

Ina Druviete

Dace Strelēvica–Ošiņa

University of Latvia

dacestre@inbox.lv

Some Aspects of the Sociolinguistic Situation in Latvia: Causes and Effects*

This paper gives an insight into the present sociolinguistic situation in Latvia – from a synopsis of the language-related legislature to the aspects of contact/conflict and interaction between various languages and language variants in Latvia.

A brief chronological overview of the history of the Latvian language and of the linguistic situation in Latvia is also provided, highlighting the crucial events and elements that have gradually shaped the language attitudes and sociolinguistic climate of Latvia today.

1. Republic of Latvia: General Overview

The Republic of Latvia was first founded on November 18, 1918. After incorporation in the Soviet Union (1940–1991), its independence was renewed on August 21, 1991. Besides Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia is one of the three Baltic states. Its territory covers about 64,000 km², and the most part of Latvia's population (~68%) resides in city areas, the largest being the capital Riga (population of about 815,000), as well as Daugavpils (~17,500) and Liepāja (~96,270).

In 2007, Latvia had approximately 2,290,700 inhabitants. The following table lists the ethnic composition of Latvia's population. The table is based on data taken from the 1989 census and a projection of 2006 from the Civil Data Register.

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Ethnic composition of Latvia (1989 and 2006)

	1989		2006	
Latvians	52.2%	1,396,100	59.0%	1,351,489
Russians	34%	902,300x	28.5%	652,204
Belorussians	4.4%	117,200	3.8%	86,594
Ukrainians	3.4%	89,300	2.5%	58,175
Poles	2.2%	59,700	2.4%	55,682
Germans	0.1%	2,900	0.2%	3,799
Lithuanians	1.3%	34,100	1.4%	31,307
Jews	0.6%	16,300	0.4%	9,529
Roma	0.3%	7,200	0.4%	8,498
Others	1.2%	31,900	1.4%	33,488

There are the following minority types in Latvia: unique autochthonous minority – Livonians; traditional allochthonous non-contact minorities – Roma (Gypsies), Jews, Germans, Poles; traditional allochthonous contact minorities – Lithuanians, Estonians, Belorussians, Russians; immigrant minorities – Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, Armenians, etc.

The Republic of Latvia is a parliamentary democracy. The parliament of Latvia (the *Saeima*) is a unicameral assembly. Its 100 members are elected for four years. *Saeima* elects the president of Latvia, also for a term of four years. In February 1999, Latvia joined the World Trade Organization, in March 2004 – the NATO, and since May 1, 2004 it is a full member of the European Union.

Latvia has a three-level administration. Besides a central government, there are 26 districts (*rajoni*), 550 local self-governments (70 cities and 480 *pagasti*), and five economic planning regions that correspond very closely to the historical regions: Latgale; Zemgale; Kurzeme (outside Latvia, historians and other experts also know it by its Germanized name, Courland); Vidzeme, and the Rīga region. The economy of Latvia is still in transition. The main branches contributing to GDP (according to 2002 data) are: services (70%), industry (19%), construction (6%), and agriculture, including forestry and fishery (5%). Unemployment still remains a concern in some areas while, in the same time, the massive emigration of people seeking jobs in other EU countries, especially Ireland, is becoming a problem because the countryside of Latvia is being gradually depopulated.

The official State language in Latvia is Latvian. The Latvian language (*latviešu valoda*), as well as the Lithuanian language, belongs to the Baltic group of the Indo-European family of languages. The only other autochthonous language in Latvia, the Livonian language (*līvõ kēļ*), belongs to the Finno-Ugric family of languages.

2. Historical Development: Latvian Linguistic Identity and Language Policy

2.1 Pre-standardisation period

Opinions differ as to when the Finno-Ugric and later Indo-European peoples first appeared in the territory of the contemporary Baltics – however, it happened several thousand years ago, according to archaeological evidence. The separation of the Latvian and Lithuanian languages is thought to have been completed by the 7th century; today Latvian and Lithuanian are not mutually understandable.

Before 1200, the people in the Baltics lived largely as free peasants loosely organized into minor townships with castles as centres. Since the early 1200s, Estonians and Latvians were colonized by German crusaders seeking to impose Christianity on them. By the end of the 13th century, the Baltic pagan tribes – the Lettgallians (*letgaļi*), Semigallians (*zemgaļi*), Curonians (*kurši*), and Selonians (*sēļi*) were completely subjugated under German rule. Over the next few centuries, the major differences in tribal Baltic languages and cultures gradually disappeared, and by the 16th century these languages had formed the basis for a more or less unified spoken Latvian language.

Due to their advantageous geographical position, the territories of Latvia and Estonia have been repeatedly attacked by foreign invaders. The territory of Estonia, together with a part of a present-day Latvia, for a long time during the Middle Ages was known as Livonia, named after the Livonians (*līvīst*), who inhabited the place where German conquerors first set foot on Baltic shore (near Riga). A territory inhabited by the Lettgallians later during the Middle Ages came under Polish government, and a part of the territory of contemporary Latvia and Estonia has also been under Swedish rule. After the Great Northern War (1700–1721), Latvian and Estonian lands fell under Russian government, but the dominance of the German landlords and language, as well as of the Lutheran church, remained. The Latvian culture and language has had to coexist, for a long time, with domineering foreign languages of the ruling class.

A certain standardisation of the Latvian language, as it may be believed, was spontaneously taking place already during the pre-written stage, i. e., until the 16th century. Since the 17th century, when the first normative grammars of Latvian appeared, one can speak of a more or less conscious language standardisation (A. Blinkena, 1994/95). In the 16th century, according to the principle of Reformation that Bible and other religious texts should be made available to everyone in their native language, the German-speaking clergymen began to translate hymnals, agendas, liturgies, prayer-books, and Bible fragments into Latvian. The oldest preserved printed texts in Latvian are the Catholic Catechism (1585) and the Lutheran Handbook (Catechism, pericopes and psalm book, 1586/1587).

Since these clergymen were not native speakers and because they were bound by rigid translation conventions of their time (e. g. word-for-word

translation), the resulting written Latvian was quite different from the possible spoken Latvian language of the time (of which we naturally have no records), or at least from the language of the Latvian folklore. The earliest written Latvian abounds in German-influenced grammatical forms and constructions. However, these texts cannot be simply dismissed as unsuccessful attempts of careless foreign authors. As many Latvian linguists agree, they are a rich source of information about the history of Latvian language and its standardization (A. Augstkalns, 1934; M. Baltiņa, 2002, etc.) And, as the 16th century texts were mostly produced in Riga, it may well be that the spoken Latvian of Riga indeed had strong German influences similar to the ones represented in the writings of the time. (As historians point out, in early medieval Riga, unlike the Latvian countryside, the ethnic origin was not yet a class-divisive feature (A. Balodis, 1991), and we can guess that the early medieval middle-class made up by the Latvian, Livonian, and German-speaking inhabitants of Riga, already presented a model of an integrated multiethnic society of a certain kind (D. Strelēvica-Ošiņa, forthcoming).

G. Mancelius (1593–1654), a German theologian and linguist, in his publications introduced extensive corrections to the earlier forms of what is called the Early Written Latvian (*veclatviešu rakstu valoda*), and he is generally regarded as having set the foundation for modern Standard Latvian. The so-called “Mancelius reform” actually caused the shift of the dialectal basis of Standard Latvian – from the vernacular of Riga (with its heavy German and also Livonian influences, reduced word endings and simplified structures), to the Central dialect of Latvian (a more archaic and “pure” variant of Latvian, spoken in Zemgale and Vidzeme) – thus maybe even halting a hypothetical shift of Latvian from synthetic to analytical morphological type, the shift that took place in many other Indo-European languages in Middle Ages (D. Strelēvica-Ošiņa, 2007).

Another milestone in the standardisation of written Latvian was the translation of the Bible (published 1685–1694) by E. Glück – this text firmly established the use of the Central dialect as the basis for Standard Latvian. Along with the ideas of the Enlightenment, a direction towards a secular Latvian literature was introduced largely with the help of another German clergyman, G. F. Stender. Later, in late 18th century, German philosopher J. G. Herder who was interested in the presumed simple and natural life of the “native peoples” and their folklore, published several Latvian folksongs in German translation. Thus, he triggered the interest in folklore among Latvians themselves. Latvian scholar K. Barons later collected a huge amount of folklore units, unparalleled anywhere in Europe.

2.2 Standardisation period

In the 19th century, the first Latvian national awakening set in. The ideologists of this movement, dubbed Neo-Latvians (*jaunlatvieši*), were the first university-educated Latvians – K. Valdemārs, K. Barons, J. Alunāns, A. Kronvalds, etc. – who started devoting attention to the legal and linguistic aspects

of language policy in territories inhabited by Latvians. Their struggle for an official status of the Latvian language, as well as against foreign influences on it, became an essential task for the newly-developing Latvian intelligentsia (and has been so ever since). In 1861, about 20 Latvian intellectuals applied to the Governor of Baltic provinces with a demand to ensure the maintenance of the Latvian language. An active purification of Latvian from German elements went hand in hand with creating a modern Latvian vocabulary and borrowing from the international word-stock (A. Veisbergs, 1993). It was a typical case of an acculturative process as described by J. E. Joseph, where a subjugated ethnic group starts its language standardisation in order to achieve the same prestigious status which the superposed language of the ruling class has, and, during the process, tries to extirpate traces of the superposed language from their own (J. E. Joseph, 1987). Let us mention, however, that during the first Latvian national awakening this work was done by non-linguists, and the purification of Latvian was more emotional and spontaneous than theoretically founded.

The Neo-Latvians truly did a tremendous work in raising the Latvian national self-esteem – by translating European classics into Latvian, writing about the worth and potential of the Latvian language, coining many new words or introducing dialectal words with broadened or new meanings into Standard Latvian, etc. According to the Neo-Latvian viewpoint, only the national language can adequately serve as a symbol of self-identification with the national culture. And, what is essential to note – the Neo-Latvians and their followers were acting very much in line with the Western European, especially German philological tradition of their (or earlier) time. The respect for folklore; the tradition of choral singing; the idea that language (and its purity and correctness) epitomizes the spirit of the nation (the Humboldtian *Volksgeist*); the interest in historical linguistics and dialectology – all these still survive as milestones of Latvian culture and language attitudes. The Neo-Latvians successfully used elements borrowed from German culture in fighting the German rule and influence – and set an example of how to deal with similar situations in the future (D. Strelēvica-Ošiņa, forthcoming). D. Bula, an expert on Latvian identity issues, has shown how even some allegedly specific Latvian self-definitions actually have their roots in the romanticized descriptions given by outsiders (i. e. Germans) – such as the widespread, inspiring image of Latvians as “the nation of singers” (D. Bula, 2000). It is typical, actually, that foreign-dominated, underprivileged ethnoses across the world – from Latvians and Livonians in Latvia to the First Nations in Canada and the US – owe the inspiration of their national and linguistic emancipation to a foreign cultural influence (D. Strelēvica, 2000b, 2001).

By the turn of the centuries, the first professionally educated Latvian linguists (J. Velme, G. Freibergs-Brīvkalnieks, K. Milenbahs) appeared and began to carry out the standardisation of Latvian on scientific grounds. These first Latvian linguists were graduates of Tartu university in Estonia, where the study language was then German, and thus, just like Neo-Latvians, they were influenced by German philosophy and linguistics. They realized that language

change proves its vitality, and that there is a close connection between language and the socio-political background of its speakers. (However, a large part of the Latvian society until today tends to regard language change as a negative factor.)

The end of the 19th century was one of the crucial periods in the existence of Latvian, in a sense that it had no official status and its sociolinguistic functions were reduced to a minimum. Only Russian and German were the languages of all governing bodies, courts, and secondary schools. Still, the peoples in the Baltics by this time were already consolidated as nations; their national standard languages had been formed, their national literature and press publications had reached a high level, and the national awakening tendencies were in full bloom. Thus, the linguistic quality and level of standardisation of Latvian was rather high, despite its restricted sociolinguistic functions. Already before the WWI, a strong theoretical background for corpus planning was established. WWI led to the collapse of the two empires – Russian and German –, making it possible for Latvia to assert its statehood. On November 18, 1918, Latvia declared its full independence. This is sometimes called the second national awakening of Latvians.

The period from 1914 to early 1920s may be characterized as one of unpromising rivalry between the languages spread in the territory of Latvia. Language, quite reasonably, was considered as an important political and ideological weapon. (E. g. when, during WWI, the Latvian Communists succeeded for a brief period in gaining control over a part of territory of Latvia, in their first decree Latvian was treated as one of the official languages besides Russian and German.)

When the independent Republic of Latvia was established, the political situation still remained dangerous, and no programmatic documents concerning language use were adopted then. Even in the first Constitution of Republic of Latvia (1922) there was no article on official state language. The article No. 115 in the 2nd part of this Constitution which had not been officially adopted due to political controversies, concerned the use of languages: “*Latvian is the official state language. For the representatives of minorities, a free use of their languages in spoken and written form is guaranteed. The use of minority languages in state government and administrative bodies shall be determined by special regulations*”. This basic principle is in force in Latvian language policy up to now.

During the period of independence (1918–1940), the minorities in Latvia enjoyed equal rights in all spheres of life. The only thing that mattered was an individual’s loyalty and commitment to the welfare of the country. The state granted free primary and secondary education to all minorities in their mother tongue (A. Staris, V. Ūsiņš, 2000). The minorities organized political parties, set up societies, and held religious services, theatre performances, etc. in their native languages. (Their organizations, however, like all institutions of the pre-war Latvia, were closed down in 1940 with the Soviet occupation, and the successfully started process of integration was nipped in the bud.) According to the 1935 census, there were 77% Latvians, 8.8% Russians, 4.9% Jews, 3.3%

Germans, 2.5% Poles, 1.4% Belorussians, 1.2% Lithuanians, 0.4% Estonians, and 0.1% Ukrainians in Latvia. Although the percentage of non-Latvian inhabitants during the First Republic was only 25%, there were some specific problems. The majority of minority populations belonged to larger nations which had not so long ago dominated over Latvians politically, economically and culturally. The first decrees and laws tried to strengthen the positions of Latvian. According to the “*Education Law*” (December 8, 1919), Latvian had to be a compulsory subject in all schools. On November 21, 1921, the “*Regulations on the State Language Proficiency*” were adopted. In 1932 two language laws were adopted, some amendments to them were made in 1934, but German and Russian still occupied certain positions besides Latvian. The borderline in the official language policy was the year 1934. The Latvian language was then recognized as the strongest means of integrating non-Latvians into Latvian society. This conception was reflected in the “*Education Law*” (July 12, 1934) and in the “*Law on State Language*” (January 5, 1935). Only after 1935 the positions of Latvian as the only state language were strengthened to a sufficient extent, but language policy still lacked a strategic conception.

However, by the 1930s Latvian had developed into a full-fledged polyfunctional language. The Terminology Commission (established in 1919) coined Latvian terms in more than 20 branches of science. It has to be noted that during the first independent Republic of Latvia (and moreover later during the Soviet period, as we shall see), there was a strong prescriptivist and purism-oriented approach in the language attitudes and study. E. g. the most prominent Latvian linguist of all times, J. Endzelīns (1873–1961), was also a supporter of such approach. As noted by G. Thomas, it is typical of small nations that have survived a foreign rule (1991).

We can still say that Latvian cultural identity developed as a result of interaction of all the national and ethnic minorities living in its territory (Livonian, German, Russian, etc.), and also been influenced by other neighbouring European cultures, especially Scandinavian. What is important to note, in Latvia there have practically never (since the very beginning of the implementation of Protestantism in 16th century) been any violent clashes between different groups of society on the basis of religious or denominational identity.

2.3 Post-standardisation period

2.3.1 The Soviet period

The development of the independent state of Latvia was interrupted in 1940 for more than 50 years of Soviet occupation. During that period, any expression of the idea of national identity was persecuted severely, since the leading ideologists understood it was associated with the aspirations for independence and had an important symbolic value in the consciousness of Latvians.

The language policy in the Baltic states followed the well-known principles of Soviet domestic affairs (M. Rannut, 1994). Its ambiguous character also influenced the languages of the Baltic States. On one hand, the official postulates about the absolute equality of languages and the necessity to create con-

ditions for their evolution and development were beneficial for Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian, as concerns corpus planning, literature, and press in these languages. Special institutes were established for investigation of these languages; many grammars and dictionaries were published. The languages of the Baltic states, which were already highly standardized and stylistically diverse before WWII, became even richer and well-developed, with their own terminology in almost all branches of science.

On the other hand, the propaganda about the benefits of languages convergence and about the leading role of Russian, as well as the everyday experience of not being able to communicate with state officials, doctors, salespersons, etc. in one's native tongue, did not allow the languages of the Baltic states to fulfill all their potential. Paraphrasing the expression of E. Hamp, the Baltic languages were allowed to walk to their grave "with their boots on". Languages were rich and well-developed, but their sociolinguistic functions became more and more restricted. This paradox does not seem to appear frequently among the world's languages. As C. B. Paulston points out, "*it is exactly this past Latvian subordinate/Russian superordinate relationship that dominates present-day language policies in Latvia*" (C. B. Paulston, 1997: 187).

Russian was not officially attributed the status of the State language, but was simply the language with the widest functional range and could thus serve as the lingua franca. "*However, such a seemingly liberal or rational/technical division of functions in fact led to one-sided bilingualism: locals had to be bilingual in their own language and in Russian, those who migrated into the republics however did not need to learn the local languages*" (U. Ozolins, 1995: 3).

There was no explicit language policy spelled out by constitution or laws. The Soviet constitution proclaimed that all languages were equal. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union had a deliberate policy of the governmental institutions for changing the patterns of language acquisition and use. As several scholars (mainly M. Rannut, 1996) have pointed out, three main stages can be observed in Soviet language policy, each differing in the methods used to achieve the ideological goals: 1) Stalin's regime, characterized by drastic and violent measures; the elimination of whole ethnic groups using a class-based approach; 2) Brezhnev's period; 3) Gorbachev's period, characterized by new tension between the imperially-minded Russians and the local nations fighting for self-determination.

As M. Rannut states, Soviet linguistic policy never existed *per se*, it was merely a dimension of the whole communist ideology. Even this implicit policy was never stable, and reflected the current views of the Secretary General.

The psychological violence that accompanied the establishment of a special status for Russian is really worth attention. Step by step, the ideas about the special qualities and superiority of Russian was implemented, in often-repeated slogans such as the following: "the Russian people have liberated other peoples and have provided them with fraternal help"; "communication of all the nations of the USSR takes place via Russian"; "the Russian language is one of the best developed languages of the world", etc. As H. Haarmann has pointed

out, “*the promotion of language shift to Russian or ethnic fusion, which, in Soviet ideological language, corresponds to “processes of transition to the second mother tongue” can well be considered as the ultimate goal of Soviet national politics*” (H. Haarmann, 1992: 111). Recommendations of Taskhent Conference (1975) included the following: to extend the teaching of Russian as an optional subject in all higher and secondary educational establishments; to produce model syllabuses for programs of intensive Russian instruction in national schools; to begin the teaching of Russian in kindergartens. In 1950s, a pragmatic decision was taken to teach all subjects in Latvian, Lithuanian or Estonian, but a whole school year was appended to facilitate the acquisition of Russian. “Mixed” (national and Russian) schools were also instituted. Although there was no real tendency to choose Russian-medium schooling with an economic motivation, the number of children being taught in Russian (many being born in ethnically mixed families) exceeded the number of children having Russian as a native language.

Until the end of the 1980s, it was practically impossible to shop, get medical aid, or communicate with administrative bodies without knowledge of Russian. Thus, almost all the adult population in Latvia had quite good Russian language skills. These skills were a matter of existence, not only of upward mobility. Besides, there was an unofficial policy that monolingual Russians in both formal and informal levels should feel perfectly comfortable and receive all services in Russian, and that it was the duty of local peoples to adapt to this situation.

At the same time the retention rates for mother tongues were high: 99.6% for Lithuanians, 98.9% for Estonians, 97.4% for Latvians (P. Zvidriņš, 1993). Due to unbalanced sociolinguistic functions and prestige (the Latvian language acquisition was never recognized as necessary by Soviet governmental officials, and the main sociolinguistic functions were covered by Russian), Latvia, like other Baltic states, developed two separate linguistic communities: a monolingual Russian community and an asymmetrically bilingual Latvian community. Only a small percentage of non-Russian minorities were trilingual in their own language, Russian and Latvian. As the result of Soviet language policy, mother tongue retention rates in these ethnic groups decreased dramatically. The phenomenon of “the Russian-speaking” or Russophones emerged. As M. Diachkov states, “*this conglomeration of ‘Russophones’ cannot be defined as national or ethnic minority in the Western understanding of the term, rather a group of minorities. First, it was ethnically non-uniform; second, it was not part and parcel of the local population in contrast to numerous ethnic minorities in the Western countries; and, last but not least, they were partially de-ethnicized and many of them preferred to identify themselves with ‘the Soviet people’*” (M. Diachkov, 1994: 193).

But why did russification not succeed fully in the Baltic States? The main factors were:

- 1) time. Language shift rarely occurs in less than three generations;
- 2) “*Moscow’s great mistake has been to link language as a means of multi-ethnic communication with the attempt to impose an alien ideology*”

and way of life on half the population of the country” (Kirkwood, 1991: 78),

- 3) The presence of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian in the local education system (including the higher education). It was certainly a major factor in language maintenance.

According to 1989 census, 67% of Latvians, 37% of Lithuanians, and 34% of Estonians had free command of Russian (P. Zvidriņš, 1993). These figures of the official statistics seem to be incredibly low – it may well be that a negative answer about the knowledge of Russian was intended as resistance to russification.

There were other forms of national resistance as well – an enormous interest in national history, folklore and literature; language purism, etc. Due to political reasons and administrative pressures, Latvian linguists could not affect the shrinking sociolinguistic functions of Latvian, therefore the preservation, even perfection, of language quality became the major focus and task. Extensive research of Latvian was carried out, a two-volume grammar and an eight-volume dictionary of Standard Latvian were compiled. In 1946, the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences was founded, and until 1990 it published 15 terminological dictionaries and more than 50 bulletins on various fields of science and technology. Since 1965, a yearbook on correct usage of Latvian language, as well as a bulletin for journalists, and numerous monographic studies were published (A. Blinkena, 1998). It is also not surprising that the language planning activities are often aimed at the elements of the culture which is regarded as threatening to the national culture. In the 1860s and 1870s, the main accent was on the elimination of German influences from language; in Soviet times there was a negative attitude towards Russian influences.

In the Soviet times, in fact, we can speak of prescriptivism and purism as a secret, non-violent weapon of defense against the russification policy. If one could not openly protest against the Soviet rule and the privileged status of the Russian language and Russophones, then it was possible, on the language level, to proscribe and criticize excessive lexical borrowing from Russian, Russian-induced changes in Latvian grammar, etc. Linguists, editors, and language teachers of the Soviet time actually thus carried out a silent struggle for the survival of Latvian language and nationhood. What later broke out as the emotional but non-violent Singing Revolution (*Dziesmotā revolūcija*), or the third national awakening in late 1980s and early 1990s, had actually thus been prepared throughout the Soviet occupation. In a way, this movement was similar to the 1960s Quiet Revolution (*Révolution Tranquille*) in the francophone province of Quebec in Canada, where the separatist movement was mainly based on the struggle for re-establishing the status and use of the Quebecois French language. Let us note again that the Latvian-Russian controversy, like that of the Quebecois and Anglophones in Quebec, has practically never been physically violent but always concentrated in and around the language sphere. If we compare these language-based ethnic conflicts with some conflict cases

elsewhere in the world which, often on the basis of religious differences, break out in physical aggression, we may guess that language-centered communities manage to keep an ethnic conflict on a verbal, civilized level (D. Strelēvica 2000a, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; D. Strelēvica-Ošīna 2007a, 2008).

In the Baltic states, the Language Laws were among the first laws to be passed in the perestroika period (1987–1989), together with the legalization of their national flags and anthems. During the process of democratization, all three Baltic states struggled for the official recognition of the priority of their national titular languages. In Latvia, the petition for establishing Latvian as the state language was signed by more than 350,000 people. In 1988, the Supreme Councils of the Baltic Republics (still part of the Soviet Union at that time) adopted amendments to the Constitutions which proclaimed Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian the official State languages in the respective republics. On January 18, 1989, the Language Law was adopted in Estonia, on January 25, 1989, in Lithuania, and on May 5, 1989 – in Latvia. The main goal of this pre-independence Law was to promote the use of Latvian and to develop Latvian language skills among the Russian-speaking population. These Laws did not correspond to the concept of the monolingual state, as Russian retained the functions of an official language in a number of spheres. Though the local languages had the status of the sole State language, these laws allowed for the parallel use of Russian in the majority of sociolinguistic functions. The main principle was the availability of language choice, therefore state officials and holders of certain jobs which included contacts with the general public had to be bilingual.

Full implementation of the Language Laws in Latvia was postponed, and a special decree specifying the implementation of the Language Law was issued. There was a three-year transition period during which state employees lacking Latvian language skills could acquire them. (In almost all workplaces, free Latvian language classes were organised during working hours.) The implementation of the 1989 Language Laws, however, was hampered by the unstable political situation during 1989–1991. The work on establishing the status and role of Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian became more active only after the restoration of independence.

2.3.2 The renewed independence

On August 1991, the Republic of Latvia was again proclaimed a sovereign state. In 1992, in order to strengthen the status of the state language, additions and amendments were made to the 1989 Language Law. Several additional regulations and decrees were adopted, e. g., “*Official State Language Proficiency Certification Regulation*” (Resolution No. 189, May 25, 1992) and “*Regulations of the Republic of Latvia Official State Language Inspection Board*” (July 22, 1992) in Latvia.

On October 15, 1998 the *Saeima* incorporated a chapter on ‘Fundamental Human Rights’ in the Constitution. Article 114 of this chapter provides that “*persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity*”. These rights correspond

to those mentioned in *The Law on Unrestricted Development of National Minorities and Ethnic Groups of Latvia and the Rights to Cultural Autonomy* that was passed on March 19, 1991. And they can also be found in the 1999 *Law on the State Language*.

In 1999, the *Law on State Language* was adopted, aiming to ensure:

- “1) *the preservation, protection and development of the Latvian language;*
- 2) *the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage of the Latvian nation;*
- 3) *the right to use the Latvian language freely in any sphere of life in the whole territory of Latvia;*
- 4) *the integration of national minorities into Latvian society while respecting their right to use their mother tongue or any other language;*
- 5) *the increase of the influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia by promoting a faster integration of society” (Article 1).*

The Law ensures the integration of members of ethnic minorities into the society of Latvia, while preserving their rights to use their native language or other languages (Art. 1,4). The Law also ensures the maintenance, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as a historic variant of the Latvian language (Art. 3,4), and officially recognizes Livonian as an autochthonous language (Art. 4). All other languages are considered to be “foreign”.

Article 3 of the Law determines:

“(1) *In the Republic of Latvia, the state language shall be the Latvian language.*

(..)

(4) *The state shall ensure the preservation, protection and development of the Latgalian written language as a historically established variety of the Latvian language.”*

According to this Law, any other language used in the Republic of Latvia, except the Livonian language, shall be regarded as a foreign language. “*The state shall ensure the protection, preservation and development of the Livonian language as the language of the indigenous population (autochthons)*”. (Article 3)

Article 18 determines the usage of languages in place-names and other names:

“(1) *In the Republic of Latvia, place-names shall be created and used in the state language.*

(..)

(4) *In the territory of the Livonian Coast, place-names and the names of public institutions, voluntary organisations, enterprises (or companies), as well as the names of events held in this territory, shall also be created and used in the Livonian language.”*

The use of minority languages in the private sphere is not unlimited: state intervention into the private sphere to regulate language use is envisaged to a

degree determined by a lawful interest of the public, e. g. in matters affecting public health, public safety and public order (Art 2, 2).

The *Law on Citizenship* is also among the most important laws in Latvia and an important component of language policy. Latvia and Estonia were the only ones among the USSR successor states which rejected the so-called “zero option” on citizenship (granting citizenship to all permanent residents of the state at the moment of proclaiming the independence). In Lithuania, citizenship was granted to every previous Soviet citizen residing in Lithuania, because post-war immigrants were relatively few in number and rather well-integrated in the Lithuanian society. However, the ethno-demographic situation in Latvia and Estonia did not permit such course of action. The naturalization of all permanent residents was impossible, because the majority of the Russian-speaking population was unwilling to accept the independence of Latvia and Estonia. Admitting them to citizenship before they had reached a satisfactory level of integration into the local society would have been dangerous for national statehood.

In the Latvian *Law on Citizenship* (1994), the citizens of Latvia are defined as persons who had been citizens of Latvia on 17 June, 1940 (the day when Soviet troops entered Latvia) or descendants of such persons. Others could obtain citizenship through a naturalization process. Among the requirements for naturalization is a command of the Latvian language. According to Law on Citizenship, persons are considered to have a command of Latvian language if they: 1) completely understand information on an everyday topic, 2) can carry on a conversation and answer questions on everyday topics, 3) can read freely and understand any texts of everyday nature, laws and other normative acts, 4) can write a composition on a topic from everyday life. There are several exemptions (e. g. disability) from the language examination in Latvia.

The language requirements in the Law on Citizenship of Latvia do not differ from those of many other countries. Language tuition programs were developed already since 1988; about 450,000 people have already acquired the state language proficiency certificate required for professional duties. However, only about 200,000 persons have completed the naturalization procedure and become citizens. There are several reasons for the low speed of naturalization – e. g. the liberal quality of aliens’ legislation in Latvia, and the benefits of alien status (namely, exemption from military service and possibility of travel to Russia without a visa). An inability to fulfill the language requirements is seldom the true reason for a refusal to apply for citizenship. Because of the liberal nature of alien’s legislation in Latvia, there are no political or social mechanisms promoting naturalization. Against the background of the generally low level of civic interest, the disadvantages prevail over the advantages of naturalization.

The most distinctive feature of language situation in Latvia is the great discrepancy between language skills, language attitudes and language use. The actual hierarchy of languages in a multilingual society is better shown by their sociolinguistic functions than by their legal status. At present, there is almost a balanced situation between Latvian and Russian. There are different political

and economic factors in favor of the use of each language. Latvian has the strongest positions in central and municipal governments; it has become the working language of state and local government, and the language of office work. The change of visual images (signs, advertisements, information) has also taken place. The linguistic landscape has shifted from Russian to Latvian.

However, the positions of the Russian language are very strong in private Russian-owned enterprises and in Russian schools, as well as in police, public transport and health care. It is largely due to the psychological resistance of Russian-speakers, who have been removed from a privileged position of political and economic dominance and become a minority, as well as the “minority complex” of Latvians. Thus, the language hierarchy in Latvia is only changing gradually, and it is determined by mutually interdependent objective and subjective factors.

Among the factors encouraging the maintenance of Latvian are:

- 1) sufficient number of Latvian as L1 (first language) speakers and growing number of L2 (second language) speakers,
- 2) use of Latvian in all the sociolinguistic functions, especially in the Parliament, ministries and municipalities, and in all levels of education,
- 3) high quality of Standard Latvian (an elaborate stylistic system and terminology),
- 4) present status of the sole official State language and the existing legal mechanisms for language protection (Law on State Language and regulations for its implementation),
- 5) status of Latvian as one of the official languages of the EU.

The factors that may hinder the maintenance of Latvian linguistic identity are:

- 1) unstable economic situation and political fragmentation in the country,
- 2) decrease of the total population of Latvians due to low birthrates,
- 3) a “minority complex” widespread among Latvians (an inability to actively insist on the use of Latvian);
- 4) higher economical value of the main languages in competition – Russian and English,
- 5) presence of huge Russian language community enjoying linguistic self-sufficiency,
- 6) tendencies of globalisation and linguistic imperialism, integration of Latvia into supra-national structures such as the European Union and NATO,
- 7) implementation of some international minority rights standards which ignore the post-colonial language situation in Latvia and ensure the protection of minority languages, mainly Russian, at the expense of Latvian,
- 8) insufficient financing for research and development of the Latvian language,
- 9) uncertainty about the future of the working and official language regime in the EU institutions.

With the *Social Integration Foundation* which was established in late 1990s to implement the National Program *'The Integration of Society in Latvia'*, the Latvian government tries to create circumstances that might, on the one hand, help people to maintain their language and, on the other hand, urge them to learn Latvian which they need for economic advancement. The integration program provides ~ 1 million dollars per year for ethnic minorities.

Since the re-establishment of state independence, the Latvian language is ready to fulfil any new functions, despite the marked decrease in financial support for its research and standardisation. A Latvian Language Expert Commission, dealing with issues of language standardisation, has been established under the auspices of the State Language Centre. Alongside the Terminology Commission, a Centre for Translation and Terminology has also been founded. (More than 1000 EU documents have already been translated into Latvian, and the linguistic quality of Latvian corresponds to the average level of most of the European languages.) In January 2002, the Commission of the State Language was established under the auspices of the President of the State, V. Vīķe-Freiberga. The task of this Commission is to work out a strategic program for the Latvian language development in the nearest decade. This program aims to cover all sectors of language policy and, if sufficiently funded, it will guarantee the protection of the Latvian language and shape a new, European approach to the language issue.

Let us stress once more that the nations living in the Baltics attach an extremely high symbolic value to their language, and the decline of the language use during the Soviet period was traumatic to their national self-confidence. The Baltic people therefore wanted to restore the lost functions of their languages as soon as possible, and were disappointed by the slow implementation of the adopted Language Laws. There is certain bitterness in the Latvian attitude towards their Russian neighbours but, as some respondents in a research carried out by I. Boldāne have replied, they do not seek a revenge, but simply wish to avoid hearing and using the Russian language (2008, 59).

In the Russian-speaking public, some deeply rooted stereotypical views about the superiority of Russian as the language of internationalism still prevail; another problem is the lack of multilingual traditions in Russia, as well as the legacy of an imperial way of thinking. Soviet ideology which influenced the political outlook of many Russian-speakers, continues to be an important factor in the tensions which persist after the regaining of independence (Karklins, 1994). Not only the local nations, but also the Russians residing in the Baltic states have developed a strong emotional link between language and nationality. As pointed out by I. Apine and V. Volkovs (2007), most Russian respondents in a sociolinguistic study replied that the Russian language is the main component of the collective Russian identity, while religion, due to the "multi-denominationality" of Russian community, is not (2007, 177). Indeed, besides members of the Russian Orthodox church there is also a number of Russophone Baptists, members of Charismatic churches, Judaists, Muslims, atheists, etc. in Latvia. The Christian part of Latvian and Russian communities (even though belonging to different Christian denominations) sometimes even

finds their religious identity as a factor contributing to reconciliation and mutual understanding between Latvians and Russians, while language may still be a cause of controversy (D. Strelēvica, 2006a). (E. g., the 2004 Education reform which aimed to increase the use of Latvian in Russian-speaking schools, caused a lot of protests and heated rhetoric. But now this issue is no longer current and the implementation of the reform is gradually reaching its goal.)

3. Regional identity among other identities in Latvia

3.1 Terminology and definitions

Neither scientists nor practitioners have managed to come up with a universally acceptable formulation of the terms 'region' and 'regional'. However, regionalists and economists usually use the word 'region' to denote a specific territory which can be of any size but has specific and universally common characteristics. In the Council of Europe and the European Union, the terms 'regional self-governments' and 'local self-governments' are widely used – the latter referring to first-level (lower) local governments (cities and rural municipalities), while the former is used to describe second-level (counties, shires, regions) and third-level self-governments. In Latvia, both in terms of regional theory and practice, the term 'region' may be defined as follows: "*Region is a part of the country's territory (a parish, a city, a group of parishes, a group of parishes and cities, a district, a group of districts and cities, a group of districts) which has common specific characteristics or problems.*" (I. Vaidere, E. Vanags, 1997)

When dividing a country into regions, one can use both normative and analytic criteria. Normative regions are specified on the basis of a political approach. Their boundaries are usually specified according to the tasks which are assigned to regional and local self-governments, as well as the number of residents that are needed in each region in order to carry out these tasks effectively and economically. Sometimes historical, cultural and other factors also come into play, especially when there is a need to maintain the specificity and autonomy of a regional or local self-government. Analytical (functional) regions, however, have specific advantages in terms of economic analysis. They are particularly appropriate if the purpose is to determine various types of problematic regions. Regions can also be classified according to typical areas of activity, levels of socio-economic development, etc.

If we have to define the term 'regional policy', it is worthwhile noting that "*regional policy refers to a series of political steps that are taken with the aim of affecting sectors of the economy and/or regional structures. Regional policy is purposeful activity by a government or by international organizations, involving specially determined instruments which are used to reduce territorial economic differences among various territorial units. The establishment of regional policies means that a country must develop basic principles, directions and priority goals which are differentiated by region, but which all correspond to the country's general direction of development.*" (I. Vaidere, E. Vanags, 1997). In Latvia,

the establishment of regional policies is a very urgent issue. Regions of Latvia differ from one another in their economic priorities, national and social structure of population, and historical traditions. The preconditions for the forming of regional differences are: 1) the diversity of ethnic historical origin of inhabitants (the different ancient Baltic tribes, as well as the Finno-Ugric ethnos of Livonians), 2) historical events and conditions, 3) development of regional economy, 4) migration processes.

A disproportionately large amount of residents, production, social infrastructure and scientific potential is concentrated in the Riga district, which is a good example of an overheated region. One-third of the entire population of Latvia lives in the city of Riga alone. Riga accounts for more than half of the country's industrial output. Educational and cultural institutions are also heavily concentrated in Riga. There are also important regional differences elsewhere in Latvia, too. Per capita residential income tax receipts (the residential income tax is the main source of income for Latvia's local governments) vary significantly. Some local governments preside over territories where there is no unemployment at all, while others have high unemployment rates. Without a purposeful involvement of the state and local governments in this process, the regional differences will certainly not be mitigated.

The basic goals of regional development in Latvia are to improve the quality of life in Latvia and to reduce differences among the regions, exploiting fully the potential of each territory. A harmonious interaction of the state and its regions should be ensured, as well as favorable conditions for integrating Latvia within the EU and its regional development processes. And, like education, new technologies, etc., language skills (knowledge of the standard language, the state language, and foreign languages) are becoming more and more important in developing one's social, economic and cultural potential. In the same time, it is also important to maintain the linguistic identity of residents, preserving their language and culture (M. Djačkova, 2002).

3.2 Dialects as the main indicators of regional linguistic identity

As a result of the medieval feudal system under the German landlords' rule (which limited the mobility of peasants from region to region), there are now about 500 sub-dialects or vernaculars of Latvian. But basically the Latvian language is divided into three main dialects:

- 1) the Central dialect (*vidus dialekts*) which became the basis of Standard Latvian since the 17th century; spoken in parts of Vidzeme, Zemgale and Southern Kurzeme. For many people, as a recent research proved, the notions of 'Standard Latvian' and 'the Central dialect of Latvian' are almost identical (D. Strelēvica-Ošiņa, 2007b);
- 2) the High Latvian (*augšzemnieku*) or Latgalian (*latgaļu*) language variety, spoken in Latgale. It forms the basis for the so-called Latgalian written language which is the core of regional Latgalian linguistic identity. Since the renewal of the independence of Latvia, there have been many

heated debates in the society on whether Latgalian is a dialect of Latvian or a separate language;

- 3) the Livonian dialect (*lībiskais dialects*) which arose in the Latvian–Livonian contact when Livonians became gradually assimilated by Latvians. For the purpose of the research within a larger international project, a more explicit English equivalent *Livonianized dialect* was introduced, to avoid ambiguity, because the Livonian language of the Finno–Ugric family is denoted by the same English linguonym (D. Strelēvica–Ošiņa, 2007b and forthcoming). Even in Latvian, where the terms *lībiešu valoda* and *lībiskais dialekts* are not completely identic, non-experts sometimes confuse these two concepts. The Kurzeme–based sub-dialects of the Livonianized dialect are traditionally sometimes also called Tamian sub-dialects (*tāmnieku izloksnes*) (M. Rudzīte [1964] 2005), and popularly also *ventiņu mēle* ('Ventian tongue'). *Ventiņi* are the speakers of one particular sub-dialect near the city of Ventspils in Kurzeme, but in popular, non-scientific use, this term is sometimes extended to denote all the Livonianized sub-dialects and their speakers in Kurzeme (D. Strelēvica–Ošiņa, forthcoming).

It may be mentioned that there are harsh discussions around the status of the regional variants in the other Baltic States, too. *Võru/Võru–Setu* in Southern Estonia, Latgalian in Eastern Latvia and Samiogtian (*Žemaičiu*) in North Western Lithuania, are all held to be 'in-between dialect and language'. In Estonia, the Bureau for Lesser used Languages has been newly established, and *Võru/Võru–Setu* are members. In Lithuania, most linguists tend to classify *Žemaičiu* and *Aukštaičiu* as dialects, while some insist on using the term 'regional language' for them.

In Latvia, the regional dialects (except the Latgalian written language; more on this later) are not protected by legislature, but they enjoy a generations-long serious attention from linguists. Obviously as a result of the strong influence of the German philological thought in the 19th century, dialectology has always been a highly developed branch of Latvian linguistics, with an emphasis on the lexical and etymological aspect. The public attitudes towards the dialects range from respect and affection (regarding dialects as cultural treasure and symbol of one's regional origin) to a view that dialect sounds funny in contrast with standard language. Especially the Livonianized dialect of Latvian traditionally appears in print almost only in humorous contexts (D. Strelēvica–Ošiņa, 2007b and forthcoming).

3.3 The Latgalian question: emotions and evidence

Since 1629 when the Swedish–Polish war ended, the eastern region of Latvia, today called Latgale, has been for several centuries under a different administrative rule than the rest of Latvia – first Polish/Lithuanian, then Russian. This, coupled with the fact that the majority of Latgalians were Roman

Catholics, while central and western Latvia is mostly Protestant (mainly Lutheran, also Baptist), led to a distinct linguistic and cultural identity of Latgale. The first book in Latgalian, *Evangelia toto anno* (The Evangelical Year), was published in 1753. Very traumatic to the region's intellectual development was the ban to use the Latin alphabet between 1861 and 1904. By the forced use of the Cyrillic alphabet, the Russian administration hoped to convert the Latgalians to the Russian Orthodox church. Publishing books in the Latgalian language, as well as in Lithuanian, was forbidden from 1865 to 1904. During the ban, only a limited number of smuggled Catholic religious texts and some hand-written literature was available.

However, the attempts of Russian government to separate Latgale from the rest of Latvia and to eradicate its writing tradition were not successful. Despite the intensive russification and the threat of polonization, Latgalians managed to preserve their distinctive features. H. Soms and A. Ivanovs explain this by the social homogeneity of Latgalians and by their specific culture, an amalgamation of Catholicism with ancient traditions (2002, 19). After the print ban was cancelled in 1904, there was a fast rebirth of the Latgalian literary tradition; the first Latgalian newspapers, textbooks and grammars appeared. In 1918, Latgale became part of the newly created Latvian state. From 1920 to 1934, the two literary traditions in Latvia (Standard Latvian and Latgalian) developed parallelly. Latgalian was used in local governments and education as well. During the Soviet occupation of Latvia (1940–1991), Latgalian survived as a spoken language, while no printed literature in Latgalian appeared in Latvia between 1959 and 1989. (Some Latgalian intellectuals in emigration continued to publish in Latgalian.)

Since the restoration of independence of Latvia, the interest in the Latgalian language and cultural heritage has increased noticeably. It is taught as an optional subject in some schools and Rēzekne and Daugavpils universities; the “*Latgales kultūras centra izdevniecība*” (Latgale Culture Centre Publishers) publishes both old and new books in Latgalian. This language variant is protected by the *Law on State Language* stating that “The Latvian State ensures the preservation, protection and development of the Latgalian literary language as a historical variant of the Latvian language” (§3.4). There is a state-supported orthography commission of the Latgalian written language. Latgalian is now spoken by about 150,000 people, mainly in Latvia; there are some compact, 19th century emigrant-based Latgalian-speaking communities in Russia, Syberia, as well. However, as A. Stafecka notes, “*in the present situation it is difficult to foresee the development of Latgalian literary language. Even today Latgale is much weaker in comparison with other regions of Latvia. Young people are intensively moving away from Latgale, and very often Latgalian identity seems a disturbing element which they want to get rid of. [The sound articulation base of Latgalian] hinders the acquisition of correct Standard Latvian without special training [...]. However, the Latgalian language for the majority of Latvians of Latgale is the means of expression of their identity [...]. It has to*

be admitted that the Latgalian written language has had and still has an important role in the maintenance of *Latvian* identity in the Latgale region” (A. Stafecka, 2006: 448; our emphasis – I. D., D. S.–O.). It is important to remember that “*Latgalian identity and ethnic mentality is one facet of the Latvian identity*” (I. Apine, 2002: 30). However, since non-Latvians, mostly Russians, make up as much as 60% of the population in Latgale (and even more in its cities), the Russian influences can be felt strongly on the Latgalian language, and also on the language attitudes of the Latgalian society towards Standard Latvian.

There is a lot of emotional debate about the possible status of Latgalian as the third living Baltic language (although few professional linguists support this view); about the alleged discrimination of Latgalians (J. Cibulš, 2004), and about the supposed Latvian hegemony over the Latgalians. As pointedly remarked by A. Blinkena, some forces that are hostile to Latvian as state language sometimes make use of the Latgalian issue in order to challenge the idea of Latvian national integrity (A. Blinkena, 2006, 98). Indeed, the recognition of Latgalian as a separate language and thus of Latgalians as a separate ethnic group may be politically dangerous, as it would reduce the number of nominal Latvians and thus give a wrong signal to the Russian community, a large part of which is still decidedly disloyal to the independent state of Latvia. It may well be that the number of people recognizing themselves as Russians would then turn out to be definitely no more a minority in Latvia, with imaginable socio-political consequences... In any case, Latvians are too small a community and in too complicated a political situation to experiment with division into smaller ethnic units.

(The Livonian situation, i. e. the preservation of the Finno-Ugric language of Livonians, deserves more attention today since this language is on the verge of extinction, unlike Latgalian.)

3.4 Livonian and Livonianized identity

The first settlers in the territory of Latvia, as noted before, were the Finno-Ugric-speaking ancestors of the present-day Livonians. As they were gradually pushed out of their territories by the oncoming Baltic ethnoses, they concentrated in the northern parts of Latvia’s present-day regions of Kurzeme and Vidzeme, as well as in the territory which is now the city of Riga.

The assimilation and integration of Livonians into what became the Latvian nation was also promoted by the German feudal rule, and later, even more intensely, during the Soviet occupation, when it was forbidden to write the nationality “Livonian” in passports, etc. Due to various historical and geographical factors, the Livonians of Vidzeme ceased to speak Livonian by the end of the 19th century, while the Livonians of northernmost Kurzeme, in a strip of sea-shore on the tip of Kurzeme peninsula that later became known by the name of Livonian Coast (*Lībiešu krasts*, *Līvōd rānda*), managed to retain their

ethnic, cultural and to a certain extent linguistic identity almost into the 21st century. The first Livonian national awakening was inspired by Finnish scholars in the 19th century, and only in 1863 the first printed Livonian texts appeared.

Today Livonian is the smallest ethnic and linguistic minority in Latvia and probably even in the whole EU. But, although the speakers of Livonian as first language are today very few (in fact, most of them passed away during the last few years), there is an ever growing number of people, aware of their Livonian descent and/or interested in the Livonian issues, who have learned the language (in different levels of proficiency) and are participating in Livonian cultural events in Livonian Coast and in Riga. A number of linguists in Latvia – J. Endzelīns, K. Milenbahs, M. Rudzīte, T. Karma, K. Boiko, Ē. Krautmane, etc. – have analyzed the mutual influences of Latvian and Livonian. Scholars of Livonian origin, such as V. Ernštreits, K. Boiko, Z. Sīle and others, have compiled Livonian textbooks and dictionaries and are, in a way, standardising and revitalising the Livonian language. An important role is played by numerous Livonian–singing folk groups in Riga and Kurzeme.

The Livonianized dialect of Latvian has specific features, distinct from the other Latvian dialects. It is a kind of a contact vernacular where certain elements of creolization may be observed – overgeneralizations, simplification of grammatical structures, reduction of flecional endings, etc. According to M. Rudzīte, this dialect arose when the assimilated Livonians started speaking Latvian ([1969] 2005). This dialect is spoken on the coast of Riga Gulf in Vidzeme (some elements of this dialect appear in the speech of local inhabitants of the sea-oriented suburbs of Riga and adjacent villages as well), and most distinctly in Northern Kurzeme. This area, just like the Livonian media (newspaper “*Līvli*” and an annual text series) is trilingual in a way – using Standard Latvian, the Livonianized dialect of Latvian, and occasionally Livonian.

Kurzeme on the whole has developed a rather compact sense of local identity, due to specific geographical and historical factors. It is a sea-embraced peninsula, and, together with Zemgale, it was a separate (though German-ruled) state called the Duchy of Courland for about two centuries during the Middle Ages – while the other regions, Vidzeme and Latgale, until 1918 had only been provinces of larger states (Swedish, Polish, Russian). And, Livonian and the Livonianized dialect have always been essential elements in the mosaic of Kurzeme. While, on the one hand, the Livonians of different areas of Latvia are building their identity on a national, supra-regional level, the Livonian Coast in Kurzeme is perceived today by many as the symbolic centre of Livonian activities, and a place where one can vividly experience one’s Livonian ethnic identity. (D. Strelēvica, 2001, D. Strelēvica-Ošiņa, 2007b, 2007c and forthcoming).

4. Conclusions

The Baltic States and Latvia in particular are now among those regions of Europe where the most active sociolinguistic processes are taking place. Two intertwining processes can be observed now – the integration of the society within Latvia (the linguistic integration of allochthonous minorities on the basis of the Latvian language skills), and integration of Latvia itself into the European Union (which involves individual plurilingualism).

Protection of *identity* (national, regional or local) is one of the main principles that Latvian language policy and regional development policy are based on. The regional development policy, in its turn, must facilitate the reduction of unfavorable differences among Latvia's regions, while simultaneously maintaining and developing the specific characteristics of each region's natural resources and cultural environment, including language landscape.

The language planning strategy in Latvia proceeds from the following principles – the official state language is both the symbol of the state and an instrument for integration of society. The acquisition and use of the minority languages and regional variants in Latvia should nevertheless be supported.

On general, the society of Latvia is very language-centered, and this implies a wide range of diverse and interacting language attitudes and social and psychological processes at work.

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Neki aspekti sociolingvističke situacije u Latviji: uzroci i učinci

Članak donosi uvid u sadašnju sociolingvističku situaciju u Latviji, počevši od pregleda pravnih akata vezanih uz jezik do pojedinih aspekata kontakta odnosno konflikta u interakciji između različitih jezika i jezičnih varijanata. Prilog pruža kratak kronološki prikaz povijesti latvijskoga jezika i latvijske jezične situacije, naglašavajući ponajprije bitne događaje i elemente koji su postupno oblikovali jezične stavove i sociolingvističku klimu u današnjoj Latviji.

Key words: sociolinguistics, history of language, language policy, Latvian

Ključne riječi: sociolingvistika, povijest jezika, jezična politika, latvijski jezik