed., pp. 19-20

¹³ Meyer, D. (2004) *Protest and Political Opportunities*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 30, p.134

¹⁴ The term “visible minority” is most often used in Canada and refers to individuals who are visibly not part of the majority race. In Canada, it specifically refers to people who are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. For further details, see *Statistics Canada*: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/minority-minorite1-eng.htm> date last accessed: 29/06/2012

Figure 1 provides an overview of the framework that Bird has used in her study of minorities in Canada, Denmark and France.

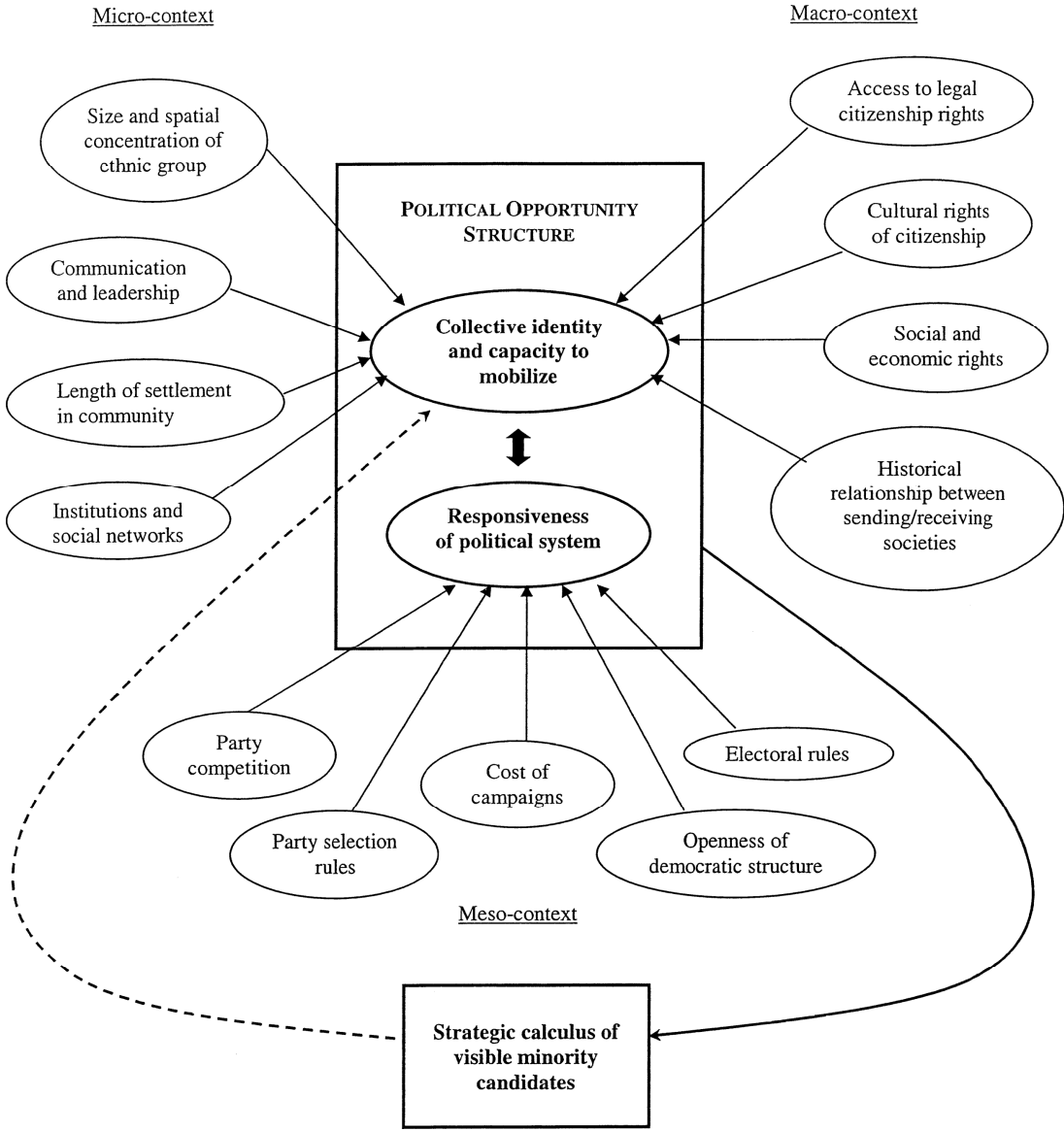


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for explaining patterns of visible minority representation

In this framework, the factors are divided into micro-, meso- and macro- elements. The micro-factors are defined by Bird as *interest constellations* and refer to the level of political interest and engagement of the ethnic group. They include factors such as the size and spatial concentration of the ethnic group and the level of resources they have available to them such as communication networks and leadership. These important *push* factors are difficult to analyse systematically across countries. As Bird points out, this is largely because this would require ‘coordinated data collection among various ethnic groups, within several local

communities, across several countries.’¹⁵ The meso-factors are defined as *institutions* and refer to the responsiveness of the political system to ethnic mobilisation. They include factors such as the openness of the democratic culture to the participation of minorities, electoral rules and party competition. Finally, the macro- factors are termed *citizenship regimes* and refer to the capacity of the minorities to mobilize should they so wish. The factors included in this category include the rules of access to citizenship and the equality of social and economic rights. However, Bird also argues that differences in the historical relationship between the sending and receiving societies should also be considered under this umbrella as it could result in differences in political mobilisation even when all other macro- factors are constant.

Bird argues that differences in levels of ethnic representation cannot be explained by one factor. In some cases, increased prominence in one factor could lead to an increase in the level of representation. However, in other cases the same increase in prominence could lead to a decrease in the level of representation. She also argues that ‘differences in levels of ethnic representation are always the result of a complex configuration of causal elements’.¹⁶ One of the key limitations of this and other frameworks is exactly this. They present the reader with a complex array of factors that may or may not lead to an increase in political participation and fail to explain how the different factors are connected.

This thesis will argue that in the cases of the ethnic minorities in Estonia and Latvia, the factor that is a reflection of many of the above mentioned elements is knowledge of the titular language. Language is a factor that is not mentioned in any of the above models, yet it is key to understanding the situation of the ethnic minorities in Estonia and Latvia. As this thesis will demonstrate, language is closely connected to many of the factors identified in the above models. For example, macro-level dynamics such as access to legal citizenship rights is connected to language because the citizenship laws in Estonia and Latvia have strict language requirements. Moreover, meso-level dynamics such as the openness of the democratic structure is also connected to language. In Estonia and Latvia, there is only one working language in state agencies and candidates for election have been required to demonstrate language proficiency. The democratic structure is therefore only open to those who are proficient in the titular language. Finally, micro-level dynamics such as the length of

¹⁵ Bird, K. (2005) The Political Representation of Visible Minorities in Electoral Democracies, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, p. 432

¹⁶ Bird, K. (2005) p.428

settlement in a country is closely connected to how likely it is that the titular language one needs to participate in politics has become part of the collective identity of a minority group.

To summarise, this thesis will argue that language is key to understanding the capacity of ethnic groups to mobilise, as well as the responsiveness of the political system to such mobilisation in Estonia and Latvia. Language has been overlooked in all of the above mentioned frameworks for the study of political mobilisation, yet the differences in political mobilisation in Estonia and Latvia cannot be understood without considering this important factor. As demonstrated above, language is the underlying factor in Estonia and Latvia that connects many of the elements traditionally thought to influence mobilisation.

3.0 Ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia

As early as 1917, Estonia and Latvia already had small numbers of Russian minorities living within their borders. In Estonia, the group amounted to 2.8 per cent of the total population. In Latvia, the number was slightly higher at 6.7 per cent.¹⁷ By the end of WWII, these numbers had increased to 8 and 10 per cent respectively. However, the overwhelming majority of Russian minorities currently residing in Estonia and Latvia arrived between the end of WWII and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, by which time the numbers increased to 30.3 and 34 per cent of the total populations of Estonia and Latvia.

The increase in ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia during the Soviet occupation can be explained by a number of factors. First and foremost, under Soviet rule, policies were designed to stimulate an influx of Russian-speakers to Estonia and Latvia. These policies served to dilute the dominance of the titular populations in the region. Many of these individuals were employed at All-Union factories. These factories were under direct control by the Soviet government. Secondly, the Red Army stationed a large number of military staff in Estonia and Latvia during the Cold War as a result of the geostrategic environment.¹⁸ Finally, the relatively high level of economic development in Estonia and Latvia compared to the Soviet Union resulted in some additional migration to the republics.

According to a 2008 estimate by the Estonian government, ethnic Russians accounted for 26

¹⁷ Laitin, D. (1998) *Identity in Formation, The Russian-speaking Populations in the Near Abroad*, Cornell University Press, United States of America, p. 64

¹⁸ Herd, G. and Löfgren, J. (2001) 'Societal Security', the Baltic States and EU Integration, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Volume 36, p.279

per cent and 28 per cent of the respective populations of Estonia and Latvia.¹⁹ This marks a slight decrease since the collapse of the Soviet Union and can largely be explained by a combination of emigration to the Soviet Union as well as the departure of the military and defence industry employees following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1990, the percentage of Russians expecting to emigrate to Russia in Estonia and Latvia amounted to 28 and 31 per cent respectively. Many of these respondents have followed through on their plans. Between 1989 and 1993, almost 106,000 ethnic Russians have emigrated to the Russian Federation from Estonia and Latvia combined.²⁰ Despite these departures the ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia constitute two of the largest concentrations of Russians outside of the Russian Federation today.

Other minority groups living within the borders of Estonia and Latvia will not be within the scope of this thesis. The reason for this is that the size of other minority groups are relatively small. For example, the third largest ethnic group in Estonia (after Estonians and Russians) is the Ukrainians. However, with a population of 27,351 persons on January 1st 2012, they constitute just 2 per cent of the total population. Estonians and Russians combined comprise of close to 95 per cent of the total population.²¹ In Latvia, the third largest ethnic group (after Latvians and Russians) are Belarusians. According to the population census of 2011, the number of Belarusians living in Latvia amounted to 68,174 persons, or just over 3 per cent of the total population. According to the same census, Latvians and Russians combined constituted 89 per cent of the total population.²² However, despite the fact that other minority groups are not within the scope of this thesis, many of the findings of this study will be applicable to these smaller minority groups.

Throughout this thesis, the terms Russian-speakers, Russian-speaking populations, ethnic Russians, minorities, and minority groups will be used interchangeably to refer to people of Russian descent living within the borders of Estonia and Latvia.

Case selection

Estonia and Latvia are not the only former Union republics with large ethnic Russian populations. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, as many as fifty million Russian-

¹⁹ 'Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in figures 2008', Statistical Office of Estonia: <http://www.stat.ee/18841>; (Tallinn, 2000), p.6 Date last accessed: 18/03/2012

²⁰ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 259

²¹ Statistics Estonia: <http://www.stat.ee/34278> date last accessed 03/06/2012

²² Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/notikumi/key-provisional-results-population-and-housing-census-2011-33306.html> date last accessed 03/06/2012

speakers were left stranded in fourteen non-Russian Union republics.²³ The reason why this thesis will focus only on ethnic Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia is because the difference in the level of political mobilisation in these two countries is particularly surprising given the widespread similarities between the two countries. These include their history, political systems and, most importantly, their experiences with ethnic Russian minorities. The following paragraph will provide more detail on these points. Although studies of this region typically include Lithuania, this study will exclude this country as the ethnic Russian population in Lithuania is much smaller than in Estonia and Latvia. In 1989, Russians constituted 9.4 per cent of the population of Lithuania. However, this number has since dropped to just above 5 per cent in 2011.²⁴

Similarities

The histories of Estonia and Latvia are very much intertwined. Both countries have a shared history of occupation. Their occupiers have been numerous and have included the Danes, Teutonic Knights, and the Swedes. Although periods of independence have been limited, both states have recently experienced independent statehood simultaneously between both 1918 and 1940 and from 1991 onwards. In a continuation of their shared history, Estonia and Latvia both joined the European Union in 2004. The similarities between the two countries are not limited to history. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, both countries introduced similar political systems in the form of parliamentary representative democratic republics with a Prime Minister holding the role of head of government. Although there are some differences between the two countries in terms of size and economic development, both countries remain similar for comparative purposes. Further similarities emerge when relations with Russia are considered. Estonia and Latvia also have similar reasons to be suspicious of Russia having been under Soviet control for much of the Twentieth Century. Finally, as the above paragraphs demonstrated, both countries experienced a similar influx of ethnic Russians under Soviet rule and now contain sizable ethnic Russian minority groups within their borders.

4.0 Why is there a difference in the level of titular language proficiency between Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia?

²³ Lakis, J (1995) Ethnic Minorities in the Postcommunist Transformation of Lithuania, *International Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 173, p. 174

²⁴ Statistics Lithuania, Population composition, Population at the beginning of the year by ethnicity: <http://db1.stat.gov.lt/statbank/SelectTable/Omrade0.asp?SubjectCode=S3&ShowNews=OFF&PLanguage=1> date last accessed 03/06/2012

In the introduction, data from the 1989 census was presented which demonstrated that the level of linguistic proficiency in the titular language was higher among Russian minorities in Latvia than in Estonia. As existing explanations do not answer why this higher level of proficiency exists, this chapter will put forward a number of explanations for why this is. In essence, this chapter will argue that Russian minorities in Latvia have become more like an indigenous minority, whereas in Estonia they bear more similarities to an immigrant population. This is predominantly due to historical factors such as the duration of settlement, the spatial concentration of Russian-speakers within the two republics and the historical relationship between the titular and Russian-speaking populations. All of these factors have led to a higher level of linguistic proficiency in the titular language among Russian minorities in Latvia compared to Russian minorities in Estonia. In addition to these historical factors, the importance of etymological differences and similarities between Russian and the titular languages should not be underestimated. Many of the factors that will be discussed in this chapter (for example, length of settlement in the community and settlement patterns) tie back to the micro- level dynamics in Bird's framework. This is because they influence the extent to which the titular language has become part of the collective identity of the minorities. Before explanations for different levels of linguistic proficiency will be discussed, a section summarising the key differences in linguistic proficiency will be presented. In chapter five, the relevance of different levels of titular language proficiency to the study of minority in representation in Estonia and Latvia will be revealed.

4.1 Linguistic proficiency

Under Soviet rule, Russian-speakers in the Baltics were able to rely entirely on their native language to get by. The Soviets sheltered Russian-speakers from having to come to terms with their minority status and the protection of the Russian language was key to this strategy. Perhaps a good example of how useful the Russian language was during this period is the fact that Russian-speakers in the Union republics were able to travel across seven different time zones without needing to use any other language than Russian. The titular languages were not afforded the same protection under Soviet rule. In fact, in Estonia and Latvia, the titular languages were marginalised by the Soviets as a result of a push towards "Russification" in

the region.²⁵ The consequence of this is that, by the end of Soviet rule, knowledge of the titular languages among ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia was limited.

Despite the limited knowledge of the titular language among ethnic Russians, a number of Russian-speakers were able to demonstrate knowledge of the titular languages around the time that the Soviet Union collapsed. According to the 1989 census, 14.9 per cent of Russian-speakers in Estonia spoke the titular language. In Latvia, 22 per cent of Russian-speakers could claim knowledge of the titular language.²⁶ Although in both cases, the numbers were relatively low, the language knowledge among ethnic Russians in Latvia was clearly higher. The censuses of 2000 demonstrated that there is still a gap in the level of titular language knowledge among ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia. The data from these censuses revealed that the percentage of ethnic Russians in Estonia with knowledge of the titular language had increased to around 44 per cent.²⁷ However, the percentage of ethnic Russians in Latvia with knowledge of the titular language was approximately 59 per cent.²⁸

4.2 Duration of settlement

Although the vast majority of Russian-speakers currently living within the borders of Estonia and Latvia arrived between 1940 and 1989, the history of Russian settlement in the region goes back hundreds of years. In 1710, Swedish Estonia and Swedish Livonia (the southern part of modern Estonia and the northern part of modern Latvia) were incorporated into the Russian Empire under Peter the Great during the Great Northern War. This was later formalised by the Treaty of Nystad in 1721. Until the First World War, the region remained within the Russian sphere of influence, despite considerable autonomy being afforded for the Baltic German rulers by the Russian Empire during most of this period.

Despite this long history with Russia, Russian migration to Estonia and Latvia only started to increase significantly from 1890. Initially, this was largely due to economic development in the Baltics. As early as 1917, the percentage of ethnic Russians living in Latvia was higher than in Estonia (6.7 per cent compared to 2.8 per cent).²⁹ As a result, by the time that the

²⁵ "Russification" refers to the "merging" of nations. However, the term is often used to describe the adoption of the Russian language by non-Russian communities.

²⁶ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 87

²⁷ Extra, G., Gorter, D. (2008) *Multilingual Europe: Facts and Policies*, The Hague: Mouton de Gruyter, p.148

²⁸ Lingupax Institute, *Language Policy and Protection of the State Language in Latvia*:

<http://www.lingupax.org/congres/taller/taller3/Druvieta.html> date last accessed: 01/06/2012

²⁹ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 64

Soviet Union collapsed, a significantly higher percentage of ethnic Russians in Latvia (as opposed to Estonia) had been living in the country for more than one generation.

Studies in the United States (U.S.) have found that there is a close connection between length of settlement and knowledge of the titular language. For example, Portes and Rumbaut studied second-generation youth in the U.S. (children of immigrants who were born in the U.S.) and found that, although these groups of individuals had retained knowledge of their ethnic language, the majority had also developed knowledge of the titular language. In fact, the majority of the sample in the study indicated that they preferred the use of the titular language over the use of their ethnic language.³⁰ The same applies to Russian minorities in the former Union republics. According to research carried out by David Laitin at kindergarten and elementary schools in Estonia, Latvia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, there is a clear intergenerational shift in the medium of instruction among ethnic Russians in these countries. He found that the shift among Russian-speakers from Russian to the titular language was positive at both kindergarten and elementary levels in all four countries.³¹

The length of settlement in the community also happens to be one of the factors that was identified in Bird's framework for the study of visible minority participation. In Bird's model, it is argued that there is a direct correlation between length of settlement and the size of collective resources a minority group is able to obtain. As chapter five will demonstrate, knowledge of the titular language is one of the most important collective resources a minority group needs to have in order to participate in politics. As a result, there is a correlation between length of settlement and political participation.

To summarise, the number of ethnic Russians in Latvia has historically been higher than in Estonia. Data on second-generation youth in the United States and data from the former Union republics demonstrates that there is a positive correlation between length of settlement and language shift. As a result, the higher number of second- and third-generation ethnic Russians in Latvia has contributed towards the higher level of titular language proficiency.

4.3 Settlement patterns

There are many similarities in terms of the spatial concentration of Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia. In both countries, Russian-speakers are largely based in cities. In Estonia,

³⁰ Portes, A., Rumbaut, R. (2001) *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, P.123

³¹ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 79

80 per cent of non-Estonians live in the cities of the north, northeast and Paldiski. In Latvia, non-Latvians form a majority in the seven largest cities of the country. According to recent estimates, the capitals cities contain particularly strong concentrations of Russian-speakers. In Estonia they compromise 37 per cent of the population of Tallinn and in Latvia they compromise 44 per cent of the population of Riga.³²

In addition, there are also regions close to the Russian borders in both countries (for example, Ida-Virumaa in Estonia and the Latgale region in Latvia) with heavy concentrations of Russian-speakers. In the main urban centre of these regions, the titular populations form a small minority of the total population. In the region Ida-Virumaa, ethnic Estonians account for less than 4 per cent of the total population of the city of Narva.³³ In the Latgale region, ethnic Latvians account for less than 14 per cent of the population of Daugavpils.³⁴

However, the regional concentration of ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia does not reveal how integrated the settlement patterns are of ethnic Russians within these regions. However, this is key to understanding why ethnic Russians in Latvia have higher levels of titular language proficiency. In general terms, Russian-speakers in Latvia are better integrated than Russian-speakers in Estonia. In Estonia there are Russian-speaking enclaves whereas in Latvia there is evidence of a more integrated form of settlement. For example, in Latvia, districts contain mixed populations of Russian-speakers and ethnic Latvians. In fact, some apartment blocks even contain mixed populations of Russian-speakers and Latvians. In Estonia, this is not so much the case. Laitin argues that this difference is mostly due to the relative size of the groups in Latvia.³⁵

One indicator that is frequently used to study the integration of minority groups is intermarriage. It is seen as a measure of the declining social distance between the titular and minority populations.³⁶ Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, the percentage of mixed nationality marriages in Latvia involving Latvians was 19.7 per cent compared to just 8.6 per cent among Estonians in the neighbouring republic. In the capital cities, these numbers were

³² Statistics Estonia: http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/l_Databas/Population_Census/databasetree.asp and Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia: <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/statistics-database-30501.html> Date last accessed: 28/02/2012

³³ Narva in figures 2010: http://web.narva.ee/files/2010_Narva%20arvudes_et_en.pdf Date last accessed: 06/03/2012

³⁴ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 355

³⁵ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 257

³⁶ Song, M. (2009) Is Intermarriage a Good Indicator of Integration? *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2, p.343

considerably higher. In 1988, 33.1 per cent of the married Russian population in Riga were married to someone of another nationality. In Tallinn the percentage was just 16.1 per cent.³⁷ In addition, as table 3 demonstrates, survey data from the early- to mid- 1990s suggests that there was a significantly higher percentage of titular respondents who would fully accept an internationality marriage of their son or daughter in Latvia compared to Estonia.

Table 3: Per cent of titular respondents who fully accept internationality marriage³⁸

	Estonia	Latvia
Son	14.5	24.7
Daughter	13.9	23.0

The reason why integration and intermarriage are closely connected to knowledge of the titular language is because the offspring of these couples are more likely to learn the titular language. For example, an official at the Latvian Parliamentary Commission on Education stated that the intergenerational shift in the medium of education in Latvia was primarily due to an increase in children of mixed marriages who decide to study in Latvian instead of Russian.³⁹ Moreover, ethnic Russians are more likely to be open to learning the titular language if they are more integrated and have titular friends and family. To summarise, it is not so much the regional dispersion that has contributed towards the difference in the level of titular language proficiency in Estonia and Latvia, but the more integrated form of settlement of ethnic Russians in Latvia that has resulted in the difference between the two groups.

4.4 Historical relationships

The importance of historical relationships to minority representation is also highlighted in Bird's model under macro- level dynamics. In her framework, the focus is on the influence of stereotypes on the capacity of minorities to mobilise. These stereotypes may have resulted from historical relationships. However, there is also a language element to historical relationships. If the titular and minority groups have a long history of cooperation, it is likely that they will have developed language proficiency in order to be able to communicate with each other. However, this is likely to be a two way process with individuals from both groups learning the language of the other group as a result of this cooperation. This section of the

³⁷ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 257

³⁸ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 253

³⁹ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 155

chapter finds that Latvians and Russians have a long history of cooperation. This is a relationship not shared by Estonians and Russians.

Although the Latvians and Russians have frequently been at odds with each other, there are many examples of cooperation between the two groups. For example, nationalists sided with Russians to counter German dominance ahead of the Bolshevik revolution. This relationship was largely forged because the nationalists in Latvia shared a lower class status with Russians and therefore had a common interest with them. In addition, in the first and second Dumas (legislative assembly in the Russian empire), six and then seven Latvian delegates were Kadets, including Jānis Čakste who went on to become the first head of state in independent Latvia in 1918. Throughout the period of Latvian independence, Latvians continued to hold prominent roles in Russian institutions. For example, at the start of 1918, the Latvian colonel Jukums Vācietis served as commander-in-chief of the Red Army, Yakov Alksnis was commander of Red Army Air Forces between 1931 and 1937, and Jēkabs Peterss was deputy chairman of the Cheka (Soviet secret police). Moreover, Latvians once constituted a significant percentage of the total employees in the Cheka (Soviet state security organisation). In 1918, 35.6 per cent of the Cheka employees were Latvians.⁴⁰ In addition to mutual cooperation, many Latvians have also taken up residence in European Russia prior to the first period of independence. During the unrest that led up to the 1905 Revolution, as many as 115,000 Latvians took up residence within the empire outside the Baltic provinces. Most of these moved to European Russia. By the start of World War I, this number was around 220,000.⁴¹ Many of these were repatriated following the peace treaty of 1920.

Although the sentiment turned against the Russians in the wake of independence, Latvians nevertheless had a long history of cooperation with Russians and the incentives during this period for both groups to learn each other's language was high. Estonians do not have the same level of experience of mutual cooperation with Russians and this has therefore presented them with less incentives to develop knowledge the titular language. However, it is also worth noting that it is unlikely that this factor has had a major contribution towards the higher level of language proficiency in Latvia because many of these examples involved cooperating on Russian soil and it is therefore more likely that Latvians learnt Russian. Nevertheless, the

⁴⁰ Rislakki, J. (2008) *The Case for Latvia. Disinformation Campaigns Against a Small Nation: Fourteen Hard Questions and Straight Answers about a Baltic Country*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, p.83

⁴¹ Laitin, D (1998), p. 257

historical relationship between Latvia and Russia has likely led, at the very least, to an interest among some Russian-speakers in learning the Latvian language.

4.5 Etymological differences and similarities

The importance of etymological differences to understanding differences in titular language proficiency among Russian minorities in the two republics should not be underestimated. The etymological similarities between Russian and Latvian have facilitated the development of linguistic proficiency among ethnic Russians in Latvia. The same cannot be said for Russian minorities in Estonia. This is because there are many more linguistic similarities between Latvian and Russian than between the Estonian and Russian languages. This is due to the family of languages that each language belongs to. As a result of this, ethnic Russians in Latvia face fewer obstacles in learning the language should they need it to obtain citizenship or to be able to participate in parliamentary politics. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the three languages and the language families to which they belong. Where possible, evidence of the difficulties monolingual ethnic Russians face in learning Estonian and Latvian will be provided. Moreover, in light of studies into language shift in Canada, the relationship between interlingual difference (the linguistic differences between languages) and language shift in Estonia and Latvia will also form part of the discussion.

Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language which has virtually no cognates (words that are etymologically related) in Russian. According to estimates from the Narva Language Centre (a region in the east of Estonia in which the population is almost exclusively ethnic Russian), it takes 70 hours of instruction to reach level B. This level only qualifies the student for jobs which require a low level of language proficiency. For administrative work, level C is required. This typically takes a further 50 hours of instruction. For professional use, level D is required and takes a further 120 hours of instruction. Finally, to reach the requirements for citizenship, a further 60 hours of instruction is necessary.⁴² The reason why the instruction is so time consuming is because ethnic Russians find the structure of the language impenetrable. Estonian is considered a difficult language to learn, not least because there are twelve different cases in Estonian, more than twice the number found in most Slavic languages. The only languages which bare any similarity with Estonian are Hungarian and Finnish.

Latvian, on the other hand, is part of the Indo-European family of languages. This is a family of several hundred different languages and dialects, to which most major languages currently

⁴² Laitin, D. (1998) p. 6

spoken in Europe belong to. Latvian belongs to the Baltic group of languages in which there are currently just two living languages: Latvian and Lithuanian. Russian is a member of the East Slavic group of the Slavic subfamily. Despite the linguistic similarities between the two languages, there are nevertheless a number of characteristics that set Slavic languages apart from other members of the Indo-European language family and therefore make it challenging for Russian-speakers to learn Latvian. Unfortunately there are no statistics available on the time it takes to learn Latvian so it is not possible to compare the number of hours it takes to learn the language with the estimates from the Narva Language Centre. Nevertheless, the fact that there are more similarities between Latvian and Russian than Estonian and Russian points towards a steeper learning curve for ethnic Russians in Estonia and, as chapter five will reveal, therefore more obstacles to citizenship and their capacity for mobilisation.

The relationship between interlingual distance and language shift is an important point to consider here. In Canada, studies have found that there was an inverse ratio between these two factors. In other words, the more different two languages are, the slower the language shift from the native language of an immigrant to the titular language is likely to be.⁴³ Given the higher interlingual distance between Estonian and Russian, one would expect that the language shift among ethnic Russians would be more limited in Estonia than in Latvia. According to the Baltic Independent, the Latvian Parliamentary Commission announced that “students of Russian descent opting to attend Latvian schools has increased dramatically, leading to a figure of 58 per cent taking the Latvian option”.⁴⁴ In Estonia, Laitin found that the most common response to the question of whether ethnic Russians would send their children to Estonian-medium schools was ‘incredulity at the very thought of an intergenerational linguistic shift’.⁴⁵ However, how do the statistics compare to these claims?

Table 2 presents survey data collected by David Laitin on the percentages of respondents whose medium of instruction at various levels was different from that of their first child. In Estonia and Latvia, the ratio between interlingual distance and language shift is less clear cut than in Canada. Although in both cases, there has been a clear intergenerational shift to the titular language by Russian-speakers, the shift is only higher at elementary level in Latvia. However, it could be argued that the shift at the elementary level is more important as ethnic

⁴³ Fill, A., Mühlhäusler, P. (2001) *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*, London: Continuum, p.68

⁴⁴ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 155

⁴⁵ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 111

Russians are less likely to switch back to Russian as a medium of instruction at secondary level once they have had the foundations of their education in the titular language.

Table 2: Intergenerational shift in medium of instruction ⁴⁶

	Estonia	Latvia
Kindergarten (Russian)		
From titular to Russian	1.8	2.0
From Russian to titular	7.5	5.6
Elementary (Russian)		
From titular to Russian	0.4	1.7
From Russian to titular	3.1	4.6

Note: Figures represent percentages of respondents whose medium of instruction at various levels was different from that of their first child. These were all urban samples.

To summarise, although ethnic Russians find both Estonian and Latvian challenging languages to learn, the relative difficulty of learning Estonian over Latvian means that it has been easier for ethnic Russians in Latvia to learn the titular language than it has for ethnic Russians in Estonia. The relationship between interlingual distance and language shift was only evident at elementary level. However, it could be argued that this says more than the data on kindergarten schools as the choice of medium of instruction at elementary level is more likely to influence the medium of instruction at secondary and higher levels of education.

In future generations, the relationship between interlingual distance and language shift is likely to become less relevant. This is because changes to language policies in Estonia and Latvia suggest that government policy is likely to determine the medium of instruction for future generations, rather than personal choice. However, the current generation of politicians attended school when it was still a personal choice and the relationship between interlingual distance and language shift is still therefore very relevant to the study of the relationship between linguistic proficiency and political participation in Estonia and Latvia.

5.0 Why does linguistic proficiency in the titular language influence the political behaviour of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia?

Chapter four explained why Russian minorities in Latvia have higher levels of linguistic proficiency in the titular language than Russian minorities in Estonia. The focus will now shift to explaining why differences in linguistic proficiency in the titular language have resulted in differences in Russian minority representation in Estonia and Latvia.

⁴⁶ Laitin, D. (1998) p. 79

This chapter will be divided into three main sections. Firstly, the focus will be on citizenship. This chapter will demonstrate how linguistic proficiency is connected to citizenship and why citizenship requirements have had an influence on the differences in minority representation in Estonia and Latvia. Secondly, it will use government legislation to demonstrate that the prevalence of language in the state apparatus ensures that minorities in Estonia and Latvia simply do not have the capacity to mobilise without knowledge of the titular language. It will use documents such as the constitutions and language laws to demonstrate that naturalised citizens continue to face widespread language barriers in government. The focus on legislation in this chapter is because legislative documents are the foundations of the state and no other source of information is able to provide a better explanation for why the current political reality in each country exists. Järve highlights the importance of legislation by arguing that ‘Legislation follows the political development of the national elite and reflects its perceptions, aims and ambitions. But once adopted and enforced, legislative acts have a formative influence on the political process’.⁴⁷ Given the higher levels of linguistic proficiency in the titular language among Russian minorities in Latvia, this findings of the first two sections of this chapter will reveal that Russian minorities in Latvia have had a distinct advantage when it comes to political participation in parliamentary elections.

The third and final section of this chapter will present an overview of a number of high profile court cases challenging elements of the language laws. It will argue that these have provided minorities in Latvia with additional confidence to challenge the status quo and to pursue a career in politics, despite the fact that they may not be able to comply with stringent language requirements. As a result, these cases have therefore further facilitated the political participation of Russian minorities in Latvia. The same cannot be said for Russian minorities in Estonia. Before embarking on this journey, this chapter will start by providing an overview of the differences in minority participation in Estonia and Latvia.

5.1 Political participation

As mentioned in the introduction, the 2011 election to the Latvian parliament saw the left-leaning, pro-Russian rights Harmony Centre party walk away with 31 of the 100 available seats. This marked a significant increase since the 2006 parliamentary elections when the party obtained just 17 seats. The party was formed as a political alliance in 2005 and is a

⁴⁷ Järve, P (2003) Language Battles in the Baltic States: 1989 to 2002. In: Daftary, F. and Grin, F. (ed.), Nation-Building, Ethnicity and Language Politics in Transition Countries, Budapest: LGI Books, p.75

strong advocate for a liberalisation of the citizenship laws and an increased role for the Russian language in education and public administration. Its Members of Parliament (MPs) are mainly members of Latvia's ethnic-Russian minority. The leader of the party (Nils Ušakovs) is himself a naturalised citizen of Latvia whose native language is Russian. Although no other pro-Russian political parties obtained seats in the 2011 parliamentary election, another pro-Russian party (For Human Rights in United Latvia) did obtain one seat in the European Parliament.

In Estonia, the success of ethnic Russian parties has not been as prevalent with no parties set up specifically to represent ethnic Russian voters in Estonia currently holding parliamentary seats. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, two ethnic Russian parties (Russian party in Estonia, or *Vene Erakond Eestis* and the Constitution Party, or *Konstitutsioonierakond*) stood for election but obtained a combined total of 0.2 per cent of the vote.⁴⁸ Perhaps the most pro-Russian party with seats in the Estonian parliament is the Estonian Centre Party, which signed a cooperation protocol with United Russia in December 2004. It is currently one of few parties in the Estonian parliament with ethnic Russians on its party list. However, despite this, only nine seats in the 101-seat parliament are currently held by minorities (see footnote 1).

5.2 Citizenship laws

According to the election laws in Estonia and Latvia, only citizens have the right to participate in elections. According to Article 4 of The Saeima (Latvian Parliament) Election Law, “any citizen of Latvia who has reached the age of 21 before Election Day may be elected to the Saeima”.⁴⁹ In the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) Election Act, Article 4 states that “Estonian citizens who have attained 21 years of age by the last day for the registration of candidates have the right to stand as candidates”.⁵⁰ Citizenship is therefore a necessary condition for those who wish to stand as candidates in parliamentary elections. However, one of the key obstacles to obtaining citizenship in both countries is the language requirements.

This section of the thesis will provide an overview of the similarities and differences between the two citizenship laws. Particular attention will be paid to the language elements of both

⁴⁸ Auers, D., Kasekamp, A. (2009) Explaining the Electoral Failure of Extreme-Right Parties in Estonia and Latvia, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 17, No.2, p. 247

⁴⁹ The Central Election Commission of Latvia, The Saeima Election Law <http://web.cvk.lv/pub/public/28126.html> date last accessed 31/05/2012

⁵⁰ Ministry of Justice, Riigikogu Election Act, <http://www.legaltext.ee/text/en/X60044K2.htm> date last accessed 31/05/2012

policies. It will reveal the importance of language to citizenship and therefore why Russian minorities in Latvia have a distinct advantage in the state apparatus.

Citizenship and naturalisation

The citizenship laws that were introduced in Estonia and Latvia reflected the dominant nationalist sentiment that prevailed in politics in the two countries following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following decades of oppression under Russian rule, the titular populations in both republics felt a great deal of resentment towards Russians and felt it was important to make sure that ethnic Russians would never again have the opportunity to take power.

Although most of the former Soviet states granted citizenship to all permanent residents on their territories, Estonia decided not to. Instead, Estonia reinstated the Citizenship Law of 1938 in November 1991 and granted citizenship only to those who were citizens prior to June 16, 1941, as well as their descendants. Most Russian-speakers who remained in Estonia following the collapse of the Soviet Union were therefore faced with a choice of remaining stateless or applying for naturalisation. In April 1995, the Citizenship Law was replaced with the Citizenship Act which set even more demanding requirements for naturalisation. The requirements were extensive and applicants had to demonstrate that they had lived permanently in Estonia for a minimum of five years, demonstrate knowledge of the Estonian constitution and citizenship law, be willing to give a pledge of loyalty to the titular state, have a permanent legal income, and be able to demonstrate knowledge of the titular language.⁵¹

In Latvia, the Law on Citizenship was adopted by parliament in March 1995 and was largely similar to the Citizenship Act in neighbouring Estonia. Latvia followed the path of Estonia by only offering citizenship to those who were citizens during the previous period of independence (prior to June 17, 1940), as well as their descendants. Prior to adoption, the law was subject to a great deal of controversy and the final document did not contain all of the original proposals (for example, calls to limit property ownership to those who were citizens). However, in the final document, the requirements for citizenship such as the duration of

⁵¹ European University Institute, Estonian Citizenship Act: [http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/EST%20Citizenship%20Act%20\(last%20amended%20June%202006\).pdf](http://eudo-citizenship.eu/NationalDB/docs/EST%20Citizenship%20Act%20(last%20amended%20June%202006).pdf) date last accessed 04/06/2012

settlement, knowledge of the constitution and titular language and the ability to demonstrate a permanent income were largely in line with the citizenship law in Estonia.⁵²

Amendments

In a 2011 article on the integration of immigrants in the Baltics, it was argued that EU conditionality had been ‘the most effective measure to liberalise the minorities’ policy in the Baltic States.⁵³ In the lead up to joining the European Union in 2004, both countries were subject to pressure from international organisations to change their citizenship laws. As a result, the laws in both countries have been subject to a number of amendments in the years prior to EU accession. For example, in June 1998, Latvia amended the citizenship law under pressure from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and Russia. The amendment granted citizenship to children of non-citizens born in Latvia, scrapped quotas and removed age brackets. In Estonia, a similar amendment was made in 1998 that granted citizenship to children who had lived in Estonia for at least five years and were born after 26 February 1992. However, despite the above mentioned amendments, none of the changes that have been made impact the language requirements. These requirements remain unchanged since the laws were first adopted.

Language

As mentioned above, most of the citizenship requirements in the Law on Citizenship in Latvia and the Citizenship Act in Estonia are very similar. However, one key difference between the two laws involves the wording surrounding the language requirements.

In Estonia, the Citizenship Act stipulates that knowledge of the Estonian language refers to general knowledge of *basic* Estonian needed in everyday life. Applicants are required to complete a listening comprehension, oral exam, a reading comprehension and a written exam. The listening comprehension includes official statements, danger and warning announcements and news. The oral exam requires the applicant to express their opinion and wishes, to use questions and to be able to provide explanations. The reading comprehension comprises has similar content to the listening exam and includes official statements, news and traffic information. Finally, the written exam includes the completion of applications, forms,

⁵² Council of Europe, Latvian Citizenship Law: <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/nationality/National%20legislation/Latvia-Law%20on%20citizenship.pdf> date last accessed 04/06/2012

⁵³ Solska, M. (2011): Citizenship, Collective Identity and the International Impact on Integration Policy in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 63, p.1094

curriculum vitae and letters of explanation. Persons who have acquired basic, secondary or higher education in the Estonian language are exempt from the examinations.

In Latvia, the Law on Citizenship stipulates that *fluency* in the Latvian language is required. The law requires them to completely understand information of a social and official nature, maintain a conversation regarding topics of a social nature, read and understand any instructions, directions and other text of a social nature and write an essay on a topic of a social nature provided to them by the examination board. Similarly to Estonia, persons who have acquired primary, secondary or higher education in the Latvian language are exempt.

Brasington argues that the reason why the language requirements in the Latvian citizenship law were more rigorous is because the Latvian language had been marginalised more than the Estonian language under Soviet occupation. In fact, he argues that Latvian had reached the second stage of language death under Soviet occupation. This stage is described as: ‘severely endangered. Speakers are only forty years old and older, grandparent age’.⁵⁴

Implications of different language requirements

On first impressions, the stricter language requirements in Latvia appear to suggest that citizenship requirements may have made it harder for ethnic Russians in Latvia to mobilise. However, the following paragraphs will argue that this is not the case. The lower number of naturalisations in Latvia can be explained by a number of other factors. In addition, the stricter language requirements in Latvia have ensured that naturalised citizens have the language skills required to operate in an environment in which the titular language is dominant. The same cannot be said for naturalised citizens in Estonia.

In Estonia, the naturalisation process started in 1992. Since then, a total of 153,892 persons have been granted citizenship.⁵⁵ In Latvia, the naturalisation process started three years later. Since 1995, a total of 135,840 individuals have been successful in their applications for citizenship.⁵⁶ The lower number of applicants is surprising given that there are more ethnic Russians in Latvia. A number of factors have contributed towards the lower number of naturalisations. First of all, the naturalisation process in Latvia started three years later than in

⁵⁴ Brasington, C (2011) After Aloysha: Baltic Citizenship Requirements Twenty Years After the Fall of Soviet Communism, *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*, Vol. 20, No. 1, p. 215

⁵⁵ Official gateway to Estonia, Citizenship: <http://estonia.eu/about-estonia/society/citizenship.html> Date last accessed: 18/03/2012

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia: <http://www.am.gov.lv/en/policy/4641/4642/4651/> Date last accessed: 18/03/2012

Estonia. Secondly, Latvia initially introduced age quotas that excluded older applicants from applying for citizenship between 1995 and 1998. Although the stricter language requirements in the citizenship law of Latvia are likely to have also had some impact on this difference, the impact of language on the total number of naturalisations appears to be limited, especially when the other factors are taken into consideration.

One of the most obvious implications of the different language requirements for citizenship is that naturalised citizens in Estonia and Latvia are likely to develop different levels of linguistic proficiency in the titular language in order to obtain citizenship. The stricter language requirements in the citizenship law of Latvia have ensured that naturalised citizens in Latvia will be fluent in Latvian. However, in Estonia, applicants for citizenship are only required to demonstrate basic language skills and are therefore not forced to develop a level of fluency in the titular language. Subsequent sections of this chapter will explain in detail why this is so important. In short, they will argue that legislation in both countries has afforded the titular language a privileged status in Estonia and Latvia. As a result, Russian minorities continue to face linguistic obstacles in the state apparatus long after obtaining citizenship. In this context, rather than forming an obstacle to mobilisation, the stricter citizenship requirements in Latvia have instead ensured that naturalised citizens in Latvia are better prepared to mobilise in parliament than naturalised citizens in Estonia.

5.3 Language and legislation

This chapter will present an overview of the language requirements that citizens face in the state apparatus. The documents presented in this section of the thesis will show that the state language is treated as the only official language and that knowledge of it is a key part of the fundamental principles of both countries. It will demonstrate that in both Estonia and Latvia, fluency in the titular language is essential for individuals in order for them to be able to participate fully in national politics. This is of particular importance for this thesis as it means that Russian minorities in Latvia have had a distinct advantage when it comes to mobilisation as a result of their higher level of linguistic proficiency in the titular language.

It will start by highlighting the language elements of the Latvian and Estonian Constitutions. This will be followed by an overview of the various language laws that have been introduced since 1989. Finally, a number of high profile court cases will be presented which will demonstrate the political participation of Russian minorities in Latvia has been facilitated by

the fact that they have been willing to challenge language requirements in order to be able to pursue a career in politics.

5.3.1 Constitutions

The following paragraphs will provide an overview of the Constitutions of Latvia and Estonia. Particular attention will be paid to the language elements of the two documents. Language features prominently in both documents and in both countries, the titular languages function as the only working languages in state institutions. Although some concessions are made in Estonia for minority languages, none of these apply to the use of language in the parliament or in other state institutions and are instead only relevant for participation in local government council or European Parliament elections.

Latvia

The foundations of the modern day Constitution of Latvia (*Satversme*) are largely based on the 1922 Constitution of Latvia. Chapters one (General Provisions), two (Parliament, or *Saeima*), three (the President) and six (Courts) from the original constitution were adopted in May 1990 and the remaining articles were added to the final document by July 1993. In the first chapter, the Constitution states that the Latvian language is the official language of the republic of Latvia. In addition, a number of important declarations regarding the use of language in the state apparatus are declared in this document. For example, the Constitution states that the working language of the parliament (*Saeima*) is the Latvian language. Although not within the scope of this thesis, the same applies in Latvia for local governments. According to article 18 of the constitution, a person elected to parliament is also required to make a solemn promise to strengthen the position of Latvian as the official language:

"I, upon assuming the duties of a Member of the Saeima, before the people of Latvia, do swear (solemnly promise) to be loyal to Latvia, to strengthen its sovereignty and the Latvian language as the only official language, to defend Latvia as an independent and democratic State, and to fulfil my duties honestly and conscientiously. I undertake to observe the Constitution and laws of Latvia."

The only mention of minority languages in the Constitution is article 114 in which it states that "ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic

and cultural identity.”⁵⁷ However, no concessions are made in terms of the use of minority languages in state institutions so knowledge of Latvian is essential for government workers.

Estonia

The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia was passed by referendum in June 1992. This was the fourth Constitution in history to be adopted by the Estonian government and a number of elements from previous Constitutions were incorporated into the new law. For example, the new document combined the Presidential Office from the 1938 Constitution with the single parliamentary chamber last seen in the 1920 version of the Constitution. The present constitution states as purpose that it shall guarantee the preservation of the Estonian nation, language and culture through the ages. Similarly to the Latvian constitution, the document states that the official language of Estonia is Estonian. It also declares that the official language of state agencies and local governments is Estonian.⁵⁸

However, the Estonian constitution does make more concessions for the use of language by minorities than the Latvian constitution. For example, local governments in areas in which the majority of the population are not Estonian may use the language of the majority of the permanent residents as the working language. Other concessions include the right of educational institutions to make their own decision on the language of instruction and the right to receive responses from state agencies, local governments, and their officials in the language of the national minority in areas in which the minority constitutes at least fifty per cent of the permanent resident population.⁵⁹ However, despite the more flexible nature of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia regarding the use of minority languages compared to neighbouring Latvia, none of these concessions apply to the use of language in state agencies. As is the case in Latvia, knowledge of the titular language is clearly necessary for those who wish to take up a role in the Latvian government.

Official language

The Constitutions of Estonia and Latvia highlight the importance of the titular languages and guarantees that they will be preserved. However, the establishment of just one official language in both countries automatically disadvantages ethnic minorities. Although some

⁵⁷ The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia: <http://archive.equal-jus.eu/189/> Date last accessed 28/05/2012

⁵⁸ The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia: <http://archive.equal-jus.eu/190/> Date last accessed 03/06/2012

⁵⁹ The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia: <http://archive.equal-jus.eu/190/> Date last accessed 03/06/2012

concessions are made for the use of minority languages in local government, none of these languages are afforded an official role in either constitution. This presents significant obstacles in two countries where it could be argued that ethnic Russians are such large groups that they no longer constitute minorities. In Latvia, the proportion of Russian-speakers is as large as the proportion of French speakers in Belgium. Even countries with relatively small minorities have taken steps to ensure that minorities are able to fully participate in their own language. For example, in Finland, the Swedish language is given a prominent role in the Constitution of Finland which states that “the national languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish”.⁶⁰ This is despite the fact that Swedish speakers amount to just over 5 per cent of the total population.⁶¹ Although, given the historical context, it is understandable that ethnic Estonians and Latvians used their constitutions to ensure that the titular languages were afforded sufficient protection, unless Russian is afforded a similar role, minorities will continue to be restricted from participating fully in politics. Returning to Finland as an example, the Swedish People’s Party of Finland (or *Svenska folkpartiet i Finland*) obtained 9 parliamentary seats in the 2011 parliamentary election.⁶² This gave them more than 4 per cent of the total 200 seats available and therefore a share of seats that is close to the size of the Swedish-speaking minority. Despite the recent successes of Harmony Centre, the share of parliamentary seats held by ethnic Russians in Estonia and Latvia is not even close to representing the size of the ethnic Russian populations currently living within the borders of Estonia and Latvia. The introduction of Russian as a second official language would remove a key barrier to minorities who wish to participate in politics.

Perhaps one of the most significant attempts to introduce Russian as an official state language was the referendum held in Latvia in February 2012. The referendum was led by the former leader of the Latvian branch of the National Bolshevik Party Vladimir Linderman, the leader of the radical-left Osipov’s party Yevgeny Osipov, and the youth movement “United Latvia”. It proposed a constitutional amendment that would have resulted in changes to Article 4, 18, 21, 101 and 104. Not only would Russian have been added as an official language, but it would have also prescribed two working languages – Latvian and Russian - for government institutions. The following question was asked:

⁶⁰ Ministry of Justice, Finland <http://www.om.fi/21910.htm> date last accessed 04/06/2012

⁶¹ Statistics Finland http://www.stat.fi/tup/tilastotietokannat/index_en.html date last accessed 04/06/2012

⁶² The Swedish People’s Party, Organisation: <http://www.sfp.fi/en/organisation/> date last accessed 04/06/2012

“Do you support the adoption of the Draft Law “Amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia” that provides for the Russian language the status of the second official language”

A total of 273,347 votes were cast in favour of the above motion and 821,722 votes were cast against the motion.⁶³ According to article 79 of the constitution, amendments can only be adopted if more than half of the electorate have voted in favour of the motion, so the referendum was rejected.⁶⁴ This result did not come as much of a surprise to most considering that only Citizens of Latvia were able to participate. This meant that the large stateless population in Latvia were not able to have their say. The referendum demonstrated that, although there is currently some momentum to introduce Russian as a second official language, it is unlikely that any change will come in this area in the near future. Until then, Russian minorities in Latvia will continue to have a distinct advantage over Russian minorities in Estonia in terms of their ability to mobilise. This is due to their higher level of linguistic proficiency in the titular language.

5.3.2 Language laws

Under Soviet rule, Estonia and Latvia both had two official languages: the titular language and Russian. The Soviets sheltered Russian-speakers from having to come to terms with their minority status by designating Russian as an official language. This meant that Russian-speakers in the two republics were able to rely entirely on their native language to get by. In fact, Russification ensured that Russian became the dominant language under Soviet rule. By the time that the Soviet Union collapsed, the titular languages in Estonia and Latvia had been marginalised. The passage of the 1989 republican language laws marked a change of course.

In the context of the Gorbachev reforms in the second half of the 1980s, Estonia and Latvia introduced republican language laws. Although these laws were originally introduced to promote bilingualism, they essentially resulted in the declaration of the titular languages as the official languages. This came as quite a shock to many Russian-speakers, particularly those who had little or no knowledge of the titular languages. David Laitin described the laws as ‘dark clouds for monolingual Russian-speakers whose linguistic repertoires had never been

⁶³ The Central Election Commission of Latvia, Referendum for Amendments to the Constitution of Latvia: <http://web.cvk.lv/pub/public/30287.html> date last accessed 04/06/2012

⁶⁴ The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia: <http://archive.equal-jus.eu/189/> Date last accessed 28/05/2012

challenged before’⁶⁵ This section of the thesis will provide an overview of these laws as well as those which have superseded them since 1989. Table 1 provides some observations from the European Centre of Minority Issues on the different periods of language-related policy agendas from 1989 onwards. It argues that since 1989, there has been an official agenda supplemented by an additional agenda in both Estonia and Latvia. It argues that since 1999, the focus has switched to excluding monolingual Russian-speakers from senior roles in the government. Language legislation establishes a direct link between politics and national identity and therefore serves to exclude minorities from taking part in politics unless they incorporate aspects of the titular identity into their own. This section of the thesis will demonstrate how language legislation has been used in Estonia and Latvia to impose language requirements on minorities who wish to participate in politics.

Table 1: Language-Related Policy Agendas in Estonia and Latvia ⁶⁶

Time period	Official agenda	Additional agenda
1989–1992	Restoring of the status of titular languages and preservation of national culture and identity	Exclusion of monolingual Russian-speakers from top jobs and achieving of political dominance by titular nation
1992–1999	Establishment of naturalisation procedures with titular language proficiency tests	Stimulation of remigration of Soviet-era settlers to their former homelands
1999–	Introduction of national integration programmes with an emphasis on the learning/teaching of the state language as the main agent of integration	Continuation of previous citizenship and language policies in order to control the access of non-titular groups to political power

Latvia

In Latvia, the republican language law was adopted in May 1989. It stipulated that acts of state power and government would be adopted and published in Latvian. A limited number of exceptions would be made for Russian translations. Workers in government and state institutions were required to have knowledge of the state language. As for public signs, the final decision on whether to translate names in a language other than Latvian was delegated to the local government. Guarantees for education in both Latvian and Russian were made by the law. However, the official role of Russian was limited to “the second most widely used

⁶⁵ Laitin, D. (1998) pp. 88

⁶⁶ Järve, P (2003) p.82

language in Latvia” and despite a mention of state support for the Latvian language, no guarantees were made for the Russian language.⁶⁷ In September 2000, the law was superseded by the Official Language Law. Whereas the original republican language law mentioned Russian in as many as 12 of the total 39 articles,⁶⁸ the new law made no mention of Russian. With the exception of the Liv language (a language used by the indigenous population in Latvia), any other language used in the Republic of Latvia is simply declared to be “a foreign language”.⁶⁹ The law also reiterated the fact that the official language of the Republic of Latvia is the Latvian language. It was subject to a great deal of controversy, particularly because it left many decisions regarding the use of language to the Cabinet of Ministers. In response to the law, the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies argued that “the law leaves a large margin of legal uncertainty, as a number of the most important provisions are left for decision by the executive branch”.⁷⁰ However, the most relevant aspect of the law to this thesis was the fact that the law stated that employees of state and local government institutions must be able to demonstrate fluency in the official language of Latvia.

Language proficiency of elected officials in Latvia

The language requirements laid out for elected officials in Latvia led to a number of high profile court cases. These will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. According to the State Language Act, candidates in parliamentary and municipal elections were required to produce a certificate of the highest level of state language proficiency in order to be able to stand for election. Under pressure from the United States and the EU, these requirements were eventually deleted from the law in May 2002. They were instead replaced with a requirement for candidates to evaluate their level of language proficiency individually. However, for many years they served to limit the capacity of ethnic minorities with limited knowledge of the titular language from participating in elections. Moreover, although the references to language requirements for elected officials have been deleted from the law, this does not mean that the linguistic barrier for elected officials has been entirely removed. Language proficiency is still required for citizenship. The Constitution and the Official Language Law still state that the working language of parliament is Latvian. Moreover, no room has been made to accommodate Russian as a second official language. As a result, the removal of language

⁶⁷ Laitin, D. (1998) pp. 89-90

⁶⁸ Explicit mentions of the Russian language in the original language law of 1989 were later replaced by implicit ones instead referring to languages other than the state language as “other languages” in 1992

⁶⁹ The Latvian Language Agency: Official Language Law: http://www.valoda.lv/en/downloadDoc_436/mid_566
Date last accessed 30/05/2012

⁷⁰ Järve, P (2003), p.88

requirements for elected officials has not made it any easier for minorities with limited knowledge of the titular language to stand for election to the parliament. Further changes in the legislation are required to prevent language forming an obstacle to political participation.

Estonia

In Estonia, the republican language law was adopted on January 1989. Similarly to Latvia, it declared that acts of organs of state power and government would be adopted and published only in Estonian. For a temporary period, Russian translations would be available. However, unlike the Latvian law, Russian could still continue to be used in local government institutions. It also stipulated that knowledge of the state language would be required for all official posts, in state enterprises, and for a variety of professions. All public signs would be in Estonian, with a few exceptions based on historical or historical-cultural factors. Finally, the law also guaranteed education in the Estonian language anywhere on its territory. No similar guarantees were made available for education in Russian. In fact the official role of Russian was only described as “the language that, after Estonian, is used most often as a native language”.⁷¹ In February 1995, this law was replaced by the Language Act.⁷² Once again, Estonian was declared as the official language of Estonia. The Act also stipulated that the working language in state agencies, local governments and agencies thereof would be Estonian. Similarly to the Official Language Law in Latvia, requirements for proficiency in and use of the Estonian language were prescribed by the Act for public servants and employees of state agencies. Perhaps the main concession made in this Act that was not mentioned in the corresponding Latvian law was the fact that, in certain cases, national minorities would be permitted to use their own language alongside Estonian as the internal working language in local governments. In July 2011, the Language Act was replaced by a new version. This document contained limited changes and was predominantly an attempt to clean up the old version which had been subject to many amendments since it was introduced in 1995. One of the changes involved the widening of the waiver from taking Estonian language proficiency examinations so that it would include individuals who had attended Russian schools in which at least 60 per cent of the classes are taught in the Estonian

⁷¹ Laitin, D. (1998) pp. 89-90

⁷² Council of Europe, Language Act of Estonia:

<http://www.coe.int/t/dgh/standardsetting/nationality/National%20legislation/Estonia-Language%20Act.asp>
date last accessed 04/06/2012

language. In addition, the new Act lowered the level of language proficiency required for many positions.⁷³

Language proficiency of elected officials in Estonia

In December 1998, Estonia added a requirement for elected officials to be able to demonstrate proficiency in the titular language. These requirements were not only added to the language law, but they were also added to the Riigikogu Election Act and to the Local Government Council Election Act. In February 1999, these requirements were extended to the private sector, non-profit organisations and foundations. Under significant pressure from the OSCE, EU and NATO, the Riigikogu Election Act was amended in November 2001 and amendments to the Local Government Council Election Act followed in December 2001. However, similarly to Latvia, the removal of the language requirements from these acts does not make it any easier for minorities with limited knowledge of the titular language to stand for Election in Estonia. Although this was a step in the right direction, minorities in Estonia are still automatically disadvantaged as a result of the prominence of the titular language in government legislation ranging from the citizenship law to the Constitution.

Summary

Since 1989, language legislation has formed an additional obstacle to political mobilisation for Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. Although the laws in both countries were largely similar, the higher level of titular language command among Russian minorities in Latvia has once again afforded them a clear advantage over Russian minorities in Estonia. Nevertheless, now that language requirements for elected officials have been abandoned, language legislation is likely to play a less significant role in the mobilisation of future generations of Russian minorities as it has in the periods that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

5.3.3 High profile court cases

This final section of chapter five will argue that Latvia has seen more high profile challenges to its language policies than Estonia, and that these cases demonstrate that ethnic minorities in Latvia have had more confidence to challenge the status quo than minority groups in Estonia.

⁷³ United Nations, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/followup/CERD-C-EST-CO-8-9-Add1.pdf> date last accessed 04/06/2012

Although language requirements for elected officials have been abandoned following pressure from a number of international organisations, for many years they prevented minorities from taking part in politics. As a result, cases such as these would have given a significant boost of confidence to minorities in a period in which it was felt that political participation was simply not possible without an advanced level of titular language proficiency. The following paragraphs will highlight a number of high profile cases in Latvia in which individuals have challenged controversial monitoring agencies in the period before language requirements for candidates were abandoned. The cases that will be considered in this section of the chapter will be *Podkolzina v. Latvia* and *Ignatāne v. Latvia*. In Estonia, no challenges to language requirements for elected officials were brought before international tribunals.

The case of *Podkolzina v. Latvia* held at the European Court of Human Rights in 2002 highlighted the fact that language formed an obstacle for those wanting to participate in politics, even if they were already Latvian citizens. In this particular case, Ingrīda Podkolzina was removed from the candidate list of the National Harmony Party (or, *Tautas saskaņas partija*) in the lead up to the parliamentary elections of 1998. Despite the fact that she was a Latvian citizen and had submitted a language certificate as part of her registration to be an electoral candidate, she was disqualified from standing for election to the Latvian parliament on the grounds that she did not have sufficient command of the Latvian language. The decision to declare her unfit for election was based on an informal examination organised by the State Language Inspectorate. An examiner approached Podkolzina unannounced and struck up an informal discussion with her about the reasons why she wanted to represent National Harmony Party in the election instead of other political parties. The following day, the examiner returned accompanied by three other individuals and asked her to write an essay in Latvian. Despite pleas from the National Harmony Party, the examiner concluded that Podkolzina did not have adequate command of Latvian and asked the Central Election Commission to remove her name from the candidate list. Following failed attempts to appeal the judgment at the Latvian Supreme Court, the case was taken before the European Court of Human Rights. In April 2002, the court delivered a unanimous judgment that the candidate had been unfairly removed from the candidate list and that her language proficiency was not tested in a proper manner.⁷⁴ Although the court did not rule that language requirements should be abolished for candidates in national elections, this decision dealt a significant blow to the

⁷⁴ European Court of Human Rights, HUDOC Database, Case of *Podkolzina v. Latvia*: <http://www.echr.coe.int/ECHR/EN/Header/Case-Law/Decisions+and+judgments/HUDOC+database/> date last accessed 09/06/2012

Latvian government and in particular to the State Language Inspectorate. In addition, it was a high profile case which not only demonstrated that minorities in Latvia had the confidence to challenge the language requirements but also demonstrated to minorities who considered language requirements to be an obstacle to political participation that they should not let language proficiency prevent them from taking part in elections.

The case of Podkolzina v. Latvia was not the only example of a high profile case led by an ethnic Russian against language requirements for electoral candidates in Latvia. In the case of Ignatāne v. Latvia in 2001, a candidate for the Movement of Social Justice and Equal Rights party was removed from the candidate list as it was determined that she did not have the correct level of language proficiency required to stand as a candidate for a local election. The United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled that this was a violation of article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

(a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;

(b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;

(c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country.⁷⁵

Although local elections are not within the scope of this thesis, this case once again demonstrated the resolve of minorities in Latvia in challenging language requirements.

In Estonia, there have also been legal challenges to language requirements for elected officials. For example, the disqualification of Juri Šutenko from local government council elections in June 1997 led to a constitutional judgment by the Supreme Court of Estonia.⁷⁶ However, none of these cases involved candidates for parliamentary elections. Moreover, they were processed by the Supreme Court of Estonia and were therefore not as high profile as the above mentioned cases in Latvia. This demonstrates that minorities in Estonia do not appear to have had the same level of confidence as minorities in Latvia to challenge the status quo.

⁷⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm> Date last accessed 30/05/2012

⁷⁶ The Supreme Court of Estonia, Judgment of the Constitutional Review Chamber of the Supreme Court of November 1998: <http://www.nc.ee/?id=458> date last accessed 08/06/2012

To summarise, the cases of *Podkolzina v. Latvia* and *Ignatāne v. Latvia* demonstrated that minorities in Latvia had the confidence to challenge the language requirements set for elected officials. In addition, the publicity surrounded these cases will have given minorities in Latvia an additional boost of confidence to not let language requirements prevent them from standing for election. Although language requirements for elected officials were later abandoned, for many years they stood in the way of minority candidates. However, the above cases demonstrate that minorities in Latvia were not willing to let them stand in their way and were willing to pursue their cases to the highest level to gain access to government. This has facilitated the higher level of minority representation witnessed in Latvia.

6.0 Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that language is not only key to understanding the capacity of minorities in Estonia and Latvia to mobilise but also to understanding the different levels of minority participation in the two countries. Language does not feature prominently in the literature on minority participation, yet this thesis has demonstrated that it can be closely connected to many of the factors that are thought to influence the likelihood of mobilisation.

Although official language requirements for elected officials in Estonia and Latvia have recently been abandoned, the dominance of the titular languages in government legislation demonstrates that titular language proficiency will remain an important asset for minorities when it comes to political participation for the foreseeable future. As long as minorities in Estonia continue to lag behind minorities in Latvia when it comes to knowledge of the titular languages, the difference in the level of political participation is likely to remain a fact of life.

Nevertheless, things are set to change. Research into language shift has revealed that future generations are likely to have better command of the titular languages. Children in Estonia and Latvia are already growing up with more contact with the titular languages than their parents did. Perhaps the best example of this is the education systems. Whereas during the Soviet period, the medium of instruction in schools was either Estonian or Russian, many former Russian schools now have a bilingual curriculum. Recent changes to language laws have increased the dominance of the titular language in the curriculum of all schools in Estonia and Latvia and it would not be surprising if future generations no longer have the option to follow a curriculum in which Russian is anything but a foreign language.

Although these developments appear to be positive for the political opportunities of future generations of ethnic Russians, there are also negative connotations attached to the intervention of the government in such an important aspect of identity. The policies pursued by the governments of Estonia and Latvia ignore group differences and have instead pushed for a society in which there is just one uniform identity. This is especially the case in the citizenship laws in both countries. As May argues, the 'strict separation of citizenship and identity in the modern polity understates, and at times disavows, the significance of wider communal affiliations, including one's language, to the construction of individual identity.'⁷⁷ If the governments of Estonia and Latvia continue to pursue a purely assimilationist model, it will not be long before ethnic Russian no longer exist as a separate identity group. As a result, these policies could prevent future generations from wanting to mobilise along ethnic lines. Unless the governments of Estonia and Latvia allow ethnic Russians to maintain key aspects of their identity such as language, the identity of this minority group will be eroded.

There are plenty of opportunities to take this study further. For example, the frameworks discussed in chapter two identified a wide range of factors that are thought to influence political participation. This study has focused on the factors that are connected to language. However, further studies could identify other factors that have influenced the capacity of ethnic minorities in Estonia and Latvia to mobilise as a group. Secondly, one area of research that is yet to be explored is the impact of language on the political participation of minorities in local elections in Estonia and Latvia. In Estonia, it is permitted to use minority languages in local government institutions. Moreover, citizenship is not required for political participation at this level. In Latvia, this is not the case. Has this led to more political participation of minorities in Estonia? Another area for further study could be the timing surrounding the increase in political participation of minorities in Latvia. Prior to 2006, the success of ethnic Russian parties in Latvia was limited. Why did it take fifteen years for ethnic Russians to mobilise enough support to become a major player in the Latvian parliament? All of these topics would help shed more light on a subject area about which little has been written.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that language is an important element in the study of minority participation that has yet to be incorporated into models of minority mobilisation. It is key to understanding different levels of minority participation in Estonia and Latvia. Perhaps the best approach for the governments of Estonia and Latvia going forward would be

⁷⁷ May, S. (2000) Uncommon Languages: The Challenges and Possibilities of Minority Language Rights, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 21, No 5, p.376

to introduce Russian as a second official language. Not only would this involve less government intervention in the identity of ethnic Russians, but it would also ensure that ethnic Russians have equal opportunities to become citizens and take part in politics without having to change their identity. However, as indicated in earlier chapters, the results of the referendum in Latvia in February 2012 indicated that this is extremely unlikely to happen.

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