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Why Isn’t Latvia the “Next” Crimea?  
Reconsidering Ethnic Integration

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By Indra Ekmanis

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Abstract: In the aftermath of Russia’s military incursion in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a flurry of articles predicted the next territorial conquest of President Vladimir Putin’s Russian revanchism. High on the list were the Baltic countries, which sit precariously on the edge of Europe and historically have been the “bloodlands” between East and West in author Timothy Snyder’s phrasing. More specifically, journalists and analysts pointed to the “Russian enclaves” in northeastern Estonia and southeastern Latvia, where, by many accounts, large ethnic Russian populations were prepared to rise up against Baltic governments with a bit of provocation from across the eastern border. However, six years on, there is little indication that Russian speakers in the Baltic countries are on the brink of causing an internal uprising. While there are multiple factors that can help explain the Baltic “dog that didn’t bark,” this essay considers an often overlooked variable in the equation: the depth of civic and cultural integration among Russian speakers in Latvia.

As the Russian Federation’s grip on Crimea became increasingly clear after 2014, compelling doomsday scenarios of a Russian invasion in the Baltics—often tied to Western hesitance to defend Baltic allies—played out in the media. In February 2016, BBC2 released a film titled “World War Three: Inside the War Room,” in which British military strategists gameplay an uprising of Russian patriots in the largely Russian-speaking city of Daugavpils, Latvia.¹ In the film, the military incursion serves as ground zero for a conflagration bringing about the fall of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and demolishing the notion of transatlantic security. In November 2016, Writer Paul D. Miller made the similar prediction that within two years:

Russian-speaking Latvians or Estonians (a quarter of Latvians and Estonians are ethnically Russian) will begin rioting, protesting for their rights, claiming to be persecuted, asking for “international protection.” A

¹ Gabriel Range, “World War Three: Inside the War Room,” BBC, 2016.
suspiciously well armed and well trained “Popular Front for the Liberation of the Russian Baltics” will appear. A few high-profile assassinations and bombings bring the Baltics to the edge of civil war. A low-grade insurgency may emerge.²

Numerous other analysts and researchers³ also teased out the potential of Russian machinations to convince a significant portion of the Russian-speaking population to turn on the post-Soviet Baltic governments.⁴

² Paul D. Miller, “How World War III Could Begin in Latvia,” Foreign Policy, Nov. 16, 2016.
³ For example, see, Carol J. William, “Latvia, with a Large Minority of Russians, Worries about Putin’s Goals,” Los Angeles Times, May 2, 2015; and Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, “Ukraine Crisis: Is Latvia next on Putin’s Hit List?” The Independent, Oct. 3, 2014; and Andrew Higgins, “Latvian Region Has Distinct Identity, and Allure for Russia,” New York Times, May 20, 2015.
⁴ While the Baltic countries were annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II, their incorporation into the USSR was not recognized by many Western countries, including the United States. This lack of recognition was critical in the reestablishment of independence in 1991, when the Baltic countries maintained a doctrine of continuity between their interwar states and their renewed post-Soviet independence.
Whether or not NATO—and more specifically the United States under President Donald Trump’s leadership—would be willing to “start World War III” in order to save these Baltic republics has been a consistent point of reference, even as the United States and other countries made assurances regarding the Alliance’s principle of collective defense. This defense is enshrined in Article V, which stipulates that an attack against one ally is an attack against all. Baltic governments, to minimize the risk of being excluded from swift and compelling assistance on a technicality, took action to enhance their military preparedness. For example, these governments reconsidered conscription and increased their contributions to meet NATO’s required two percent of gross domestic product (GDP) on military spending—a threshold many other member countries have not met.5

Now, six years removed from the illegal annexation of Crimea, and several years beyond the deadline for some doomsday predictions, the Baltic countries remain territorially sovereign. Certainly, they have navigated repeated Russian incursions on airspace, and been faced with hybrid warfare and disinformation attacks. Security and defense preparations against a potential Russian invasion remain a top concern for security experts and officials in the Baltic countries and beyond. Indeed, U.S. and European allies have demonstrated repeated commitments to expanding Baltic security.6 However, it remains a compelling question, why Russia has not pushed the Baltics to capitulate to the goal of territorially expanding the Russian Federation.

As Andres Kasekamp, Baltic historian and foreign policy specialist at University of Toronto, noted in his initial rebuttal to the arguments that Estonia “was next” on Russia’s hit list, there are many fundamental differences between the Baltic countries and the comparison point of Ukraine and Crimea.7 One key factor here is their institutional integration with western organizations. Despite concern over the power of Article V, the Baltic countries are full members of NATO. They are also deeply integrated into the European Union and the eurozone. While Ukraine (and Georgia, which Russia invaded in 2008) was actively pursuing stronger ties with these European and transatlantic structures, aspirational attachment can hardly be considered on the same plane as full integration as a basis for comparison.

Institutional ties with the United States and Western Europe are also a decisive boon to Baltic residents, providing access to new job markets and critical investments in infrastructure. These ties improve the quality of life for individuals in the Baltic states—and they are visible to Baltic residents near Russia’s border, as Kasekamp notes. “The Pskov oblast, bordering Estonia and Latvia, is one of the poorest in the entire Russian Federation” leaving little incentive for Baltic Russian speakers to imagine greener grass across the border. While southeastern Latgale has the lowest

5 “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013-2019),” NATO Press Release, Nov. 29, 2019.
6 Lukas Milevski, “Military Exercise Defender Europe-20 Is Cancelled: What Does It Mean for the Baltic States?” Foreign Policy Research Institute, March 30, 2020.
7 Andres Kasekamp, “Why Narva is not next,” Estonian World, Jan. 24, 2019.
average gross wages in Latvia (710 euro for fulltime work),\textsuperscript{8} Pskov wages are less than half of that.\textsuperscript{9}

But beyond the impact of alliances and political structures on Baltic security, the key population that drew analysts’ attention to these regions is the large concentration of Russian speakers. Even more concerning for many analysts is the relatively high number of post-Soviet non-citizens in the Baltic region, i.e., Soviet-era migrants and their descendants who have not been naturalized as Latvian or Estonian citizens. In Estonia and Latvia this unique status applies to around six and 11 percent of residents, respectively, and it disproportionately applies to older individuals. (This status will continue to skew towards the elderly as citizenship is more readily accessible to children of non-citizens.) While non-citizens hold many of the rights of citizens, they are often considered disenfranchised or stateless. At the same time, the requirements for naturalization are often perceived as extra-ordinary or assimilationist (though by objective measures, they are on par with wider Europe).\textsuperscript{10} Certainly, Latvian elites have contributed to exclusionary and paternalistic policies in the immediate post-Soviet era, some of which are slowly starting to be rectified. Fewer analyses of the non-citizen question, however, consider the instrumental reasons some non-citizens choose to maintain that status rather than naturalize, including the possibility of visa-free travel to Russia, as well as the European Union.\textsuperscript{11} Moscow frequently touts the plight of non-citizens, condemning allegedly discriminatory policies. Yet, Moscow acts discursively to distance Baltic Russian speakers from the states in which they live, rather than to rectify perceived grievances by supporting true integration policies.\textsuperscript{12}

The Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic countries are often mischaracterized or grouped by virtue of their preferred language usage or ethnic background. The demographically high concentration of Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonia are compelling when considered as statistics—around a third of the countries’ populations speak Russian as their first language and about a quarter are ethnically Russian. Russia has attempted to claim this population for itself, referring to Russian speakers abroad as part of the “Russian World” (\textit{Russkiy mir}). This concept invokes Russians abroad as part of a wider Russian civilization that demands protections provided by the Russian state. While the post-Soviet minority population

\textsuperscript{8} “Changes of Wages and Salaries in 2018,” Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, Jan. 3, 2019.
\textsuperscript{9} “Russia’s Average Monthly Nominal Wages: NW: Pskov Region, Economic Indicators,” CEIC Data, 2017.
\textsuperscript{10} Indra Ekmanis, “Judging the Book by Its Cover? Latvian Integration beyond the Headlines,” Master’s thesis, University of Washington, 2013.
\textsuperscript{11} “Latvia’s Non-Citizen Attitudes Towards Obtaining Latvian Citizenship,” Republic of Latvia Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 2014 [“Latvijas Nepilsoņu Attieksme Pret Latvijas Pilsoņības Iegūšanu.” Latvijas Republikas Pilsoņības un migrācijas lietu pārvalde, 2014]; and Paul Gobel, “Experts: Estonia Has Successfully Integrated Nearly 90% of Its Ethnic Russians,” \textit{Estonian World}, March 1, 2018.
\textsuperscript{12} Ammon Cheskin, \textit{Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia: Discursive Identity Strategies: Russian Language and Society} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); and Indra Ekmanis, \textit{Host Land or Homeland? Civic-Cultural Identity and Banal Integration in Latvia} (Seattle: University of Washington, 2017).
is not exclusively of Russian heritage, Russia as the successor state to the Soviet Union lays claim to protecting “the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad,” who are “beneficiaries” of its compatriot policy. Indeed, as Ammon Cheskin, specialist in Russia’s kin-state politics at University of Glasgow, argues, Russia’s “compatriot discourses therefore are used with the aim of consolidating Russian-speaking identities around one of traditional Russian values. These values are directly contrasted to the ‘fasistic’ and debauched values of the West.”

To equate “Russian speaking” with “Russia serving” is certainly a fallacy, despite Putin’s efforts to make parallel these designations. Indeed, “many of Latvia’s Russian speakers do not feel the close political bonds with the Russian Federation that the Kremlin might hope for. However, paradoxically, within the Latvian political and media space, “Russian speakers desire to use the Russian language, or consume media from Russia, are taken as evidence of clear political and cultural links with the Russian Federation.” The political utility of overgeneralizing the population is likewise useful for nationalist politicians in the Baltic countries. Still, the identity structures of Russian speakers in Latvia are far more complex, occupying the space of both “Russianness” and “Latvianness.” This “hybrid identity,” while complicating the notion of “Russian speakers” as a “bounded group” or disenfranchised diaspora, also requires a reassessment of Russian-speaker integration in the context of Latvia. Russian-speaker integration, then, has implications for better understanding one aspect of why the Ukraine scenario has thus far failed to play out in the Baltics.

Banal Integration

Discourse on integration inherently identifies a need to mitigate a conflictual situation between distinct groups defined by any number of boundaries, e.g., ethnicity, language, loyalty, or civic participation. Such indicators can be identified and quantified as distinct and discrete measures, and they make it possible to “count” integration and its many perceived failures. However, a banal version of integration—or integration that fades into the background of everyday life—also often exists in parallel, yet its empirical value is rarely discussed. While high-level discourse emphasizes tensions among groups—a discourse that also played out in media analysis considering the Baltic-Ukraine scenario—banal integration reflects a social cohesion among individuals that is so much a part of everyday life, it is barely quantifiable; it goes unnoticed by the

13 “The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, July 15, 2008.
14 Ammon Cheskin, “Russia’s Compatriot Policy: The Consolidation and ‘Rossiisification’ of Russian Speakers Abroad,” In Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia: Discursive Identity Strategies (University of Edinburgh Press, 2016).
15 Cheskin, Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia.
16 Cheskin, Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia.
17 Cheskin, Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia; and Rogers Brubaker, Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
society which lives it. The presence of banal integration does not mean other integration issues are irrelevant; rather, the concept seeks to fill in the gaps between the elite-led, top-down conceptions of integration—e.g., policy, language, ethnicity and citizenship controversies—to home in on the reality that exists at the ground level.

Accordingly, banal integration refers to individual interactions between minorities and the titular ethnic group, and minorities and the state in the milieu of daily life. It considers the way in which individuals fulfill the qualities of an integrated society not by marking “integratory events,” but by noting their absence. For example, there is a difference between hosting a discussion on the state of Latvian- and Russian-speaker relations, and frequenting the same café as other Russian- and Latvian-speakers after such an event. While the first is a demonstration of “achieving” an “integrated” event, the second is an unnoticed, but still a significant form of interaction that describes progress towards integration in daily life.

Socio-national banal integration takes into account the relationship between an individual and the state, and the depth or quality of this interaction. It considers the unnoticed ways in which the individual lives in a socio-national context, and, depending on the level of salience, may be indicative of attitudes of personal belonging or loyalty to the state. Not least in this measure is an individual’s formal and informal standing with the state, as measured by citizenship, residency, and involvement in state institutions and civil society organizations (e.g., public schools, community clubs, etc.). These relationships affect individuals’ daily lives in significant, but often unnoticed ways; individuals become part of the nation with or without extensive effort.

In the public sphere, Russian-speaker and Latvian-speaker integration has become an inherent element of society. Fieldwork conducted over the course of two years (post-Crimean annexation) in Latgale—the southeastern so-called risk area for Russian territorial incursion—reveals a social environment that neither objectively sanctions Russian speakers for using their preferred language, nor excludes them from communal social environments. The vast majority of interactions, observed within the context of this research, between self-flagging ethno-linguistically diverse populations have illustrated at least a moderate level of banal integration, where ethno-linguistic background is neither hidden, nor demonstratively punished. Indeed, there is also significant linguistic code-switching, or shifting between the titular language (Latvian) and minority language (Russian). This code-switching indicates a distinct progression beyond the basic banal integration marker of peaceful coexistence, toward moderate and extensive involvement in the national society. These observations, though limited in territorial scope, dispute the rhetoric that it is oppressive to be Russian speaking in Latvia and that there is limited movement toward Latvian identity development for Russian speakers. The observations also help to explain low motivations for supporting a supposed uprising fomented by the Russian state.

18 For an in-depth discussion of methodology and fieldwork settings, see, Ekmanis, Host land or homeland?
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#### Table 1: A Typology of Socio-national Banal Integration from “Extensive” to “None”

| Extensive         | High level of belonging to city, region, state; fluency in state language; active engagement in civic associational life; active engagement in national cultural life | Code switching to state language; identification with state; active participation, patriotism |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moderate          | Feeling of belonging to city, region, state; at least moderate fluency in state language; some engagement in civic associational life; demonstrates passive interest | At least minimal engagement with state language; linguistic accommodation |
| Basic             | State-issued passport, basic understanding of state language; non-citizen passport; minimal engagement in civic associational life or limited to minority gatherings; sees cultural “flags” but does not actively engage | Ethnolinguistic enclaves; non-reciprocal bilingualism |
| None              | No attachment/engagement with /estranged from nation (language, civic identity, cultural life) | Foreign nationals |

### Daugavpils—Latvia’s Risk Zone?

The city of Daugavpils is the second largest urban space in Latvia, with a population of around 100,000. On the southeastern border of the country, Daugavpils is nearly as far from the capital of Riga as is physically possible. About 80 percent of

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19 Reproduced from Ekmanis, *Host Land or Homeland?* 2017.
Daugavpils residents speak Russian as their home language, while less than 10 percent speak Latvian as their home language. While most individuals (especially young people) ostensibly speak Latvian when necessary, Latvian speakers are fluent in Russian and are likely to initiate or continue conversations in Russian in private and public settings. Daugavpils has informally obtained the moniker “Little Russia” within Latvia. The colloquial myth—and one that has been enhanced by media speculation—is that few people in Daugavpils speak Latvian and that it is a city of questionable loyalty.

In 2012, when a referendum to make Russian the second national language was voted on, Daugavpils voted distinctly in favor of the motion (85 percent). This vote has been noted as further proof that Daugavpils and Russian speakers are anti-Latvia and pro-Russia. However, this conclusion is a dangerous one to draw, and is not necessarily borne out by other statistical measures of the city. According to the 2011 census, 54 percent of the city is ethnic Russian; 20 percent is ethnic Latvian, which indicates ethnic Latvians likely also voted in favor of the referendum. What researchers often fail to account for when discussing Daugavpils is that it is a Russian-speaking city, therefore it is completely unsurprising that Daugavpils inhabitants would favor conducting official business in the language of their daily lives. Linguistic preference cannot be substituted as an indicator of national belonging; therefore, in this example, it is spurious to conclude that the desire to include Russian as an official language is tantamount to disloyalty. As sociologist Ito Küsseli notes regarding Estonia, “Language, citizenship and loyalty are not necessarily interconnected.”

While the text of the city (storefronts, signs, advertisements) is primarily Latvian, the city operates almost exclusively in Russian. For example, despite language laws, it is nearly impossible to attend the local cinema in any language other than Russian (English-language movies are dubbed in Russian, Latvian films or subtitles are extremely rare). For all intents and purposes, it is far easier to live in Daugavpils as a Russian speaker than as a Latvian speaker. The notion that Russian speakers are oppressed, or unable to exercise linguistic rights, in the city is incompatible with the reality on the ground. While the city certainly maintains a Russian linguistic environment, it is significant to note that this is not simply a relic of Soviet-era migration policies; rather, the city has long been Latvia’s cultural melting pot, with strong ethnic minority communities—not only Russian, but Polish, Jewish and Belarusian, as well. The deep history of multiculturalism and the ubiquity of linguistic diversity in the Latgalian region, however, is often misinterpreted by those farther away from Daugavpils. Some Latvians from other parts of the country often maintain a

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20 Gobel, “Experts.”
21 Solvita Pošeiko, “The Latvian Language in the Linguistic Landscape of Daugavpils,” *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, no. 2 (2015), pp. 320–336.
22 “Four Rooms: Daugavpils Movie Theater has Ignored the State Language Law for Years,” LTV/LSM.lv, Dec. 11, 2014 [“Cetras Istanas: Daugavpils Kinoteātris Gadiem Neievēro Valsts Valodas Likumu.” LTV/LSM.lv, Dec. 11, 2014], http://www.lsm.lv/lv/raksts/kulturpolitika/kultura/cetras-istanas-daugavpils-kinoteatris-gadiem-neievero-valsts-vala109917/.
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draconian view of the city as a Russian enclave in colloquial conversations, though few who express these opinions seem to have been frequent visitors to the city. “Vai tuŗ vispār runā latviski?” (“Does anyone there speak Latvian at all?”) is a common inquiry, evoking questions of loyalty with regard to Daugavpils residents. However, fieldwork evidence indicates that Daugavpils is a Russian-speaking city, but a Latvian one, nonetheless.23

From a banal integration perspective, this language non-question is not only borne out in the high rate of non-reciprocal bilingualism (conducting a conversation in two languages) and linguistic code switching in the public sphere, but also in the more extensive integration that occurs in the elusive private sphere. Perhaps the most telling indicator that banal integration is not only occurring in Latvia, but is deeply rooted in the social environment, is the high number of ethnically “mixed marriages” (jauktās laulības). About one in three married Latvians has a partner of a different ethnic background.24 These marriages and other deep interpersonal relationships are microcosms of the diversity of identity and that is germane to much of the Latvian population.

The perceived cleavage between Latvian and Russian language consistently is demonstrated to be a non-issue in both formal and personal interactions. Such observations are indicative of two key elements of the integration discussion. First, they demonstrate that Latvia is not an inherently “divided” society—structural and social division would prevent the high rate of contact and development of deep interpersonal relationships. Second, they contextualize both the increased use of Latvian by Russian speakers, and the relative insignificance of ethnicity and language in relationship formation. While Russian-speaker integration is often verbalized as problematic, ethnicity and language do not necessarily exclude extensive interpersonal connections.

Does this hum of banal integration that is present in the lived environment and in interpersonal interaction affect perceptions of belonging to the state or nation? In order to become part of the nation, state rhetoric demands intangible feelings of belonging and respect from “integrating” individuals.25 Such measures of belonging or respect need not be demonstrative attempts to identify national loyalties (though they may engender such attachments). Developing feelings of belonging to the Latvian state is particularly relevant to areas with large Russian-speaking populations. Overt efforts to “integrate” Russian speakers often have proven exclusionary and ineffective, serving to further highlight differences between “Latvians” and “Russians,” and enforcing the narrative that Russian speakers are not “real” Latvians. However, the banal integration that occurs organically—e.g., through interpersonal interactions and mundane civic and cultural attachments—is often overlooked. According to surveys conducted among youth in Daugavpils city and the surrounding region, both Latvian-

23 Ekmanis, Host land or homeland?
24 “Facts regarding society integration in Latvia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” Republic of Latvia, 2018.
25 “Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012-2018),” Ministry of Culture, Republic of Latvia, 2012.
and Russian-speakers identify strong feelings of belonging to Latvia, Latgale and their specific locality, and much less to Russia. These data support other research arguing that students tend to differentiate between national and ethnic identities: “[Students] assign themselves ethnic Russianness, which, in their minds, has little to do with Russia the country. For this reason, many don’t feel connected to Russia, they choose not to use the word ‘Russian’ and call themselves ‘Russian speakers,’ because they feel more likely to belong to Latvia.” Such findings in the Daugavpils region are critical when analyzing Russian speakers in Latvia in the post-Crimea context.

Policy Recommendations

As discussed above, reconsidering how the Russian-speaking population in Latvia is banally integrated into the nation state can inform broader understandings of why Latvia, despite many predictions to the contrary, has not become the next Ukraine regarding Russian territorial incursions. Certainly, Russia remains a significant security threat that actively works to destabilize the country by exercising both hard and soft power mechanisms, including cyber warfare, border violations, and exacerbating the perceptions of internal divisions. Latvia and the Baltic countries must continue efforts to fortify their military preparedness and hybrid warfare acumen, particularly within the context of NATO and European and transatlantic partnerships.

Still, a critical aspect of the Baltic security question lies in perceptions of belonging to the state. “What needs to be secured, then is not only (or not even) the physical border but rather the idea of the state,” suggests political ethnographer Liene Ozoliņa. Russia’s work to portray Latvia as a failed or weak state thus increases “social insecurity and the embitterment with the state now becomes a security risk.” While the discussion above considers a new aspect of Russian-speaker belonging to the local community and the broader nation—i.e., banal integration—particularly in the “hot spot” of Daugavpils, there remains significant broader concern about how the Latvian state can more fully secure “hearts and minds”—not only of the Russian-speaking population, but of Latvians writ large.

The postsocialist and neoliberal policies that have increased socio-economic insecurity also have damaged the legitimacy of the state, Ozoliņa argues. Economic pain is felt significantly in Latgale, by far the poorest region of Latvia. It is beset by stark inequalities, particularly compared to the capital of Riga (though economically more stable than the Pskov region across the border in Russia). Latgalians colloquially

26 Indra Ekmanis, “Diversity in Daugavpils: Unpacking Identity and Cultural Engagement among Minority School Youth in Eastern Latvia,” Europe-Asia Studies: The Russian-speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity 71, no. 1 (2019), pp. 71-96.
27 Māra Laizāne, Āivita Putniņa, and Ilze Mileiko, “Minority school student identity and belonging to Latvia,” Riga (Latvia: University of Latvia, 2015). (Māra Laizāne, Āivita Putniņa, and Ilze Mileiko, “Mazākumtautību skolu skolēnu identitāte un piederība Latvijai,”] Riga (Latvia: University of Latvia, 2015).
28 Liene Ozoliņa, “Would You Flee, or Would You Fight?: Tracing the Tensions at the Latvian-Russian Border,” Slavic Review 78, no. 2 (2019), pp. 348-356.
29 Ozoliņa, “Would You Flee, or Would You Fight?”
voice the feeling of being ignored by the center; Russian speakers and Latvian speakers alike anecdotally note that Rigans would rather travel halfway across Europe than three hours by train to Daugavpils. The data also demonstrate disparities in education, income and employment.\textsuperscript{30} Indeed, Latgale, compared with Latvia’s other regions, ranks worst in nearly every well-being indicator except, perhaps ironically, safety. There is certainly vast room for improvement in stabilizing Latgale’s economic situation, which in turn would theoretically engender greater amiability for the state among the population, thereby enhancing security prospects.

Reducing the Russian security threat is also a question for the increased civic and cultural integration of Russian speakers. As demonstrated earlier, Russian-speaker integration is perhaps far more consequential than is usually perceived in security analyses that focus on ethnic and linguistic cleavages apparent in demographic surveys without considering the multifaceted identities of Russian speakers. Russian speakers, perhaps especially in the “high risk” area of Latgale and Daugavpils, are integrated into their respective communities, regardless of the language either they or their neighbors speak at home. Indeed, young Russian speakers, especially, indicate that they possess multiple identities—not only distinct civic and ethnic identities, but multicultural identities that draw on traditions of their ethnic heritage, their home language and the country in which they live.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{historic-center-of-riga-latvia.jpg}
\caption{Historic Center of Riga, Latvia}
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\textsuperscript{30} “Regions and Cities at a Glance 2018—LATVIA,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, March 5, 2019, \url{https://www.oecd.org/cfe/LATVIA-Regions-and-Cities-2018.pdf}. (This report does not take into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.)
As demonstrable in Daugavpils, the Latvian state should more visibly embrace and praise the multiculturalism that already exists within the country. Estonia, for example, has made such efforts by investing in the arts and relocating the presidential offices to Narva.\textsuperscript{31} In Daugavpils, similar efforts can be seen in praise for the Mark Rothko museum (the artist was a son of the city, albeit when it was still part of the Russian Empire). However, embracing the contributions from across a diversity of Latvia’s population must not be solely a mechanism to enhance Latvia’s international status.\textsuperscript{32} Instead, it should be a mechanism to demonstrate to Russian speakers that they are a legitimate part of the nation-state—without denying their ethnic or linguistic identity. For example, ballet dancer and actor Mikail Baryshnikov, who in 2016 returned to his hometown of Riga with his production “Brodsky/Baryshnikov,” in the same year was also granted Latvian citizenship for special achievements for the state.\textsuperscript{33} In a letter to the Latvian parliament, Baryshnikov thanked Latvia for the invitation to become a Latvian citizen, remarking on his complex relationship to the state:

> My childhood in Riga was not always easy because I was the son of Russian parents. In fact, my father was sent to Latvia to occupy the country. Despite these unfortunate circumstances, I was left with a strong connection with Latvia’s people. Perhaps my family’s controversial place there is what led me to support Latvian independence and national sovereignty in my heart.\textsuperscript{34}

Strengthening the visibility of Russian speakers in the national discourse and the efficacy of the state in border regions will simultaneously enhance the quality of living for the people living in these so-called risk zones, and will demonstrate the territorial sovereignty of these regions to its residents and to Russia. By bringing Russian speakers closer to the state, expanding opportunities and capitalizing on the banal integration that already exists in Latvia, the state and NATO can further serve to inoculate themselves against Russian territorial designs that intend to capitalize on a “disenfranchised” population.

\textsuperscript{31} “Estonia Gets Creative about Integrating Local Russian-Speakers,” \textit{The Economist}, May 10, 2018.

\textsuperscript{32} Daunis Auers, “‘We Lay Claim to Him!’ Berlin, Rothko, Eisenstein, and the Reorientation of Latvian National Identity,” \textit{National Identities} 15, no. 2 (June 2013), pp. 125–137.

\textsuperscript{33} Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, “Decision to be Made on Mikhail Baryshnikov’s Latvian Citizenship.” saeima.lv, Dec 22, 2016. [Latvijas Republikas Saeima, “Lems Par Mihaila Barišnikova Uzņemšanu Latvijas Pilsonībā.”] saeima.lv, Dec. 22, 2016.

\textsuperscript{34} Mikhail Baryshnikov, “[Letter to the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia],” Nov. 15, 2016. \url{https://www.fenikssfun.com/raksti/vestule-latvijai-5157}. 

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