

TREND REPORT

VLADISLAV VOLKOV
Daugavpils University (Latvia)

The Evolution of the Concept of “Ethnic Minority” in Latvian Sociology in the Period 1991–2009

Abstract: The article reveals the evolution of the concept of “ethnic minority” in Latvian sociology. Sociologists’ research carried out in the first half of the 1990s showed the impossibility of applying the concept of “ethnic minority” to all ethnic groups in Latvia. During the 2000s, multicultural ideas of Latvian sociologists about a multi-ethnic Latvian society are taking on more special significance. The concept of “ethnic minority” also is important for the clarification of a concrete issue: in what way is the Russian ethnic group, as the largest ethnic minority, “built in” to the civil community and the Latvian national state.

Keywords: ethnic minority; ethno-sociological research; ethnic stratification; ethnic self-identity; interethnic dialogue; collective identity.

The Interdisciplinary Character of the Concept of “Ethnic Minority” in Latvian Social Knowledge

The concept of “ethnic minority” (diversity—“national minority”) belongs to a group of scientific terms, without which, Latvian sociology in the period of the restored national state system since 1991 is impossible to imagine. This interest of Latvian sociologists is explained by the ethno-political reality: Latvia historically, and especially in the second half of the 20th century and in the beginning of the present century, comes forward as an ethnically diverse society. In 2009, out of the 2.261 million individuals who constituted the population of Latvia, ethnic Latvians comprised 59.3% of the country’s population, and Russians comprised 27.5% while other ethnic groups (the Belarusians, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, the Poles, the Jews and others) made up 12.5% (Centrālās statistikas 2009).

Latvian sociology borrows the concept of “ethnic minority” from the works of the representatives of Western ethno-sociological ideas. The given concept characterizes ethnic groups which permanently live on the territory of a definite country and state, but are different from the ethnic majority of the population. At the same time, in Western sociology, the usage of the concept of “ethnic minority” has two main meanings.

On the one hand, sociologists underline the differences between the ethnic majority of the country’s population and the ethnic minorities as being primarily differences in origin, culture, historical development, language, religion and behaviour. In this

case, the concept of “ethnic minority” is often replaced by the concept of “ethnic group.”¹

On the other hand, Western sociology highlights numerous facts of unequal distribution of the social capital between ethnic majority and ethnic minorities in modern (and post-modern) societies. Ethnic groups as well as social classes form a complicated system of social stratification and social inequality (Smelser 1994: 304–327). That is why insight into the social essence of ethnic minorities resulting from oppression or stigmatization which is based on “racial, ethnic, biological or other characteristics” (Minority group 2005: 415) is relevant as well.

The analysis of the works of Latvian scientists demonstrates that the sociological interpretation of the concept of “ethnic minority” was carried out under the strong influence of four humanitarian disciplines which carefully study and interpret Latvian ethnic variety. They include sociolinguistics, politology, demography and jurisprudence/the study of law.

Moreover, it is correct to assert that the interpretation of the concept of “ethnic minority” by these disciplines was often integrated into the sociological discourse.

The works of Latvian sociolinguists greatly influenced the formation of the sociological interpretation of the concept of “ethnic minority.” It was sociolinguistics which offered the first scientific definition of this concept in Latvian humanities in the beginning of the 1990s. According to a sociolinguistic definition, an ethnic minority is, “a social group which, in the definite period, occupies a subordinate position in social life” (Druviete 1998: 47).

This insight into the ethnic minority concept is connected with the fact that sociolinguistics adheres to the subordination principle of the social functions of the state language and the languages of ethnic minorities on Latvian territory under the conditions of a national state revival. This subordination principle suggests that the state language and the ethnic minority languages perform different social functions in national, social and private lives. If the Latvian language possesses all the social functions on Latvian territory, the ethnic minorities’ languages can be used only as a part of the social and private life of people and where there is such a necessity within the ethnic minorities. In fact, the idea of the subordination of languages’ social functions worked out in sociolinguistics serves as an explanatory metaphor for the sociological understanding of a social essence of ethnic minorities too. In illustrating this approach, it is possible to refer to the evaluation of opportunities for non-Latvians to use their language in Latvian national and social life: “other nationalities [whose] representatives permanently live on the territory of Latvia, but whose national languages thoroughly function in their historical motherland, have neither legal, nor constitutional, nor moral rights to claim any privileges on the territory of Latvia” (Skujiņa 1992, p. 23).

¹ Thus, the Oxford edition of, *A Dictionary of Sociology* (2005), interprets an ethnic group as “a group of people which characterizes itself or is characterized by others as sharing common peculiarities which make this group different from other ethnic groups and are revealed in the behaviour of the given group” (Ethnic group 2005: 197). As it is evident from this definition that cultural and other characteristics of ethnic minorities (ethnic groups) are different in comparison with the culture of the ethnic majority; they are nevertheless no less valuable.

Politology formed the most widely-spread and developed comprehension discourse of the concept of "ethnic minority." It is characterized by scientific generalizations, establishing relations of the concept of "ethnic minority" with such fundamental concepts as the "Latvian nation," "Latvian national state," "multicultural society," "democracy," "human rights," "minority rights," "society integration" etc. On the whole, politological discourse specified a systematic approach to the analysis of Latvian ethnic minorities in the structure of the Latvian nation within the national democratic state. Ethnic minorities are viewed as an inseparable/organic part of the Latvian people restoring a democratic modern state (Apine, Vēbers 1992: 1). Definitions of the concept of "ethnic minority" are similar to those accepted in Latvian sociolinguistics. However, in these definitions, researchers emphasize to a lesser degree the feature of inequality and subordinate social position in comparison with the nation. A feature of cultural differences between the ethnic minority and the nation is clearly marked. An ethnic minority, "is a social group which differs from the ethnic majority by its origin or other peculiarities" (Dribins 2004: 11).

In the framework of jurisprudence, to the extent which cannot be seen in any other scientific disciplines dealing with the problem of ethnic minorities in Latvia, the liberal approach to the rights of representatives of the given groups of population is carried out the most systematically. Lawyers consider that the ethnic minorities' rights are a reflection of individual human rights, thus they indirectly are against any claims of multiculturalism adherents to add a "recognition policy" to a liberal ethno-policy (Mazākumgrupu (minoritāšu) integrācijas aspekti 2001: 33).

Latvian demographical science uses the concept of an "ethnic group" without making any distinctions in the legal status of its representatives. By that, in the framework of this approach the differences between the concepts of "ethnic minority" and "ethnic group" are not observed. For this science, it is important to analyze ethnic (group) differences in the demographic behaviour of the Latvians and the non-Latvians (Zariņa 1993: 14–15), and the influence of the non-Latvians' migration/emigration on the situation in the labour market (Eglīte 1994: 6). For demography, it turns out to be crucial to show quantitative sizes and an ethnic group ratio within the population structure, which would better enable us to explain such peculiarities of large ethnic groups, such as their ability to assimilate small ethnic groups. To this effect demographers speak about "two numerically large nationalities which intensively assimilate minorities" in Latvia. That is why, taking demographics into consideration, you can find another, different, structuring of ethnic areas from that of politology and history, namely the two numerically large nationalities (the Latvians and the Russians) and a great number of small nationalities (the Belarusians, the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Lithuanians, etc.) (Ezera, Zvidriņš 1994: p. 32–34).

The Sociological Interpretation of the Concept of "Ethnic Minority"

With reference to the situation in the Latvian Republic, the concept of "ethnic minority" is connected with the concept of a "Latvian nation." The absolute ma-

jority of publications explain this connection based on liberal ideas about a modern nation as “a civil unity” which forms and in its turn is actively formed by the democratic national state. That is why a civil nation of a modern society stands opposed to the “ethnic [and] cultural unity” which is typical for traditional societies (Levits 1998: 79). There are two factors which influence the propagation of such ideas:

1. Historically Latvia has been a multiethnic society and will remain so for the foreseeable future; but at the same time the Latvian national democratic state is considered to be the only possible form of political structure.
2. Liberalism is a dominant intellectual trend in the European Union; and Latvia, as a member state, feels its strong impact on modern social research.

Liberal tradition views a nation primarily as a civil unity of people for whom common civil values are more important than their religious, ethnic or social identity/affiliation. It is this civil unity, which serves as a basis for a national democratic state (Dribins 1995: 39, Pabriks 1998: 104–105, Vēbers 1997: 8). This is why an ethnic minority also comes forward as an ethnic group within the modern civil nation which considers common civil identity as basic, but “its” ethno-cultural identity—as an additional aspect to common civil identity.

The historic, political and ethno-demographic context within which the Latvian nation was being restored influenced significantly the assertion of the concept of “ethnic minority” in Latvian sociology in the period 1991–2009. The complexity of this process is determined by the fact that following the incorporation of Latvia into the USSR and the mass migration of representatives of primarily Eastern Slavic people (the Russians, the Belarusians and the Ukrainians), a large Russian community was formed and some representatives of this community claimed their political recognition along with the Latvians, which meant the legitimization of a generalized split into two communities in Latvia (Birkavs 1994: 5, Dribins 1998: 7). At the same time the majority of the Latvian Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Estonians, and Gypsies see themselves simply as the country’s ethnic minorities. Within this context, the basic notion in the concept of “ethnic minority” is the concept of “ethnicity,” which is revealed in people’s perception of their own “ethnic identity” (Dribins 1998:7, Иванов [Ivanov] 1993: 44–45). Ethnic identity is opposed to, firstly, the mentality of the representatives of the “Russian-speaking group,” secondly, “the Russians” who, according to the scientists, have a tendency to identify with the “Russian Empire.” That is why the very concept of “ethnic minority,” which applies to “numerically small ethnic group with an expressed identity, for example, the Poles etc” (Zepa 1992: 26, Laķis 2000: 387), is not opposed to the concept of a “Latvian nation.”

The analysis of works of Latvian sociologists and other scientific disciplines which study the country’s ethnic minorities suggests the following trends in the analysis of ethnic minorities in Latvia will appear:

- the most optimal model of the Latvian nation is a variant of “the Latvians + ethnic minorities;” thereby revealing the negative attitude toward the addition of a self-sufficient Russian-speaking community to this model;

— gradually, the importance of borderlines between ethnic groups in Latvia (similar to borderlines between social groups) in social behaviour models and social communication will be recognized.

In the sociology of the 1990s, there was some research in which the concepts of "ethnic minority" and "ethnic group" were clearly delimited methodologically. Considering the differences between these concepts was important in order to show the different degree of loyalty of the non-Latvians towards the Latvian state. B. Zepa points out that an individual or group's Latvian citizenship status positively influences the degree of the non-Latvians' civil awareness development and increases the level of their political loyalty (Zepa 1995: 43.lpp.).

Sociologists' research carried out in the first half of the 1990s showed the impossibility of applying the concept of "ethnic minority" to all ethnic groups in Latvia. First of all it referred to the Russian (Russian-speaking) population of the country. Consequently, the perception of a contradiction between the chosen normative study model for the multiethnic Latvian society and reality, which was impossible to describe by means of the Latvian nation model of "Latvians + ethnic minorities," was typical of sociological and general social research. Thus, for example, in Vilcins's research it is shown that the Russians (and the Russian-speaking population) praise the prestige of such professions as a shop assistant, waiter, or lorry driver than do ethnic Latvians. The author of the research explains it by, that is to say, a certain fixation in the mind of the Russian ethnic group "a migrant's life perception and psychology" (Vilciņš 1992: 37). R. Rungule in the study entitled, "The attitude of the minority people of Olaine toward the lifestyles in their town" (public opinion poll data of 1991) shows that the non-Latvians (the Russians, the Belarusians, the Ukrainians, the Poles etc.) have an immigrant attitude toward their area of residence. They find important values such as: home maintenance, their indebtedness and their employment but not the ecological situation of their place of residence (Rungule 1992: 28).

At the same time there is an example of an ethnic Russian group differentiation. Thus the research by D. Fišmeistere carried out in 1992 entitled, "Adaptation of immigrants in Latvia," shows the differences in the psychological adaptation to Latvia of "migrants" on the one hand, and members of Russian national-cultural societies on the other (Fišmeistere 1993: 1–5). It is clear that the chosen division of respondents does not fully correspond to a strict analytical differentiation of the concepts of "ethnic group" and of "ethnic minority." But at the same time it is evident that Latvian sociologists already in the beginning of the 1990s tried to use concepts which were similar in their content to the concept of "ethnic minority."

In sociology, the description of the characteristics of respondents as being foreign is often used, which includes the representatives of all non-Latvian ethnic groups in Latvia. The citizens of Latvia and therefore representatives of ethnic minorities and non-citizens do not fall under the strict definition of "ethnic minority." Thus, B. Zepa's research, "Social thought during the transitional period in Latvia: the dynamics of the views of the Latvians and representatives of other nationalities (1989–1992)," demonstrates that the substantially different views on the established state status and state institutions of the Latvian Republic as well as on the economic reforms

are connected with the differentiation between the Latvians and members of other nationalities in the society (Zepa 1992: 22). Sociologists also pointed out the different roles in the restoration of Latvian independence played by Latvians and non-Latvians (Zepa, Kārklīņa 1995: 177–179).

In the field of sociology at the beginning of the 1990s, there were some works in which one could sense a very evident distance from the concept of “ethnic minority,” which led to an attempt to consider Latvian society as a unity of two ethnic communities—Latvian and Russian. Thus, the research by Gundars.J. Ķeniņš (Kings), Dž. Teds Bārnovs, and S. Baņkovska entitled “Personal values of the Russian speaking executives in Latvia” (1992), shows that in Latvian entrepreneurship culture there exist autonomously both the values of the Latvians and the values of the Russian ethnic group. Moreover, the authors of the research considered the formation of Latvian entrepreneurship culture to be based upon common values and that cooperation between company managers, both Latvian and Russian (Russian-speaking) is very important: “It is important that the policy makers, within the acceptable limits, take into account the values of both the Russian speaking layer of population as well as the Latvians and other people” (Ķeniņš (Kings) u.c. 1995: 15). Actually, this research realized the idea of Latvian society as a multi-community, multicultural formation.

In the 2000s some changes in the interpretation of the concept of “ethnic minority” occurred. During that time, an idea which appeared more often was that the affiliation of non-Latvians with ethnic minorities in and of itself did not guarantee the unity of the Latvian nation. Therefore, the state programme which sought to integrate Latvian society put an emphasis exactly on integration as a way of connecting ethnic Latvians and all non-Latvians, both Latvian citizens and non-citizens. If in the 1990s many considered the threat to the integrity of the Latvian nation in the form of a bi-community state came from the Russian-speaking community (whose representatives are not Latvian citizens), in the 2000s this reason was realized as seen in the existence of a self-sufficient Russian-speaking sphere (informational, value) (Kruks, Šulmane 2002: 7, Tabuns 2006: 56, Vasariņa 2007: 324). It is clear that the self-sufficiency of the Russian-speaking sphere in the social life of Latvia is reproduced not only by non-citizens but by Latvian citizens as well. Sociologists note the fact of ethnic mobilization among non-Latvians, both citizens and non-citizens (Šņitņikovs 2007: 10). Apparently in this case the concepts of “ethnic minority” and “ethnic group” can be used as synonyms. This is why the methodological meaning of the concept of “ethnic minority” was being relatively diminished—in order to emphasize the idea of a nation and national state integrity.

It seems possible to mention different pieces of sociological research during the 2000s in which the problems of Latvian societal integration in fact led to a complete identification of the concepts of “ethnic group” and of “ethnic minority.” Thus, Inese Šūpule (2007:36) writes about the importance of keeping the ethnic culture for the research respondents. The Latvians as well as the Russians act as the respondents regardless of whether they are Latvian citizens or non-citizens. In the research entitled, “Cultures. Young People. Media,” the target audience is the visitors of the many

Russian-speaking Internet portals, namely "Non-ethnic Latvians whose first language is not Latvian" (Tabuns 2006: 4).

For Latvian sociologists who analyse social position and the role of ethnic groups and minorities in the society, the first decade of the 20th century was a time for the approbation of new ideas connected with the deeper analysis of the real variety of Latvian ethnic life. For instance, in the analysis of the position of the Russian ethnic minority, the concept of a large language community which forms its own ethno-political discourse, in addition to that of the Latvian language community, is becoming more frequently recognised (Kļave 2007:19). "Ethnic minority" status itself does not guarantee the preservation of the ethnic culture and identity. Nils Muižnieks and Aivars Tabuns (2007: 51–52) believe that it is necessary to observe the social position of ethnic minorities by means of a concept such as "the ethnic equal guarantee." Within this context, the scientists find it important "to reconsider the concept of ethnic culture along with the traditional concept of culture including some modern means of expression as well as the principle of cultural interaction."

Under the circumstances of a relative re-evaluation of the concept of "ethnic minority" in order to show the integration prospect of the Latvian nation, sociologists more often appeal to a wider context of ethnicity analysis—to the ideological analysis of the state ethno-policy and to ideological foundations which exist in the social conscience. The most frequently used ideologies are liberalism, multiculturalism, and nationalism (Zepa 2007: 44; Vasariņa 2007: 326). Sociologists pay attention to the specific character of Eastern Europe for which there is a typical formation of democratic nations on both the basis of the state and civil society and on the ethnicity (Šņitņikovs 2007: 11–17).

Some sociologists in Latvia are interested in the specific problems of the country's ethnic minorities. One has to admit that they are mainly scientists who belong to some ethnic minority themselves. This problem concerns a large portion of the non-citizens of the Republic of Latvia. On January 1, 2009 there were 357,8 thousand non-citizens living in Latvia making up 15,8% of the total population. Most of them were representatives of some ethnic minority of Latvia. In 2009 Victors Makarov and Aleksejs Dimitrov carried out a study called, "Non-citizens in Latvia and the Right to Vote: Decisions and Compromises," in which they discussed the possibility of granting non-citizens the rights to vote in municipal elections.

In the second half of the first decade of the 21st century it was important for some researchers to draw a precise picture characterizing the groups of respondents. Such terms as "Latvians" and "others" characterizing the respondents can be found in the research piece entitled, "Migration. Its Influence on the Inter-ethnic Relations in Latvia," carried out in 2007/2008. Such tendencies to simplify the picture of the multiethnic society in Latvia are characteristic of some researchers studying the possible consequences of foreign workforce migration. Foreign guest-workers could change the interethnic proportions in Latvia and, increasing the proportion of non-Latvians, decrease the feelings of Latvian identity in Latvians (Migrācijas ietekme 2007/2008).

Some Latvian researchers paid attention to schematic features of such simplifications. Maria Golubeva and Ivars Ijabs in their study (2009) have criticized the position

taken by a great number of representatives of political consciousness which single out only the interests and values of “Latvians” and “others” from the complicated character of ethnic variety in Latvia. When reacting to the schematic character of some scientific approaches, both Golubeva and Ijabs in their research have put the terms, “Latvians” and “others” into inverted commas.

Such schematic character can disappear if the dynamics of interests and behaviour of ethnic minorities is viewed as evidence of civil society itself becoming more complicated. First of all, an analysis of the status of the Russian language as the language of the largest ethnic minority in Latvia is taken into account. According to Latvian legislation, national minorities have the right to use their mother tongue in their everyday life. At the same time, the special status of the Russian language in the social life of Latvia is not stipulated; nevertheless, the real share of the Russian language functions in the social life of Latvia is quite impressive. Golubeva and Ijabs in their research have not found the Russian language to be a threat to the Latvian language, but simply a means of communication for the Russian minority. In such a role, the usage of the language helps to promote democratic values and to increase possibilities of political participation. The authors of the research have pointed out that some active members of Latvian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have shown an interest in cooperation with NGOs whose primary language of communication is Russian. This is despite the fact that there is a lack of experience in establishing inter-cultural communication between non-governmental organizations working in Latvian and those operating primarily in Russian (Golubeva & Ijabs 2009: 1–2, 6, 13).

The fact that the concept of “ethnic minority” has been widely used in ethno-sociological studies, shows that a great number of sociologists believe that society in Latvia has reached certain results in the sphere of integration; so, they see ethnic differences as functional and cultural differences in a united national body. It is proved by the tendency of some applied studies to view difficulties of the social, political and cultural integration of ethnic minorities as an integral part of the society in Latvia. In the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, a great number of sociological studies have not considered the idea about the Russian ethnic group being the result of intensive migration from Slavic republics of the USSR and, therefore, completely foreign to the cultural values of Latvia. Such opinions were typical of the first half of 1990s. Moreover, sociologists in Latvia believe that an ethnic minority status in a democratic country does not mean different social possibilities for representatives of ethnic minorities from those enjoyed by the title nation. It is clear that such a method for solving the real problems of ethnic minorities is criticized socially when ethno-politics and the stereotypes existing in the social consciousness are concerned.

The research piece, “Separate Education—Different Citizens,” carried out in 2008/2009 within an international research project of the Network of Education Policy Centres (Curika), has shown the dissatisfaction of teachers and pupils from schools utilizing Russian as the language of instruction with regard to their curriculum of humanitarian subjects. (For example, 76% of teachers believe that these courses reflect mainly the “Latvian point of view;” 50% of pupils from such schools find descriptions of Latvians and Russians in history books sometimes unfair. Political

participation in Latvia is not a goal for many Russian pupils as they believe that Russians have fewer possibilities to be promoted socially than Latvians. At the same time, pupils from schools with Latvian as the language of instruction have negative attitudes towards the "symmetrical division of political power.")

In this research one can notice the multicultural approach to the interpretation of the concept of "ethnic minority." Ethnic groups see each other as equal members of the interethnic dialogue. In this case, it is important for the researcher to note that Latvians as the basic political nation and Russians as an ethnic minority both have to follow this idea. As the different ways history is interpreted by Russian and Latvian teachers and students is concerned, Linda Curika (Curika 2009: 18–19) has made a conclusion about the necessity of a discussion "on the controversial points of the history to be able to find the interpretation satisfying [to] both ethnic groups."

A multicultural approach is characteristic in the research "A Challenge to Civil Participation," carried out in 2008. It considered the concept of "ethnic minority" to be the recognition of equality of ethnic groups in a multiethnic country. Having studied perspectives of civil participation, the authors decided that it was essential for a civil society to establish in its public space favourable conditions for such dialogue that would take into consideration the interests of different social groups including minorities. Within this research, a monitoring of the legislative initiatives of the Saeima (the Parliament of Latvia) as well as mass media publications was carried out. Suggestions connected with both the broadening and restricting of the civil participation of all members of the society or certain groups have been noted. This research was the result of the fact that the societal integration in Latvia foresaw both, individual and group integration. The authors have found that some newspapers in Latvia have expressed negative attitudes towards certain ethnic and linguistic groups and, as a result, have stirred up disrespect towards people belonging to such groups (Golubeva, Rožukalne 2009: 3–4, 34). By that, the authors of the research have shown the impossibility of accepting the term, "ethnic minority," without accepting the ethnic group as a collective actor in the inter-ethnic dialogue and multiethnic civil society at large.

Sociological Analysis of the Russian Ethnic Minority in Latvia in the 2000s

In the 2000s, sociologists carried out substantial research on the Latvian society as a multiethnic and multicultural reality. And this multi-ethnicity is primarily recognized as the presence in the society not only of the Latvians as a state-forming nation but also ethnic minorities. The number of ethnic minorities is seen differentially. The Russian minority, which differs from the Latvian Belarusians, Lithuanians, Poles, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups in number and in social functions, is distinguished amongst the Latvian ethnic minorities. It was the Russian minority, which, in the period of the restored Latvian independence, was able to create a socio-cultural infrastructure functioning in the Russian language (a system of private secondary and higher education institutions, numerous national-cultural societies, and independent political

parties and associations, whose aim was to articulate/express the Russian collective identity within the common Latvian identity, media/press, scientific research, etc.).

The latest ethnological research review shows that there are the following important concepts/ideas for the understanding of the behaviour peculiarities of the Russian ethnic minorities and its ethnic consciousness:

1. The ethnic aspect of social stratification. The representational sociological research piece entitled, "Class self-identification in Latvia," carried out in 2005 did not discover any considerable differences in the socio-class self-identification of the ethnic groups' representatives. Thus, shares of the Latvians and Russians who identify themselves with the working class approximately correspond to their ratio within the ethnic structure of the Latvian society. The share of the Latvians identifying themselves with the middle class was higher than the corresponding share of Russians. But the Latvians identified themselves with the lower class more rarely than the Russians. Identification with the upper class was more frequent among the Russians than the Latvians but for the most part the common self-identification share with this social group within the whole sample was extremely small (Šķiriskā pašidentifikācija 2005: 5–6; Volkov 2007: 334–354).

2. Ethnic peculiarities of Latvian entrepreneurship. Expert opinions expressed in various research, say that the psychological abilities of the Russians to adapt to entrepreneurship are greater than those of the Latvians. According to an expert opinion, the Russians are better able to adapt to change than the Latvians; they are better risk-takers, are more adventurous by nature, possess a better self-appraisal and are not afraid of starting their career from the very bottom of a career ladder. The research piece entitled, "Society integration and entrepreneurship," cites an expert opinion stating that, "the Russians are more purposeful, [more] active by nature than the Latvians, who are tied to their present job." There are some ethnic differences in the Latvian entrepreneurship culture as well. Experts highlight that the Russian businessmen, when recruiting a work force, are more orientated toward informal contacts, whereas the Latvian businessmen prefer public tenders. At the same time, the "Russian" business sphere is more closed. Consequently, the researchers state that within a part of the Latvian Russian culture, elements of self-segregation are known to occur quite often, which in turn impedes social mobility in the economic arena (Zepa 2004b: 7–8, 42).

3. Ethnic borderlines of social capital distribution. A group of authors from Latvia, Hungary and the USA carried out one of the few studies on the inequality in social capital distribution in the sphere of education between the Russian ethnic minority on the one hand and the Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians on the other. The authors of the research think that in comparison with the Soviet period, a gap between the Russians and the title nations' representatives in the level of obtained education has increased (Hazans 2005).

4. Ethnic self-identity differences. In the research piece entitled, "Civil society formation in the largest Latvian cities and ethnically heterogeneous regions," the dependence of the topicality of ethnic self-identification on such factors as an ethnic affiliation, a living place and a legal status in Latvia (a citizen or a permanent

resident without Latvian citizenship) is shown. Ethnic self-identification is the most important for the Latvians—65%. Among the Russian respondents, its topicality was identified by 41%, but among the respondents of other nationalities—24%. Russian respondents more frequently expressed the importance of personal ethnic identity in the residential zones, where inter-ethnic communication is more intense, mainly in the cities. Ethnic identity was not so relevant for the Russian people in Latgale, or for older residents who were usually Latvian citizens. Thus, among the Russian people in Liepāja, the importance of ethnic identity was noted by 71% of respondents, in Jelgava—68%, in the Riga region—62%, while concurrently 85% of the Russian respondents from the Rezekne region, 76%—from the Kraslava region and 61%—from the Ludza region, do not find ethnic identity important. Among the Russian citizens of Latvia, 31% noted the topicality of personal ethnic identity, but among non-citizens—54%. The Russians' fear of being deprived of the chances to develop their personal ethnic culture proved to be higher in the regions of Latvia where there was an established basis for the Latvian Russian-speaking socio-cultural infrastructure: private educational institutions, including institutions of higher education, editor's offices of the largest Russian newspapers, theatres, a business sphere, etc. The Russians of Riga, Daugavpils and Jelgava turned out to be more skeptical about the chances of preserving their personal culture than the Russians of Ventspils, Rezekne and the Rezekne region, Riga and the Kraslava regions (Zepa, Šūpule, Tomšone, Krastiņa, Krišāne 2005: 40–41).

5. Ethnic differences in social competence. The most frequently encountered issue in numerous ethno-linguistic and ethno-sociological studies—is the issue of the Russian minority's social competence and primarily that of the Russian youth. Representatives of the national minorities see their linguistic competence, i.e. the level of their Latvian language knowledge, as a key for social competence in the economic sphere. Thus, among the young people—ethnic minorities' representatives who are certain in their ability to find work, 83% demonstrated a high level knowledge of the Latvian language, 71%—intermediate and 64%—low (Zepa, Šūpule, Tomšone, Krastiņa 2006: 70).

6. Ethnic differences of common civil identity. One of the most relevant peculiarities of the Russian national minority consciousness structuring is the attitude towards civil and cultural values, which were consolidated in Latvia after 1991. Primarily, basic values such as one's attitude towards the institution of Latvian citizenship, the state language's social relevance, the political and social participation level, the degree of one's identification with Latvia and its regions, etc. Researchers show the contradictory character of these phenomena. On the one hand, scientists note that since 2000 the portion of the population which wants to obtain Latvian citizenship has increased from 20% to 41%, and three quarters of non-citizens want their children to become citizens of Latvia (Zepa, Šūpule, Tomšone, Krastiņa, Krišāne 2005: 15). On the other hand, one can observe a decrease in the importance of the state language in the Russian people's consciousness. According to the research, the degree of identification with Latvia among the Russians is significantly lower than is reported among the Latvians (Zobena 2004/2005: 26).

7. Level of ethnic distance. Research underlines that on the level of individual contacts between the Russians and the Latvians, there is almost no existence of an ethnic distance or it is minimal. With regard to Latvian-Russian interactions, it is reported that among the Latvians, as well as among the Russians, the proportion of those who have a positive attitude toward the representatives of the opposite side almost coincides—59–60% (Makarovs, Strode 2005: 6).

But for the Russians as well as for the Latvians, the threat of the preservation of personal collective identities is still of current importance. Sociologists emphasize that the Russians see the threat to their collective identity in, “the habit of a privileged status for the Russian language which existed in the USSR” (Zepa 2004a: 14, 28). The Latvians and the Russians express opposite views on the problem, to which extent Latvian ethno-policy meets the Russian minority’s interests. For instance, 39.7% of the Russians and only 5.9% of the Latvians think that in Latvia the interests of the Russian-speaking population are taken into account to a lesser degree than it is necessary (Makarovs, Strode 2005: 8).

The research conducted in 2005 entitled, “Ethno-political tension in Latvia: the search for conflict solution” (research supervisor B. Zepa), admits that the presence of an ethno-conflict in Latvian society is determined by complicated interethnic relationships on the level of group agents but not on the individual level, which generates “collective ethnic fears.” As a main reasons for such ethno-conflict, the authors of the research point out: scaled changes in the Latvian society which resulted in a change of the ethnic groups’ status, the role of media working in different information areas and the asymmetrical character of the ethnic stratification in Latvia, which allows for the numerical dominance of the Latvians in the state government and education (Zepa 2005: 6, 10).

8. The expansion of scientific research methods for ethnological analysis. In their research, Latvian authors are continuously giving a more precise definition for the categories which are used for the analytical description of the social peculiarities of the Russian ethnic minority in Latvia. Among such categories and accents it is necessary to outline:

- the idea of a positive role for schools, with both Russian and Latvian streams, in which the bilingual environment would be characterized as, a “diversity of cultures.” Despite this concept, the authors do not insist on the asymmetric property of the Latvian or Russian cultures in the bilingual education of the Russian students (Kļave, Šūpule, Zepa 2004: 29).
- the idea of a social value of bilingual education for national minorities within the context of a multicultural dialogue, which presumes an active participation by all parts in the educational process (Dedze 2002: 66–67, 82).
- the idea of the importance of the dialogue and equal partnership between the state and ethnic minority in the sphere of education (Zelčermans, Rogaļeva 2001: 80, Golubeva 2004: 4).
- the idea of a fully-fledged interethnic dialogue as a base for the recognition of the collective identity of ethnic minorities (Volkovs 2008:34–43; Volkov & Lavriņenko 2009: 4–45).

In general, it can be noted that at the modern stage of Latvian ethno-sociological research, in the content analysis of the concept of “ethnic minority” in particular, multicultural ideas of Latvian sociologists about multi-ethnic Latvian society are taking on a more special significance. Certainly, recognizing the ethnic groups as fully-fledged subjects of the multiethnic society is a fragmentary phenomenon, which can be explained in the following way:

1. Latvian society’s multi-ethnicity and multi-culture are not included in many fundamental values of the Latvian national state and modern liberal democracy, for example:
 - a. public interethnic consensus about the one state language;
 - b. public interethnic consensus about the place of the ethnic (national) minorities’ status and the autonomy of their culture in the civil society of Latvia.
2. Liberal and scientific consciousness have little interest in the collective identity of ethnic minorities in modern (post-modern) civil societies. So, Latvian sociologists consider the society in Latvia as a multiethnic community with different ethnic groups. But it is necessary to discover the attitude of Latvian society toward its ethnic diversity. The basic problem is the following: whether or not Latvian society can recognize ethnic minorities as collective subjects of a fully-fledged inter-ethnic dialogue.

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Biographical Note: Vladislav Volkov, Ph.D. Associate Professor, Director of the Institute of Social Researches, Daugavpils University, Latvia. Main research interests: sociology of ethnicity, multiculturalism, ethnic minorities.

Important publications: *Krievi Latvijā* [Russians in Latvia] 1996; *Slāvi Latvijā* [Slavs in Latvia] (with I. Apine) 1998; *Latvijas krievu identitāte: vēsturisks un socioloģisks apcerējums* [Identity of Russians in Latvia: historical and sociological approach] (with I. Apine) 2007.

Address: vladislavs.volkovs@du.lv