

THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING DIASPORA IN THE BALTIC STATES: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECT

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Currently, more than 20 million Russians permanently reside outside Russia. As migration trends show, their number will be increasing in the future. The Russian-speaking diaspora in the Baltic States is an essential part of the Russian community abroad. Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia used to be a single state with Russia for a long time. It could not but affect the formation of these countries as subjects of international politics. Since May 2004, the Baltic States have been members of the European Union. Together with Finland, they constitute the EU's border space with Russia. To a large extent, it determines their geopolitical role in Europe. The article examines the Russian-speaking diaspora in the Baltic States. It substantiates the factors facilitating its stability and the preservation of the Russian cultural space, analyses the socio-economic and legal status of different groups of Russian-speaking residents, and identifies the peculiarities of various groups of the Russian-speaking population as well as prospects for the development of the diaspora.

Keywords:

Russia-EU border area, Russian-speaking diaspora, factors of sustainability and development

Introduction

Speeding up migration processes requires a scientific study. Investigations of Russian diasporas — 20 million people strong and counting¹ — are much in line with the global trend for exploring communities abroad. Yet the current state and prospects of Russian diasporas remain poorly understood: full-scale comprehensive studies have not been carried out at the public (Rossotrudnivhestvo institutions, the Russkiy Mir foundation, etc.) or the academic level.

For geographical, cultural-historical, political and economic reasons, these studies are particularly relevant in the Baltics when conducted with a focus on the

¹ *Rossiya v tsifrah. 2019, 2020, Kratkiy statisticheskiy sbornik [Russia in digits. 2019. 2020. A statistical digest]* 2020, Rosstat, p. 81.

Russia–EU relations. Along with the Russians, these countries have welcomed members of other ethnic groups residing in the USSR [1, p. 151]. Since Russian is the common language of all these migrants, they are referred to collectively as ‘Russian speakers’ instead of ‘Soviet citizens’, the latter term being unacceptable today. Moreover, in the countries of destination, locals perceive migrants from the former USSR — Ukrainians, Belarusians, Tatars, Jews and members of other ethnic groups — as ‘Russians’.

The Russophone diaspora in the Baltics is a sociocultural rather than ethnic phenomenon, where Russians play the role of the ‘diaspora-building’ group. In the context of the Baltics’ post-Soviet policies, this phenomenon is construed as an indication of the affiliation of various ethnic groups with Russia. Its political angle manifests itself in the fact that Russians do not prevail amongst the leaders of the Russophone diaspora. In Latvia, the rallies against the ban on using Russian as a language of instruction in schools were headed by members of other ethnic groups — Yakov Pliner, Vladimir Linderman, the member of the Saeima Boriss Cilevičs and the member of the European Parliament Tatjana Ždanok. In Estonia, prominent figures protecting the rights of the Russians are Vadim Polishchuk, Hanon Barabaner, Igor Rosenfeld, Eteri Kekelidze, Rafik Grigorjan and the member of the European Parliament Yana Toom.

The Baltics’ Russophones are an example of the classical diaspora thoroughly described in the literature [2–8].

The demographic and spatial dimension of diaspora stability

In December 1991, after the demise of the USSR, Russians accounted for 1.46 million people or 18.3 per cent of the Baltics’ 7.9 million-strong population. After the accession to the EU, the Baltics, like other Eastern European states, were increasingly becoming countries of origin for migrants headed to Western Europe. The 2008 crisis contributed substantially to the process: about 20 per cent of residents able to work left the region. This trend continued until the onset of the Covid pandemic. In 2018, Latvia’s population declined by 7.6 per cent (raking first in the EU in this respect). The ethnic factor did not matter: labour migrants were people from all ethnic groups. The common denominator was demographic losses.

Compared to the Soviet period, the population of Estonia declined by 16.2 per cent; Lithuania, 26.8 per cent; Latvia, 29.3 per cent. These figures prompted Lithuanian economist Povilas Gylys to call the process ‘evacuation’ rather than emigration [9, p. 359].

The population of the Baltics decreased to 6 million in the post-Soviet period, with Russians comprising 17.6 per cent or 1.07 million people. The proportion of Russian speakers fell from 47.6 to 37.5 per cent in Latvia; from 20.2 to 15.3 in

Lithuania; from 38.5 to 31.4 in Estonia. Yet, if the military personnel of the Baltic Military District and their families who had left the Baltics by the beginning of 1996 are taken into account, the percentage of Russians has not changed over the past 30 years. This circumstance testifies to the strength of their position in this region, which has strategic importance to Russia.

Emigration from Russia has been growing recently. According to Rosstat, 498 people left the country for the Baltics in 2010 (139 for Latvia, 153 for Lithuania and 206 for Estonia). In 2018, this number reached 2,516: 1,024 people emigrated to Latvia, 625 to Lithuania and 867 to Estonia². The emigration of Russian speakers to the Baltics from other former republics of the USSR is also increasing.

The stability of a diaspora largely depends on settlement patterns. Russian speakers in the Baltics have impressive territorial bases. In Latvia, it is Riga with 45 per cent of Latvians and 55 per cent of Russian speakers. The country's second-largest city, Daugavpils, is the most Russian area: Russians account for 53.6 per cent of the population; Latvians and Latgalians, 19.8; Poles, 14.2; Belarusians, 7.4. In Liepaja, Latvians comprise 59 per cent of all the residents; in Jelgava, 58; Ventspils, 57; Jurmala, 53; Rēzekne, 47; Salaspils, 42.

In Lithuania, Klaipeda, the country's third-largest city ethnic Russians constitute 19.5 per cent of the population. The cities of Visaginas and Zrasai are also important, with 52 and 23 per cent of Russians, respectively. In Vilnius, Lithuanians comprise 63.5 per cent of the population; Poles, 16; Russians, 11.9; Belarusians 4.4; Ukrainians, 1.5.

In Estonia's third most populous county, Ida Virumaa, Russians account for 83 per cent of its 137,000-strong population. Narva, the third-largest city in the country, is located there: amongst the locals, 86 per cent are Russian and 95 per cent Russophone. Other cities and towns of the country also speak Russian. These are Estonia's fifth-most populous city Kohtla-Järve (80 per cent of the population are Russians and 15 Estonians) and the country's second-largest seaport Sillamäe (87.5 and 4.8 per cent, respectively). In the latter, 8,500 of the total 16,000 population are Russian citizens. In Maardu, home to the largest cargo port in the country, Estonians account for less than 25 per cent of the population. Another port city of Estonia, Paldiski, is Russophone as well: Estonians comprise only 32 per cent of its population. Finally, there is Tallinn, where Russian speakers account for 43 per cent of the population, and 36.5 per cent are Russian. In Tallinn's largest district, Lasnamäe (119,000 people), Russian speakers comprise 75 per cent of the residents (Russians, 67 per cent) and Estonians less than 25 per cent. The Rigans call this district Lasnagrad, following the pattern seen in many names of Russian cities and towns. In ethnic terms, the area resembles the suburb

² *Rossiya v tsifrakh. 2019, 2020, Kratkiy statisticheskiy sbornik [Russia in digits. 2019. 2020. A statistical digest] 2020, Rosstat, p. 81.*

of Maskavas Forštate, where Russian merchants and artisans settled from the 18th century onwards. The area surrounding Lake Peipus is densely populated by Russian Old Believers, who moved to Estonian in the 18th–19th century.

Therefore, the Russophone diaspora gravitates toward large industrial cities and strategically significant areas. This pattern distinguishes it from other Russian-speaking communities dispersed across other world regions. The latter, albeit growing in numbers, do not have the potential to form ‘functioning’ diasporas. History provides ample evidence. The dispersed settlement of 2.7 million Russians (white émigrés), which took place in the 1920s in Europe and America, led to the emergence of many diasporas. But two generations later, the Russians almost entirely assimilated with dominant ethnic groups. A completely different case is the 7,000 Old Believers, the *dukhobory*, who emigrated to Canada in the 19th century and settled in the province of Saskatchewan to form a single community. Today, Canada is home to over 30,000 *dukhobory* who speak Russian and cherish national traditions [10, p. 95].

The cultural-historical factors behind the stability of diaspora

The Baltics are smaller states where the numbers of the titular and non-titular ethnic groups are of the same order of magnitude. In Lithuania, this ratio is 79:21; Estonia, 68:32; Latvia, 63:37. The comensurateness of the main language groups makes it possible to classify the Baltics as dual-community countries, with this factor preventing ethnic assimilation.

The stability of diasporas in the Baltic States is affected by many other factors, including historical ones. The Russians expanded to the Baltic coast in the 11th century, when Yaroslav the Wise founded Yuryev (Tartu) in 1030. In the 13th–15th centuries, Russians comprised the majority of the population of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Russia (Western Russia in Russian historiography); the country’s codes of laws — the Statute and the Metrica — were published in Church Slavonic. In the 16th century, the majority of highborn boyars (the then Russian elite) headed by Prince Kurbsky emigrated to Lithuania, fleeing from the repressions unleashed by Ivan the Terrible. In the 17th century, the Schism of the Russian Church caused a massive exodus of Old Believers to the Baltics. Since then, they have become the autochthonous population of the area [11]. From the 18th century, after Peter I prevailed in the Great Northern War, the territories of the Baltics were part of Russia for 200 years. Finally, in the 20 century, they were Soviet republics for another 50 years. All this left a mark on the historical memory of the Russians. A manifestation thereof is the phrase *russkaya Pribaltika* (the Russian Baltic area); coined in the 19th century, it became a substantial element of the Russian collective consciousness [12; 13].

An indicator of a diaspora's stability is its representation in the receiving society. The Baltic Russians have always enjoyed developed institutions [14; 15]. Today, there are 46 Russian associations in Latvia (including the Russian Community, which has a consular status at the UN³), 35 in Estonia and 29 in Lithuania.

An important consolidating factor is the spiritual life of a diaspora, a necessary element of which is historical memory. 9 May, the Victory Day in some Eastern European countries, including Russia, is celebrated with fervour by many residents of the Baltics. The commemoration has had a big part in uniting the Russophone diaspora. This is particularly so in Latvia. The square at the Monument to the Liberators of Riga is covered with flowers on that day. This large-scale act of solidarity creates a powerful impression.

Theatre culture, which has a long tradition in the Baltic States [16; 17], occupies an essential role in strengthening the spiritual unity of the diaspora. In addition to regular tours by leading theatre companies from Russia, permanent theatre companies operate in the Baltics. The Russian theatre in Vilna, established in 1864, held performances until World War I. The Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania has been working since 1946; the Russian Theatre in Riga traces its history back to 1883. In 2006, it was named after Mikhail Chekhov, its director in the 1930s. The Russian Theatre of Estonia has worked in Tallinn since 1948. Before that, from 1928 to 1940, a Russian theatre functioned in Narva.

The core elements of any culture are language and religion [18, p. 116]. Orthodox Christianity is represented in the Baltic States by numerous churches and monasteries. The Cathedral of the Theotokos in Vilnius, built in 1348 by Russian architects to resemble the St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, is one of the oldest Christian sanctuaries in Lithuania; the cathedral is located in the city centre. The 19th-century Cathedral of the Nativity of Christ in Riga, which is opposite the Palace of Justice, and the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Tallinn, situated on Toompea opposite the Estonian Parliament, are also in central locations.

Another factor in diaspora stability is its geographical position, namely proximity to Russia and its highly developed western regions, which are home to the principal cultural centres — Moscow and St. Petersburg. The Baltics' Russian-speaking diaspora is not just an ethnocultural community but part of the people of a big neighbouring country (unlike, for example, the Chinese diaspora in the US). Geographical nearness to the historical homeland is a powerful incentive for diaspora consolidation.

Changes in the social structure of the diaspora

In 1991, when the Baltics gained independence, the Russian-speaking diaspora included eight groups.

³ The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the main bodies of the organisation; it coordinates economic and social cooperation.

Group 1 comprised those who had lived in the Baltics since the pre-war or even pre-revolutionary times, including a large Old Believer community. This group became fully integrated into society. In 1993, about 130,000 ethnic Russians were granted citizenship in Latvia and another 100,000 in Estonia.

Group 2 comprised members of the Russian intelligentsia, including such prominent figures as Yuri Lotman, Boris Egorov, Mikhail Bronstein, David Samoilov in Estonia, Yuri Abyzov, Nikolai Zadornov, Vladlen Dozortsev in Latvia and Konstantin Vorobiev, Grigory Kanovich in Lithuania. They settled in the Baltic republics after the war, as the ideological pressure there was much less intense than in Moscow or Leningrad. They constituted a small but influential group that contributed significantly to the region's cultural development. 'Many researchers whose mother tongue is Russian,' says Tiit Matsulevičs, one of the founders of the Estonian political party Res Publica, 'have done a lot for the development of science [in the country]. Without them, Estonian culture and spiritual life would have lost a lot' [19, 1. 34].

Group 3, which was much larger, brought together engineers, doctors, teachers, economists, actors, journalists, etc.; most came to the Baltics at an invitation from the employer or having taken a job by distribution after graduation.

Group 4 consisted of skilled workers and junior technicians mastering new technologies at large enterprises built during the post-war industrialisation of the Baltic Republics.

The arrival of groups 2, 3 and 4 to the Baltics, driven by production needs, added to the republics' creative richness and human and technological potential. Overall, members of those groups were welcomed by the titular nation.

Group 5 consisted of the officers of the Baltic Military District and their families. The time they spent in the Baltics was regulated by orders: the active military personnel were not free to decide where to live. But retirees, who then enjoyed numerous privileges, stayed in the region by choice, causing little excitement amongst the locals. Military retirees constituted Group 6.

The other two groups had the lowest social status.

Group 7 comprised common conscripts who, after completing their military service, managed to stay in the Baltics, gain a foothold there and move their families, creating a 'plume of immigration'.

Finally, Group 8, which brought together 'last-minute migrants' (about 40 per cent of the diaspora), was the least educated. Its members had come to the Baltics to build economic facilities of all-Union importance: the Muuga Port, the Olaine chemical complex, the Popov Riga Radio Factory, the Ignalina NP and sundry objects constructed in Estonia for the 1980 Olympic Games. Most of these newcomers were rural inhabitants from the country's poorest locations, mainly in the neighbouring Leningrad and Pskov regions; for them, moving to the prosperous Baltics was an undoubted success. The titular nation looked at the members of this group with apprehension [20].

These eight groups differed sharply in many respects, including socio-political views: groups 7 and 8 were socially indifferent, and groups 1–4 engaged in civic participation. All the diaspora leaders came from the latter four groups.

Thus, by the time the USSR was dissolved, the Baltics' Russian-speaking diaspora was heterogeneous in social, ideological and cultural terms. To this day, it remains highly stratified in many regards.

Criteria for legal relations with the state of residence

Lithuania adopted a law on citizenship allowing anyone, regardless of nationality and the period of residence in the country ('zero variant'), to become a citizen. In this respect, the Russian diaspora in Lithuania is homogeneous, whilst in Latvia and Estonia, it consists of three social groups radically different in their socio-political status: citizens of the countries of residence, citizens of Russia and aliens or non-citizens.

Today, 530,000 Russians live in Latvia: 341,000 are citizens of the country, 137,000 aliens and 52,000 Russian citizens. In Estonia, out of 327,000, 127,000 are citizens of the country, 69,000 are aliens, and 86,000 are Russian citizens (6.4 per cent of the total population)⁴.

Not all aliens are Russians: amongst the total Russian population of Latvia, 26.1 per cent are aliens; amongst Ukrainian, 41.8 per cent; amongst Belarusian, 44.9.

In the 1990s, the governments of Latvia and Estonia devoted much effort to limiting the participation of Russian speakers in political life. The alien status, a product of this effort, is a formidable obstacle to the full integration of the Russian diaspora into the life of society, depriving a significant part of the population of representation in the parliament and imparting ethnocentric features to the political regime.

The main motive to refuse citizenship lies in the realm of morality and ethics. Many see the need to apply for citizenship in one's own country as unfair: a self-respecting adult is made to prove his or her social worth to an official.

Aliens are subject to job-related restrictions: they cannot hold positions at public institutions or serve in the army and law enforcement agencies. The most severe limitations are associated with aliens in Latvia, where 80 differences between the rights of citizens and non-citizens have been recorded [21–23].

In contrast to Latvia, Estonian aliens can participate local elections. This legal norm, adopted in response to the ethnic situation in Ida-Virumaa, has ensured the dominance in administrations of many cities, including the capital, of members of the Centre Party, which receives solid support from Russophone voters.

There is a correlation between civic status and age. In Latvia, 86.8 per cent of aliens are over 40 years old. Amongst Russian-speaking youth aged 18–25, 93.4 per cent are Latvian citizens.

⁴ Estonia has the second-largest proportion of Russian citizens after Russia.

Aliens also enjoy some preferences. The EU granted them the right to travel visa-free across the Union from 1 January 2007. After that, the rate of non-citizen naturalisation decreased dramatically. Since 18 June 2008, Estonian and Latvian aliens have enjoyed visa-free travel to Russia as well.

Most Estonians deplore the institution of non-citizenship. According to a study carried out at Tallinn University in cooperation with the Saar Poll polling company in December 2012, 74.8 per cent of Estonians considered the citizenship examination unfair [24].

The most significant socio-economic restriction was that, during the 1990s' privatisation, non-citizens had been denied the right to own large properties. According to the then prevailing opinion of radical nationalist lawmakers, Russian speakers, once deprived of full civil rights, were bound to return to Russia. This did not happen. Denied access to big business, aliens began to set up small and medium-sized enterprises. Whilst the Estonians and the Latvians occupied vacant seats in the state institutions, the Russian speakers successfully ventured into commerce, encouraging Latvia's Prime Minister Valdis Birkavs in February 1994 to seek sympathy from the European Commission because 'Russians are in control of business in Latvia' [quoted according to 25].

The socio-economic criterion

The structural changes in the economy that accompanied the market transition affected skilled workers more severely than anyone else. Radical nationalists are still proud of the destruction of large enterprises, which, in their opinion, helped get rid of 'outside' workforce.

It was widely believed until recently that citizenship and a good command of the language of the titular ethnic group would automatically give Russophones equal economic opportunities. Although knowledge of the state language does give Russian speakers better chances, it does not equate them with the titular ethnic groups. Economic relations turned out to be part of political relations. According to official statistics, the average income of non-titular ethnic groups is 10–12 per cent below that of the titular ones.

About 20 per cent of the diaspora are employed in business and about 15 per cent in education, healthcare, hospitality and household, consulting and information services. About 27 per cent work in industrial production, transport and construction. A large proportion of skilled workers seek employment in other EU countries. Approximately 28 per cent are pensioners, including former military officers. The remaining 8–10 per cent are unemployed.

The Baltics' pension systems have been aligned with the EU norms. Both aliens and Russian citizens permanently residing in Latvia and Estonia are entitled to superannuation if they meet the minimum work experience requirement of

15 years. In 2021, the amount of superannuation was 320 euros in Latvia, 440 in Lithuania and 520 in Estonia. This disparity is accounted for by significant differences between the countries in GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (PPP). According to the 2021 IMF data, GDP (PPP) in Latvia was USD 31,509; in Lithuania, USD 38,824; in Estonia, USD 37,745 (compared to USD 27,930 in Russia). But the way GDP is distributed is no less important.

The Gini coefficient is used to assess economic inequality: the more its value deviates from zero and approaches one, the higher the concentration of wealth in certain population groups. This indicator is calculated based on official data, the shadow economy not taken into account. According to UN data, the 2020 Gini coefficients in Latvia (0.345), Lithuania (0.356) and Estonia (0.342), albeit not as impressive as in the classical Nordic welfare states of Denmark (0.252), Sweden (0.256) and Finland (0.263), pointed to far better performance than that observed in Russia (0.418). Economic inequality is not an acute social problem in the Baltic States.

Yet, the socio-economic polarisation of the Russian-speaking diaspora is stronger than of the titular nation, as evidenced by various rankings: in 2005–2011, seven of Latvia's ten wealthiest people were Russian speakers. This situation was unprecedented for an EU country. Even today, there are many Russophones amongst the Baltic millionaires.

The economic development of the Baltics is affected by three factors. The first is physical infrastructure and the research and academic potential dating back to the Soviet period; the second is the economic reforms carried out in the 1990s under strict public control and the ensuing technical modernisation; the third is financial assistance from the EU.

As early as 2015, the Baltics managed to halve the GDP (PPP) gap between themselves and the 'old' EU member states (EU-15). The receipts of the three countries increased steadily after the 2008 crisis until the 2020 pandemic (Lithuania's economy grew by only 0.34 per cent in 2020).

Over the 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian-speaking population has adapted to their new situation. Of course, not all segments of the diaspora proved equally receptive to the post-Soviet transformations. Members of groups 7 and 8 were the most immune.

The lower-status groups adapt to dramatic events more easily, having more experience and skills in coping with trauma. Moreover, they tend not to take such things to heart; this helps them get used to the new conditions more quickly. Remarkably, members of these groups were the first to send their children to schools with instruction in the titular languages.

A principal source of income for the residents of the Baltic States is cross-border cooperation with Russia, and the border areas have traditionally enjoyed a favourable regime for international trade in goods and services. A European Com-

mission decision of August 2014 exempted cross-border cooperation with Russia from the sanctions regime. In the Baltic States, most of the population of areas bordering Russia is Russophone.

A multi-ethnic yet close-knit Russian-speaking community has emerged in the Baltic States. It has a distinctive common feature: in the first post-Soviet years, on the one hand, it learnt not to be overly opposed to the national legislation and political institutions, and, on the other, it came up with ways to circumvent them. In this sense, there are no substantial differences between the social behaviour strategies of the diaspora in the Baltics and the residents of present-day Russia. In other words, Russians living in these countries habitually employ the psychological mechanism of self-protection that developed under the totalitarian regime — the socio-psychological restrictionism, at which the Russians excelled so much in the 20th century [26]. At the same time, the Ukraine events forced the Baltics' authorities to pay greater attention to the Russophone population. In the last eight years, the political role of the Russian diaspora in the Baltics has markedly increased [27].

The criteria of identity

Today, the difference in identifying oneself with Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia is noticeable not so much between age groups as between those born in the country of residence and those born elsewhere. At the same time, even the latter consider the respective Baltic State their native home where they have worked, created a family, retired or, in other words, lived their whole life. Although for most Russians born in the Baltics, their countries of residence are their motherlands, they identify themselves with Russia (consider themselves Russians by ethnic origin). The Russian-born Baltic residents of the older generation have a strong local identity: they use the demonyms *Rigan*, *Klaipedian* and *Narvian* much more frequently than members of the respective titular nations do.

The middle generation tends to see themselves as Latvian, Lithuanian, or Estonian Russians because their parents are Russian; they are proud of Russian culture, but their social ties with the country are weak, and they have no intention to relocate there.

Although all generations identify themselves with Russia to an extent, the younger one feels a stronger connection to Russian culture than the country in its geographical aspect. The older generation is attached to not contemporary Russia but the Soviet Union. However, even amongst the younger people, many acknowledge the influence of the USSR and its largely Russian culture [28; 29].

Two communities within one society create two information spaces: part of the population receives information in the titular language and others in Russian.

These spaces rarely overlap. The mutual isolation of the titular and Russian-speaking communities gradually decreases as generations change, the younger diaspora members being more receptive to multiculturalism.

The new generation of Russians, the descendants of the 'last-minute migrants' of the 1970s—1980s, lead an active social life in the Baltics. Many of them have never seen their historic homeland. Stockholm or Frankfurt am Main are much closer to them than Moscow or Nizhny Novgorod. They strive to establish themselves socially and economically, not politically. Having obtained Lithuania, Latvian or Estonian citizenship, they do not hurry to the ballot box, which naturally annoys the party leaders seeking more cordial relations with Russia.

Young Russian speakers in the Baltics differ from their Russian peers in their business-like, practical and diligent attitude. As a rule, they speak both the language of the titular nation and English. From the very beginning, they could not rely on anybody's help and had to struggle for survival. Many have acquired expertise in commerce, banking, financial transactions, and information technology and established business contacts in the West.

Still, they are less politically active compared with their peers in the titular nations, having less free time and being more occupied at work. It is easier for them to enter a European or American university; they are more successful in internships abroad. They have little interest in the problem of identity, with their worldview defined by regional as much as national consciousness (for them, the concept of *Baltic Russians* is similar to notions such as *Uralians*, *Kubanians*, and *Siberians*). The Baltics' younger Russian speakers can be defined as having ambivalent ethnic psychology characterised by a lack of uncritical immersion in one's culture and a tendency to distance oneself from a different culture, which denies basic national values. The combination of European business experience with the breadth and universality of the Russian ethnicity largely contributes to the creative potential of the diaspora.

A qualitatively different inter-ethnic relationship is emerging between the younger generations of the Baltics' two largest communities: a dialogue between sovereign consciousnesses is being established. Young businesspeople from the titular ethnic groups, who will soon replace the current politicians, are shaping their social behaviour according to the laws of market rationality. Committed to their national positions, they are less concerned about preserving the Latvian or Estonian languages, which are experiencing increasing pressure from English. They have a greater proclivity for interethnic cooperation. At the same time, the Russophone diaspora supports the trend toward abandoning traditional identities as the global-regional dialectics develop.

Conclusion

Amongst territories bordering Russia, the Baltic region occupies a special place: it is where Russia neighbours the EU. The Union is a major actor (along with the US and China) in creating the new world-system configuration — an

actor closest to Russia in historical and civilisational terms. In this geostrategic region, the Russian-speaking diaspora has considerable potential in terms of Russia-EU interactions. This potential is rooted in the unique features of the diaspora: historical (the 'Russian Baltic area' is over 300 years old); demographic (no other diaspora comprises such a substantial proportion of the population); economic (a strong position in the Baltics' economies); settlement-related (close-knit communities in selected areas contribute to identity preservation); geographical (proximity to Russia); administrative (strong representation in public and municipal authorities); geopolitical (preferred settlement in the capitals, large industrial centres and port cities); infrastructural (a vast network of cultural, educational, information and denominational institutions); linguistic (a significant part of the titular nation speaks Russian, and younger members of the diaspora speak the titular languages).

All this determines autonomy, stability, significance and prospects of the only area in the EU with a strong Russian presence. The Ukraine events have even further increased the role of the Russian diaspora in the Baltics.

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