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# The Impact of Totalitarian Rule on Contemporary European Union Policy: The Case of Latvia and its Linguistic Divide

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## Abstract

*The influence of multiple totalitarian regimes has resulted in the Latvia of today becoming a multi-ethnic society. The reinstatement of Latvia's outdated 1922 constitution following independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, failed to deal with the demographic changes that had taken place under Soviet rule. Notably, protections for minority groups were given no constitutional, nor subsequent legislative backing. This was only partially addressed under the EU's Copenhagen Criteria requirement on minority protections as part of the accession process. As the situation was not fully dealt with during accession, the language rights of minorities of Latvia continue to be impacted on. This article examines paradoxes in EU policy towards minority languages. It is argued that given this historic context, the current system of EU languages is discriminatory and unduly impacts on the linguistic rights of a large proportion of the Latvian and broader EU populace.*

## Introduction

From its driving role in international conflicts, to its horrifying impact on the lives of millions, modern totalitarian rule is one of the twentieth century's most defining ideologies. Totalitarian rule has held a central role in shaping modern Latvian history. This is most obviously true of Latvia's forced annexation under the Soviet Union (1940-1941 and 1945-1991), and equally clear in its brief period of Nazi rule (1941-1945). Perhaps more surprisingly, momentum towards totalitarian rule can equally be detected in Latvia's interwar independence earlier in the century. As a consequence of this rule, a distinct ethnic divide in Latvia is now present. The most obvious public manifestation of this divide is visible through Latvian national language policy. This paper examines the impact of this inescapable history of totalitarian rule on Latvia's contemporary social and political landscape, especially its 2004 integration into the European Union (EU).

Drawing on the historic justifications for contemporary policies towards ethnic minorities in Latvia, this paper argues that current Latvian, and to a greater extent, EU policies do little to address the legacy of linguistic and ethnic pluralism that totalitarian rule left. With language often being described as a core element of national identity,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For example, A. Caviedes, 'The Role of Language in Nation-Building within the European Union', *Dialectical Anthropology*, Vol. 27, Nos.3/4, 2003, p.249; S. Wright, *Community and Communication: The role of language in nation state building and European integration*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2000, p.121.

this paper further contends that, given Latvia's historic circumstances, the current system of official languages in the EU causes *de facto* discrimination, unduly impacting on the linguistic rights of a large proportion of the Latvian and broader EU population.

## The Historic Precedence

Alongside national aspirations, Latvia has historically enacted discriminatory public policy. It is an irony of the Latvian political landscape that such policies have too been core in occupiers' attempts to assert their versions of hegemony over the local population. Although a Latvian national consciousness first began to emerge in the late nineteenth century,<sup>3</sup> discriminatory ultra-nationalist policy only developed under totalitarian rule in the mid-late 1930s. The emergence of discriminatory attitudes and their manifestation in public policy was supported and reinforced by the constitution. This stance toward ethnic minorities is typical of totalitarian led societies who reject "toleration, pluralism and the open society."<sup>4</sup> Of the lack of protection for minority groups in the Latvian constitution, James Pollock noted in 1923 that "There is very little reason why racial or religious difficulties should arise, since the large majority of the population are Letts and belong to the Lutheran Church".<sup>5</sup>

Pollock's claim was inaccurate, as there was a significant minority ethnic population. Between 1885 and 1897, under the rule of imperial Russian leader Tsar Alexander III, a process of 'Russification' had taken place.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Germans had been economically, politically and socially influential in Latvia over a 700 year history of dominance and social oppression over the local population.<sup>7</sup> In 1935, the Germans were a small, but influential minority, comprising 3.2 per cent of the population.<sup>8</sup> The state was multi-ethnic, comprising significant proportions of Polish, Roma and other minority groups.<sup>9</sup> Andres Kasekamp indicates that it was such ethnic minorities, totalling almost a quarter of the population when combined, who held disproportionate political, social and economic influence being social elites holding political and economic power.<sup>10</sup>

The influence of these groups was evident in the fact that many minority schools existed, maintained by state funds, and so too, numerous allowances were being made for the use of minority languages in administrative and legal.<sup>11</sup> After dissolving the *saeima*

<sup>3</sup> A. Pabriks & A. Purs, *Latvia: The Challenges of Change*, London, Routledge, 2001, pp.1-2.

<sup>4</sup> A. Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction 4th Edition*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p.217.

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Pollock, 'The constitution of Latvia', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1923, p.448.

<sup>6</sup> J.W. Hidden, 'The Baltic Germans and German policy towards Latvia after 1918', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1970, p.295; A. Plakans, 'Democratization and political participation in post communist societies: The case of Latvia', in K. Dawisha & B. Parrott (eds), *The consolidation of democracy in East-Central Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp.100-101.

<sup>7</sup> M. M. Laserson, 'The recognition of Latvia', *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1943, p.236.

<sup>8</sup> D. S. Eglitis, *Imagining the nation: History, modernity, and revolution in Latvia*, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002, p.108.

<sup>9</sup> G. Hogan-Brun, et al., 'Language politics and practices in the Baltic States', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 2007, p.8.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kasekamp, 'Radical right-wing movements in the North-East Baltic', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 1999, p.594.

<sup>11</sup> Hogan-Brun, et al., op cit., p.9.

(Parliament) and seizing total rule in a 1934 *coup d'état*, Latvian leader Karlis Ulmanis became particularly concerned by the high proportion of property and other capital controlled by those not ethnically Latvian. His right-wing ultra-nationalist policies eliminated higher education teaching in the traditional languages of German and Russian, replacing them with Latvian.<sup>12</sup> This resulted in those of German, Russian and Jewish descent being squeezed out of positions of political and economic influence, with preferential treatment given to Latvians.<sup>13</sup> This was a 'textbook' case of Ernest Gellner's theories on the emergence of nationalism in what was by all accounts an agrarian society in transition. That is, emphasis was placed on an education system and high culture, protected by the state, and supposedly endorsed by the populace.<sup>14</sup> It was, however, those of German descent who were the subject of any real animosity in Latvia due to their historic hegemony over the local population.<sup>15</sup> Equivalent discriminatory policy also emerged during this period in other fascist states in Europe. It is well documented that during the 1930s Germany began to enact public policy which favoured ethnic Germans.<sup>16</sup> However, when "compared to the other dictatorships in the world, his [Ulmanis'] was truly mild."<sup>17</sup> While Latvia's nationalistic policies were comparable to those enacted in many other European states during the 1930s, their resurrection in post-Soviet Latvia was to become a significant complicating factor in the democratisation process and causing discord in the European integration process.

Three days after the fall of Paris to Nazi Germany and in line with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet military commenced occupation of Latvia on 17 June 1940. Soviet provocateurs organised mass marches and meetings designed to create the impress of the beginnings of a popular uprising. 'Official' Soviet accounts described it as the "overthrow" of "the hated fascist government", bringing "the age long aspirations of the Latvian people" into being.<sup>18</sup> A staged election with only one candidate brought to power the *saiema* which soon after voted unanimously for Latvia to become part of the USSR.<sup>19</sup> Following this, a relatively short period of Nazi occupation from 1941-1944 was followed by Soviet occupation once again, sending approximately 120-150,000 Latvians to seek exile in the West.<sup>20</sup>

Under Soviet rule another intensive process of 'Russification' took place, which significantly eclipsed that earlier undertaken by Imperial Russia. In the 1940s, for example, over 50,000 of Latvia's educated elite were deported to Siberia.<sup>21</sup> In 1945,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> A. Plakans, *The Latvians: A short history*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.135.

<sup>14</sup> E. Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983, pp.8-14.

<sup>15</sup> A. Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: The Missing Center*, The Historical Institute of Latvia, Riga, 1996, p.80.

<sup>16</sup> See for example, C. Browning, 'The decision-making process', in D. Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, London, Routledge, 2004, pp.174-175; H. Friedlaender, 'Step by step: The expansion of murder, 1939-41', in O. Bartov (ed.), *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.65-67; M. Burleigh & W. Wippermann, 'The 'uniqueness' of Nazi racialism', in A. A. Kallis (ed.), *The Fascism Reader*, London, Routledge, 2003, pp.335.

<sup>17</sup> J. Dreifelds, *Latvia in transition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.30.

<sup>18</sup> J. Kalnberzins, *Ten Years of Soviet Latvia*, Moscow, Foreign Language Publishing House, 1951, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> Plakans, *The Latvians: A short history*, op cit., p.144-145; Eglitis, op cit., p.6.

<sup>20</sup> M. Grunts, *Latvians in exile in the free world 1940-1980*, London: M.V. Grunts (self published), c.1980, p.1.

<sup>21</sup> V. Nollendorfs, & U. Neiburgs, *Soviet mass deportations from Latvia*, Latvijas Instituts, 2006, <<http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=142>>, accessed 23 August 2008.

Latvians comprised close to 80 per cent of the local population, dropping to 52 percent by 1989.<sup>22</sup> Although a national resistance existed until the 1950s, all political parties other than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were banned. Farms and industry were collectivised. The use of the Latvian language was curbed, and the display of the Latvian national flag was forbidden.<sup>23</sup> In the Baltic States, the Russian language was termed by the Soviet occupiers to be “the language of friendship of nations.”<sup>24</sup> The hidden subtext of this was an aim to destroy the local languages, which had been identified by the occupiers as a key element in national identity.

Language has historically been used as a control mechanism by European totalitarian regimes to reinforce the dominance of the state’s nationality. This was explicitly the case in Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany.<sup>25</sup> The Soviet Union’s foundational Marxist-Leninist ideology however, purported to define groupings of people by class rather than nation. The Soviet Union spoke of there being 130 equal languages in the USSR.<sup>26</sup> While this remained the official stance, from 1958 Russian became the *lingua franca* of the entire USSR.<sup>27</sup> All public administration was conducted in Russian, as was all academic discourse. Unsurprisingly, suppression of the national minority occurred alongside such restrictive language policy.

Ironically, Communist propaganda used Latvia’s brief periods of fascist rule and Nazi occupation to undermine international criticism of their own illegitimate occupancy. Implying that their occupation of Latvia had been a matter of choice, one 1965 Soviet ‘academic’ publication described a lobby group of East European refugees in America as “Nazi collaborationists” with the aim of casting “rude slander on their countries who *decided* to go socialist [emphasis added].”<sup>28</sup> Soviet representations of lobbyist ‘political refugees’ depicted them as charlatans “spreading false information and outright lies about the Socialist countries” to grow “rich at the expense of their fellow exiles, thousands of Latvians abroad [who] live under hard conditions.”<sup>29</sup> When referring to the Western call for Latvian “freedom and rights”, the authors of this State published text claimed that this actually meant “the freedom and right to repeat the previous Nazi barbarities.”<sup>30</sup> Such Soviet propaganda uses Latvia’s totalitarian history to filter the brutal nature of their own regime.

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<sup>22</sup> A. Sprudz, ‘Rebuilding democracy in Latvia: Overcoming a dual legacy’, in J. Zielonka (ed.), *Democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe, Volume I: Institutional engineering*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.140; E. Stern, et al., ‘Crisis management in transitional democracies: The Baltic experience’, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 37, No.4, 2002, p.530.

<sup>23</sup> Nollendorfs & Neiburgs, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Eesti Instituut, *Estonica: Russification*, undated, <[http://www.estonica.org/eng/lugu.html?kateg=43&menyy\\_id=99&alam=61&leht=11](http://www.estonica.org/eng/lugu.html?kateg=43&menyy_id=99&alam=61&leht=11)>, accessed 1 October 2008.

<sup>25</sup> M. Blinkhorn, *Mussolini and Fascist Italy*, London, Routledge, 1994, p.4; J. J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 2000, p.5.

<sup>26</sup> For example, M. I. Isaev, *One hundred and thirty with equal rights: On languages of the peoples of the USSR*, Moscow, Nauka, 1970.

<sup>27</sup> L. A. Grenoble and A. Lenore, *Language policy in the Soviet Union*, New York, Springer, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> J. Silabriedis & B. Arklans, *‘Political refugees’ unmasked!*, Riga, Latvian State Publishing House, 1965, p.189.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.209.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.212.

## The Inter-War Legacy Revived

When Latvia regained independence following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the constitution of 1922 was reinstated. Many Western powers had not recognized *de jure* the annexation of Latvia,<sup>31</sup> therefore the constitution's re-adoption emphasised the continuity of the state.<sup>32</sup> Despite the constitution allowing the conditions for the rise of totalitarian rule in the inter-war period, its adoption of this constitution was a case of "choosing what seemed to be a lesser evil."<sup>33</sup> The Latvian Prime Minister continues to hold the same powers which gave way to Karlis Ulmanis' seizure of total rule in 1934. In this respect, Andrejs Plakans describes that "The authoritarian period in the interwar republic... is a silent but nevertheless eloquent reminder that the Latvian state had already experienced one failure of parliamentary democracy".<sup>34</sup> Ilze Koroleva and Ritma Rungule cautiously note that the elderly in particular, are nostalgic towards the 'golden years' of independent interwar Latvia under the Ulmanis regime.<sup>35</sup> Unlike in Russia where there has been a tendency for younger generations to idealise the certainty and social order of their Soviet past, Latvian youth have developed belief systems which reflect that of their grandparents' generation.<sup>36</sup>

The newly (re)independent Latvia immediately began to enact discriminatory policy towards ethnic Latvians, in the guise of responding to decades of Soviet 'Russification'. It remains an irony that the same justification was used to popularise Ulmanis' interwar policy. Based on the concept of *jus sanguinis*, the right of blood, the *Law on Citizenship* 1994 indicated that persons who were "Latvian citizens before June 17, 1940, and their descendants" are automatically entitled to citizenship.<sup>37</sup> While the post-Soviet Latvia was demographically a multi-ethnic society, such citizenship law resulted in the homogenisation of the emerging political system.<sup>38</sup> Anton Steen suggests this was the intention of the Latvian political elite. He indicates it was motivated by a need to "protect the national core."<sup>39</sup> Discriminatory legislation continued to be passed on this basis. The ethnically homogenous political elite continued to hold consensual attitudes towards such discrimination.<sup>40</sup> This culminated in the passing of the 1998 education law, which dictated that year-ten students could only be taught in the state language of

<sup>31</sup> Sprudz, op. cit., p.140.

<sup>32</sup> A leader of a Diaspora civil society group in Australia, Aivars Mednis described the West's non- *de jure* recognition of Soviet rule as being "the most significant contribution" to the independence cause of Latvia and the other Baltic States cited in Baltic Council of Australia, 1989, p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Sprudz, op. cit., p.141.

<sup>34</sup> A. Plakans, 'Democratization and political participation in post communist societies: The case of Latvia', in K. Dawisha & B. Parrott (eds), *The consolidation of democracy in East-Central Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.254.

<sup>35</sup> I. Koroleva & R. Rungule, 'Latvia: Democracy as an abstract value', in H. Klingermann; D. Fuchs & J. Zielonka (eds), *Democracy and political culture in Eastern Europe*, Milton Park, Routledge, 2006, p.238.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.235.

<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 'Latvian citizenship', <<http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/service/4727/>>, accessed 2 May 2008.

<sup>38</sup> V V. Pettai & M. Kreuzer, 'Party politics in the Baltic States: Social bases and institutional context', *East European Politics & Societies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1998, p.152.

<sup>39</sup> A. Steen, *Between past and future: Elites, democracy and the state in post-communist countries: A comparison of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 1997, p.86.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.282.

Latvian.<sup>41</sup> Responses to this by members of the Russian community implied that “the state is reliving a Nazi past in the present.”<sup>42</sup> Placards adorning swastikas becoming a common feature of protest rallies by Russian speaking minorities.<sup>43</sup> The impact of Soviet anti-Latvian nationalism propaganda, thus still lives on today.

## European Accession as a Catalyst for Change

The European integration process has had a distinct effect on the emergence of Latvian neo-Fascism. This has however been a paradoxical process. The lure of the common market, and the security that NATO promised, caused Latvia to rethink its discriminatory policies. While the European Union (and to a lesser extent NATO) accession process resulted in a minority rights dialogue being established in Latvia, some European Union policy has actually worked to reinforce the ethnic divide. This has once again manifested itself primarily through minority language policy and law.

Due to warnings that the 1998 education law in its current form would hinder Latvia’s chances of joining the EU, it was amended to allow 40 percent of the curriculum to be taught in a minority language.<sup>44</sup> As a result of this amendment, Latvia was invited to commence EU accession negotiations.<sup>45</sup> NATO Secretary-General George Robertson indicated in 2002 that Latvia risked exclusion from the alliance because its discriminatory laws were not conforming to NATO’s political ideals.<sup>46</sup> As a result of these external pressures, constitutional amendments were ratified in 2002. Section 114 of the constitution now reads that “Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity”.<sup>47</sup> The lure of engagement in the European Common Market and the security of the NATO alliance caused Latvia to adopt a less discriminatory body of law.

## European Language Policy: Reviving Latvia’s Interwar Legacy Again?

The European Union continues to hold paradoxical attitudes towards linguistic diversity, including the use of minority languages. Since the 1992 ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Commission (the Commission) has actively promoted language learning, with linguistic diversity forming the cornerstone of European education policy.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the Commission explicitly indicates that this includes the

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<sup>41</sup> D. J. Galbreath, ‘Still ‘treading air’? Looking at the post-enlargement challenges to democracy in the Baltic States’, *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2008, p.93.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> For example, Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> D. J. Galbreath, ‘European Integration through Democratic Conditionality: Latvia in the Context of Minority Rights’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006, p.93; F. Schimmelfennig, S. Engert & H. Knobel, ‘Costs, commitment and compliance: The impact of EU democratic conditionality on Latvia, Slovakia and Turkey’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2003, p.513.

<sup>45</sup> Schimmelfennig, Engert & Knobel, op. cit., pp.513-514.

<sup>46</sup> New York University School of Law, ‘Latvia - constitutional watch: East European constitutional review’, 2002, <[http://www.law.nyu.edu/eecr/vol11num3/constitutionwatch/latvia\\_print.html](http://www.law.nyu.edu/eecr/vol11num3/constitutionwatch/latvia_print.html)>, accessed 17 March 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Latvia, *Constitution of Latvia*, 1922 (with amendments as at 2008).

<sup>48</sup> European Commission, *High level group on multilingualism: Final report*, 2007.

learning of regional or minority languages.<sup>49</sup> The Commission's aim of linguistic freedom and diversity is, however, challenged by the current structure of official EU languages – an inflexible situation imbedded in one of the European Community's foundational laws.

From its inception, the European Union established a structure of official languages. Regulation 1 passed by the European Economic Community, a predecessor to the EU, was that “determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community.” This regulation dictates that:

Documents which a Member State or a person subject to the jurisdiction of a Member State sends to institutions of the Community may be drafted in any one of the official languages selected by the sender. The reply shall be drafted in the same language.<sup>50</sup>

While in 1958 this initially referred to the languages of the founding members, this has now been expanded by a number of amendments to currently include 23 national languages spoken in the European Union.<sup>51</sup>

Despite an official policy of equality among the official languages of the EU, the actual working languages of its institutions have been a cause of tension among particular Member States. While the French language was historically dominant in the European institutions, with the gradual expansions of the European Union, English has started to emerge as its *lingua franca*.<sup>52</sup> This is unsurprising since approximately 69 per cent of the European population can speak English.<sup>53</sup> A number of protests have been made by German officials for being addressed in English in an official capacity.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in an attempt to avoid such criticisms, many European institutions employ multiple working languages. These are usually English, French and German, and occasionally Spanish or Italian. These languages being the five most widely understood languages prior to the 2004 expansion.<sup>55</sup> The eastern expansion of 2004 however, caused a marked shift in linguistic diversity and the dominance of particular languages. Italian was no longer one of the top five languages spoken, rather, Russian had taken its place.<sup>56</sup> It is a strange irony that the Soviet ‘Russification’ process was retrospectively successful at promoting linguistic dominance in what is now a large part of the EU. Of the 44 per cent of the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> European Council, *Regulation 1*, Brussels, 1958, OJ L17 6.10.1958.

<sup>51</sup> These being, Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish and Swedish. See European Commission, ‘Languages of Europe’, undated, <[http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/index_en.html)>, accessed 26 September 2008.

<sup>52</sup> U. Ammon, ‘The status of German and other languages in the European Community’, in F. Coulmas (ed.), *A Language Policy for the European Community*, Berlin, Mouton de Gruyter, 1991, p.249.

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer: Europeans and their Languages*, 2006, p.14.

<sup>54</sup> U. Ammon, ‘Language conflicts in the European Union’, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2006, p.322; European Ombudsman, ‘Recommendation to the European Commission in complaint 259/2005/(PB)GG’, 2005; European Ombudsman, ‘Special Report from the European Ombudsman to the European Parliament following the draft recommendation to the Council of the European Union in complaint 1487/2005/GG’, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.331.

<sup>56</sup> see, European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer*, op. cit., p.6.



European Union population who can speak Russian, 16 per cent reportedly speak it on a daily basis.<sup>57</sup>

Through its language policy, the EU holds a paradoxical stance towards minority languages. By not accommodating citizens to communicate with its institutions in non-official although widely spoken languages (such as Russian), the EU claims to support the use and promotion of minority and non-official languages. In 1992, the Council of Europe adopted the *European Charter for Minority Languages* (the Charter). Although not being an initiative of the EU, the European Parliament supported and encouraged its Member States to ratify the Charter.<sup>58</sup> Article 10 of the Charter indicates that public authorities must recognise the use of minority languages, and allow documentation and communications to take place between the populace and authorities in these languages.<sup>59</sup> This is inconsistent with the European Economic Community's Regulation 1. That said, the European Economic Community itself was not a signatory of this convention. Although a number of Member States did ratify this convention, those on the eastern boundaries of the community are notably absent. This is understandable given historic attempts by occupiers to purge them of their nationhood.

Since Latvia's independence and subsequent accession to the European Union, the ethnically Russian population has remained a large and numerically stable proportion of the population. The majority of the ethnic-Russian population have also maintained their language usage. While between 1989 and 2007 there was a slight drop in the Russian population of both nations, it would appear that with European integration this has plateaued (see Error! Reference source not found.). In 2007, national statistics note that in Latvia 28 per cent are ethnically Russian.<sup>60</sup> These figures correlate closely with EU statistics on language usage in these states. Russian is noted as the mother tongue of 26 per cent of Latvian citizens.<sup>61</sup> These statistics on language usage exclude those who are non-citizens, meaning that they are however, significant underestimations. In 2001, for example, there were 550,000 stateless people living in Latvia – the vast majority of who are likely to be ethnically Russian.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p.16.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, op. cit., p.188.

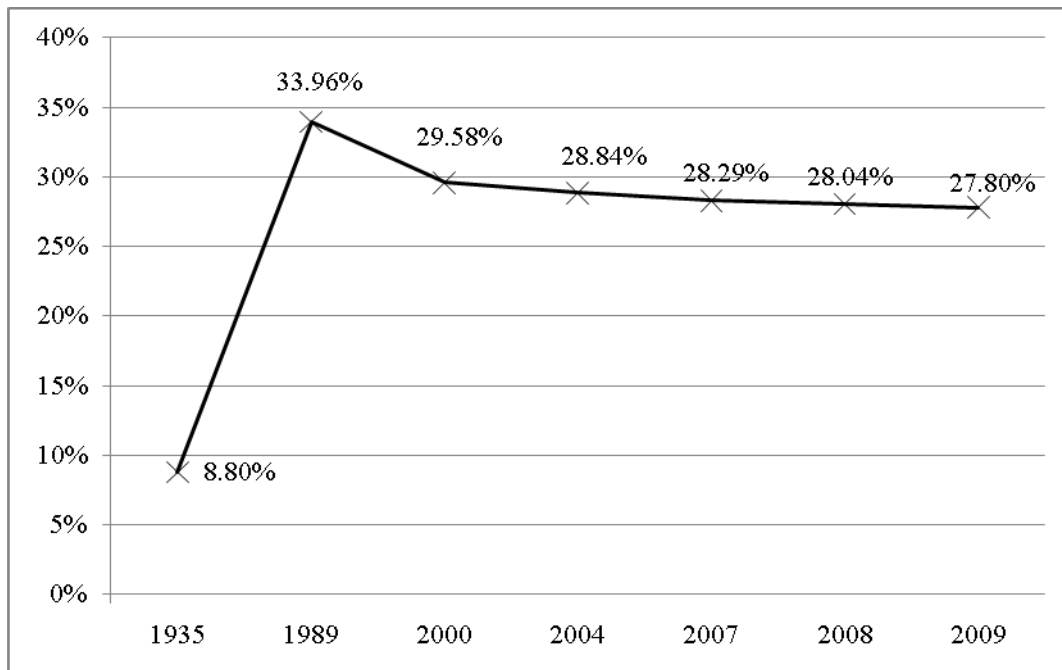
<sup>59</sup> Council of Europe, *European Charter for Minority Languages*, 1992, article 10.

<sup>60</sup> Latvijas statistika, Census data and national statistics.

<sup>61</sup> European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer*, op. cit., p.6.

<sup>62</sup> M. Johns, "Do As I Say, Not As I Do": The European Union, Eastern Europe and Minority Rights', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 17, No.4, 2003, p.691.

Figure 1: Percentage of Latvian population ethnically Russian by year (source: Latvijas statistika)



The emergence of supra-nationalism through the EU is often cited as representing the decline of the nation state.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, a key intention of the early European integration project was to off-set the rivalries between competing nation-states.<sup>64</sup> A paradox of this contention lies in the continued reinforcement of dominant nationalities through the EU structure of official languages. As a result, at a national level, minority language rights are often swept aside under the auspices of nationalist-driven cultural and linguistic homogeneity.<sup>65</sup> This is reflected in the *Official Language Law* of Latvia which states:

The purpose of this law is to ensure... the maintenance of the cultural and historic heritage of the Latvian nation; ... [and] the increased influence of the Latvian language in the cultural environment of Latvia, to promote a more rapid integration of society.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> See for example, U. Beck & E. Grande, 'Cosmopolitanism: Europe's Way Out of Crisis', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.10, No.1, pp.67-86 (pp.69-70); F. Cerutti, 'A Political Identity of the Europeans?', *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 72, 2003, p.34-38; R. Kastoryano, 'Citizenship: Beyond Blood and Soil', in R. Leveau, K. Mohsen-Finan & C. Wihtol de Wenden (eds), *New European Identity and Citizenship*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002, p.115-116; S. Huntington, *The Clash of the Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996, p.35.

<sup>64</sup> D. P. Calleo, 'Reflections on the idea of the nation-state', in C. A. Kupchan (ed.) *Nationalism and nationalities in the New Europe*, Ithica, Cornell University Press, 1995, p.34; G. Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, Houndmills, Macmillan, 1995, p.27; D. Messenger, 'Dividing Europe: The Cold War and European Integration', in D. Dinan (ed.), *Origins and Evolution of the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.36-39.

<sup>65</sup> S. May, 'Language, Nationalism and Democracy in Europe' in G. Hogan-Brun and S. Wolff (eds), *Minority Languages in Europe: Frameworks, Status, Prospects*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p.215.

<sup>66</sup> Latvia, *Official Language Law*, 1999, section 1.

This law also dictates that all other languages of the Republic of Latvia are to be regarded as foreign.<sup>67</sup> Among the Copenhagen Criteria which Latvia (and other potential Member States) had to fulfil in the EU accession process, was that of the “protection of minorities.”<sup>68</sup> This had little practical effect in Latvia. A number of writers attribute this to it being an ambiguous requirement.<sup>69</sup> Despite pre-accession process negotiations promoting ethnic and linguistic diversity, as a result of such actions during the actual accession process (or indeed lack of actions) minority communities have a great distrust for the EU.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

It remains a curious irony the European Union does not have a legal requirement to communicate with a large proportion of its residents in their mother tongue. Although this may be, in part, attributed to the rapid shift in linguistic diversity through the EU's eastern expansions, the restrictions on languages through which European public authorities will communicate with their residents hold some core similarities to language restrictions under totalitarian regimes of the left and right. While on one hand, the EU is promoting language diversity through its minority language initiatives, on the other hand, the system of official languages is preventing true linguistic freedom and diversity from becoming a reality. In a large part, national governments, such as Latvia's, are responsible for this. Although it is understandable given the historic attempts to destroy the Latvian nation, the insistence on homogenous nationalistic and protectionist language policy appears to be counter to the intentions of the European integration project.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. section 5. This is with the exception of the indigenous Livonian language (*Official Language Law* 1999: Section 5). As at 2005, there were only 170 people who count themselves as ethnic Livs, with the language spoken by only a handful of people aged over the age of 80. Liv is the rarest language in the European Union. See I. Mezs, 'Ethnic Minorities in Latvia', Latvijas Instituts, 2005, <[http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=464](http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=77&Itemid=464)>, accessed 18 September 2008.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission, 'Glossary – Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria)', <[http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession\\_criteria\\_copenhagen\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm)>, accessed 1 October 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Galbreath, 'European Integration through Democratic Conditionality,' op. cit., p.75; P. Vermeersch, 'Poland: minority policies in a homogenized state', in B. Rechel (ed.), *Minority Rights in Central and Eastern Europe*, Milton Park, Routledge, 2009, p.174.

<sup>70</sup> Galbreath, 'European Integration through Democratic Conditionality,' op. cit., p.75.