INTRODUCTION

From time to time discussions on ethnic minorities stir up in the press and on television. Now in the context of EU enlargement the problem of observance of minority rights is one of the most pressing topics in Latvia. During negotiations between Moscow and Brussels about Russia’s unsolved border problem with Estonia and Latvia, Russia keeps on reiterating a number of solicitous considerations. Concerns are voiced most vigorously about the feelings of the Russian minority in both the Baltic countries. The European Commission points out that the Russian minorities in both countries enjoy adequate citizenship rights and that there is no discrimination in respect of the language. How does this look like in reality?

Similarly to many other European countries Latvia is a national multicultural country. Latvia’s citizens who belong to ethnic minorities have a right to preserve and develop their identity, culture and language.

However, the situation in Latvia is peculiar with its huge proportion of minorities as at the beginning of 2003 aliens represented 42% of the country’s population. The individual who live in Latvia and do not know the Latvian language are exposed to the risk of isolation, unemployment and social apathy. Therefore this time the discussion will focus on pressing topics such as the education and employment of ethnic minorities as well as the influence of mass media on the integration process of society.
Possibilities to get education in native language, bilingual education, transition to the Latvian language as a teaching language and teaching aids for learning the Latvian language, the question of language in higher education establishments could be the most important themes describing the topic about the education of ethnic minorities in Latvia’s case.

To what extent education is linked with employment? Will it influence also the labour market if ethnic minority pupils have to study only in the Latvian language, respectively, will the rate of non-Latvians in the certain sectors of labour market increase, for example, will increase the number of civil servants who are not Latvians? Is occupation dependent on nationality? To what extent does it depend on the knowledge of the language?

Mass media implicitly play an important role in the formation of views of Latvia’s population in respect of such actual topics as bilingual education, questions of the language, politics of national minorities, civic involvement, etc. Are the restrictions to use the minorities’ languages in mass media affect a communication between ethnic minorities and Latvian society? How these restrictions show up in real life, taking account that press, radio and TV are the main mass media in Latvia?

Above-mentioned topics are described below in turn.

**ETHNIC COMPOSITION**

The percentage share of ethnic minorities in Latvia’s population is among the largest in Central- and Eastern Europe. According to the Citizenship and Migration Department of Latvia, as of 1 January 2004 ethnic non-Latvians represented 41.4% of the total population of Latvia (2.317 mln inhabitants): Russians accounted for 29% of the country’s population followed by Byelorussians (3.9%), Ukrainians (2.6%), Poles (2.5%), Lithuanians (1.4%) and Jews (0.5%). Ethnic minorities live across the whole territory of the country although their percentage share is higher in urban areas; they are also concentrated in the eastern region of the country. Ethnic minorities constitute a majority in several cities including Riga, the capital (58%).

In the soviet era Latvia’s population increased mainly on account of immigration from other parts of the Soviet Union thus promoting growth in the number of non-Latvians up to 48% in 1989. This process was the cause for concern of the ethnic Latvians that they might become a minority in their own country. In 2000 the share of ethnic Latvians had decreased to 42.3% and at the beginning of 2004 was 41.4%. To some extent this may be explained by the fact that after the restoration of independence to Latvia part of the ethnic Russians, including the family members of the former USSR armed forces, returned to their homeland or departed for other countries.

It is noteworthy that despite the increasing percentage of ethnic Latvians their number has still been declining over the last years. In the period between 1995-2002, 100.1 thousand births and 150.2 thousand deaths of ethnic Latvians were recorded, representing a decrease of 50 thousand. With an exception of the Roma population, the natural increase of all major ethnicities has actually been negative.

The situation of Latvia is typical in that ethnic minorities are forming politically on the basis of the language and not on ethnicity. The language-related problems being the main cause for contradictions in domestic policy and in the area of minority rights are
at the focus of international observation. From this perspective, the population of Latvia may be divided into two categories: the majority of Latvian-speakers (approximately 60%) and the minority of Russian speakers (around 40%)……

Other languages of ethnic minorities are spoken in Latvia but the use of these languages is limited.

**CITIZENSHIP**

The situation of linguistic minorities in Latvia especially that of Russian speakers is encumbered with their reluctance to acquire citizenship which is an obstacle to equal conditions and to enjoying their rights in practically all spheres of social life.

In the period between 1 February 1995 and 31 March 2004 75 thousand applications for naturalization have been submitted by the applicants to Latvia’s citizenship. By the decree of the Cabinet of Ministers nearly 71 thousand persons have been granted Latvia’s citizenship. Of the total number of persons who have submitted an application for citizenship, 67.3% are Russians, 10.4% Byelorussians, 8.6% Ukrainians, 4.6% Lithuanians and Estonians, 4.6% Poles and 4.5% - representatives of other ethnicities.

According to statistical data, since autumn 2003 the number of representatives of ethnic minorities who have expressed a wish to naturalize has increased dramatically. This can be explained by the results of the referendum on EU accession. The minorities want to possess equal rights with the citizens of Latvia and hence become citizens of the EU. According to the data of the Population Register of the Department of Citizenship and Migration, more than half of population of some Latvia’s ethnic minorities are citizens; of these 49% are Russians, 53% Lithuanians, 58% Estonians, 65% Jews and 70% Poles.

**EDUCATION**

Fierce indignation in the circles of Russian-speakers was caused by the education reform laying down that starting on 1 September 2004 the language of instruction beginning with the 10th grade or 1st year at central and local government general/vocational secondary education institutions that provide study programs for ethnic minorities will be the official state language for not less than three fifths of the total taught time per school year including foreign languages but the study programs relating to the language of ethnic minority, its identity and culture will be conducted in the language of this minority. Such a reform should have actually been introduced as early as in 1991 following the re-establishment of independence.

The Association supporting schools with Russian, as the language of instruction believes that at least 70% of the total taught time should be provided in the language of ethnic minority. Despite the protests, 77% of the directors of the minority education institutions have acknowledged their preparedness to shift to instruction in the state language.

In the school year 2002-2003 69% of the general school pupils studied in Latvian schools, 29.7% in Russian schools and the remaining 0.5% in Polish, Ukrainian and Belarusian schools. Taking into account that according to the Population Census 2000
data, 64.7% of the population aged 5-19 years were Latvians, 26.3% - Russians, 2.3% - Polish and 6.8% - other nationalities, the enrolment structure by the languages of instruction seems very appropriate.

In the school year 2002/03, 88% of students in higher education institutions studied in Latvian, 10% - in Russian and 2% - in English. State institutions provide studies in Latvian (98%) and English (2%), but private institutions – 55% in Latvian, 44% - in Russian and 0.6% - in English.

**EMPLOYMENT**

The results of the Labour Force Surveys in 2003 reflected that there was no distinct difference between employed persons by nationality and profession. The only exception was skilled agriculture and fishery workers, where non-Latvians comprised just one-fourth of all employed persons. Inspecting the situation by kind of activity, it revealed that there was triple dominance of Latvians over the non-Latvians in public administration sector (“L” in Nace Rev 1.1) and double dominance in agriculture sector (“A+B”). Meanwhile there were 1.7 times more non-Latvians than Latvians in transport and telecommunications (“I”) and 1.5 times more - in industry sector (“C+D+E”).

Exploring the structure of employed population as well as jobseekers and economically inactive persons by nationality no distinctions showed up in 2003.

**MASS MEDIA**

There are no obstacles for the press in Latvia to disseminate information in the languages of ethnic minorities. An analysis of the 6 major newspapers in Latvia (3 in Latvian and 3 in Russian) proved that in 2001 the number of articles about ethnic minorities in the Latvian and Russian press was very similar (respectively: 49% and 51%). However, the articles in Russian were considerably longer thus making up 56% of the total amount of all publications.

In regard of broadcasting, Russian-speakers without fluent knowledge of the Latvian language have a restricted access to these mass media. The Law on Radio and TV Broadcasting lays down that one of the two public TV canals should broadcast only in Latvian while the other can devote only up to 20% of the airtime to broadcasts in other languages. An assumption can be made that the language restriction is an attempt to motivate the Russian-speaking population to improve their knowledge of the Latvian language. But an anxiety persists that in practice this regulation promotes a situation when media and information are segregated as the non-Latvian speakers and especially the Russian-speakers turn to the canals broadcasting in Russian from other countries. For the purpose of integration the audience of non-Latvians is broadened by introducing new programs about the life and culture of ethnic minorities in Latvia as well as by creating interactive broadcasts in live with the participation of Latvian politicians where the participants can express their views both in Latvian and Russian.

Concerning radio broadcasts, 25% of the restrictions to broadcasting in other languages except Latvian refers to the broadcasting organizations and not to the canals. If one broadcasting organization owns several canals, it can use one canal for broadcasting in another language 24 hours a day. In 2002, 84% of the total length of radio programs
was accounted for by the programs in Latvian, 12% in Russian and 4% in other languages. Compared with 1996, the length of radio programs in Latvian increased by 88%, in Russian by 187% and in other languages by 512%.

**CONCLUSION**

No substantial features of discrimination of ethnic minorities were revealed in a process of studying of all above-mentioned topics. The protests of the Russian speaking population to some extent could be explained by tough thinking kept from the Soviet times and disinclination to change lifestyle even to a certain degree. Every alteration is a challenge, and if somebody is not flexible and is afraid or just is not willing to fit him to new surrounding, he make representations. Latvia already 13 years has spent as independent state. It is a considerable time period of human life and it is more than enough to learn the language of the state one had chosen to live.

The integration of society must be based on European and Latvian values that are at the core of Western civilization and Latvian culture. Firstly, this means common views about the values of the Latvian State - a country that is free, democratic and European. Secondly, this means unity with the help of the Latvian language as the main mean of communication in the territory of Latvia, the language known and spoken by every inhabitant of the country.

The speaker is presenting her personal views, which do not necessarily represent the point of view of the CSB of Latvia.

**Literature:**