

Foreword

Data from the 1989 USSR census graphically records the results of 45 years of “Leninist – Stalinist nationality policies” in Latvia and paints in dark colours the prospects of the Latvian language and the Latvian people’s survival.

According to the census there were 1,459,000 Latvians in the USSR. Latvia was home to 1,388,000 Latvians or 95 % of the Latvians living in the USSR. At the time of the census in January 1989, there were 2,680,000 people registered as living in Latvia and 2,667,000 permanent residents in Latvia, of which 1,279,000 were non-Latvians. Of all of the peoples in the USSR, Latvians were the only people whose native population had not reached pre-World War II levels. The number of Latvians living in Latvia in 1989 was 5.4 % less than in 1935, while at the same time the number of Russians in Latvia had increased by 540 %, Belarusians by 450 %, but Ukrainians by a factor of 50. In 1989 there were 906,000 Russians in Latvia (34 %), 120,000 Belarusians (4.5 %), 92,000 Ukrainians (3.5 %), as well as small numbers of Poles, Lithuanians, Hebrews and those of other nationalities.*

The 1989 census data gives us information about native languages and people’s comprehension of a second language. The data shows that 97.4 % of Latvians gave Latvian as their native language and 68 % were fluent in Russian. On the other hand, only 23 % of those of other nationalities understood Latvian. Therefore it is understandable that for the majority of foreigners living in Latvia, the republic was *terra incognita*, because it is not possible to understand and respect another people if one doesn’t know its language, culture, history, national characteristics, traditions and customs.

The main factor in the reduced proportion of Latvians in Latvia was the unabated immigration of foreigners. The flood of migrants divided Latvia into two parts. In one country there were two completely different groups of inhabitants – Latvians and non-Latvians, between whom there was a language barrier that hindered communication. Most immigrants did not speak Latvian and were not concerned about that. Quite the opposite, they were proud of it because at all official gatherings, many enterprises, agencies and organizations the only language heard was the one they had brought with them, the Russian language. It never occurred to the leadership or ideologues of the USSR that before sending a migrant – a skilled worker or specialist – to Latvia, he should attend Latvian language courses

* For more 1985 USSR census results see Latvian State Archive (LVA) – 277. f., 17. apr. 445. l., pp. 18–29, *LPSR Valsts statistikas komitejas priekšsēdētāja M. Baltiņa 1990. g. 28. februāra ziņojums*.

and only then be allowed to go. No one in Moscow was the least concerned about the Latvian language skills of those thousands of migrants who arrived from all regions of the USSR to seek their fortune in Latvia.

As is well known, language is one of the most important factors in the formation and development of an ethnos. Language forms an ethnic character of “we”, as opposed to “them”. Language is one of the most important tools that unites “us” and differentiates us from “others”. Even someone who is a complete “stranger” becomes closer and understandable if he speaks your native language.

While the Estonian language law was being discussed, Tartu University professor Jurij Lotmans correctly stated, “Language is an indispensable element for every national culture, for every culture. Without language there is no culture. The level of language development is an indicator of language development as a whole. For this reason threats to a language are threats to a culture, but threats to a culture are threats to the survivability of a nation.”*

With Latvia’s occupation in 1940 the Russian language has increasingly squeezed out the Latvian language from record keeping, official meetings, from all spheres of life. This process gained momentum in the post World War II years when the flood of Russians and Russian speakers increased.

The goal of this collection of documents is to show that from 1944 (when Latvia was re-occupied by the Soviet Union) until 1989, when Latvia regained its independence, a planned invasion by the Russian language was started and carried out. We also want to show what was being done to attempt to stop or at least slow down the growing threats to the Latvian language, and by extension, to the Latvian culture and the nation itself. These documents show that the Latvian CP and the Soviet republic’s leaders at that time were short on courage, will power and consistency. They were and remain the Kremlin’s diligent and obedient executors of Leninist-Stalinist nationality policies, and through the years zigged and zagged along with the “Party’s general policies”: in first post war years they adopted several important decisions on immigrants learning the Latvian language, but failed to enforce them; after Stalin’s death, as they implemented the Kremlin’s instructions, again adopting decisions regarding the use of Latvian in record keeping and promoting cadres, but after the arrest of L. Beria, the initiator of this “new nationality policy”, these were quickly “forgotten”. As fervently as the communists criticized themselves in the June 1953 LCP CC plenary for “ignoring national characteristics”, at the July 1959 LCP CC plenary they “unmasked” Eduards Berklavs and other national communists for efforts to restrict immigration, extend the use of the Latvian language and promote national cadres. In 1971 these same people were the most active propagandists and defenders of the proclaimed dogma of creating a “Soviet people.”

* Лотман Юрий. Закон о языке нужен. Радуга. № 4, 1989, с. 41.

Documents in the archives also describe the many courageous people who at top level CP meetings, in letters and wide-ranging reports to the Kremlin factually described the sabotage and neglect of the Latvian language and the ever increasing Russification of Latvia. They took a stand on the Latvian language and its orthography.

It is understandable that during these years no positive changes to the Kremlin's nationalities policy were made – quite the opposite. The flow of immigrants to Latvia increased together with the threat to the Latvian language and the imposition of the Russian language. In obeying the commands of the Kremlin leadership, increasingly forgotten and tossed aside were the basic principles of Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin's nationalities policy that required that immigrants – functionaries – learn the local language and observe local national customs.

The fight for the increased and secured status of the Latvian language against Russification started anew during the **Third Awakening** and culminated with the adoption of the Language law. However, the consequences of 45 years of distorted implementation of "nationalities policies" have not been completely overcome even today.

The original texts of the documents collected in this volume are in both Russian and Latvian. The English translation is based on the published Latvian text (*Par latviešu valodu. Pret rusifikāciju. 1944–1989. Dokumenti*. Edited and translated from Russian by J. Riekstiņš. Rīga: LVA, 2012). Surnames appear in their Latvian form (for example, the Cyrillic Калнберзин is transliterated and letticed as Kalnbērziņš; В. Лацис – V. Lācis; Курпнек – Kurpnieks). As it is not always possible to identify the ethnicity of those persons named in the text, and for the sake of consistency, the Latvian form is retained throughout the English translation except in Cases where a well-known figure's name has a traditional English spelling (e.g., Beria, Stalin, Khrushchev). In some documents, initials are used in place of names; in some cases, the full names of the individuals are unknown. In other cases, only the surname appears.

The style of most of the documents, a relic of the Soviet period, has been preserved as far as possible in the English translation. The clumsy use of language was an integral feature of such documents – awkward and frequently based on Russian, the distorted Latvian language used is a telling reflection of the period.

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