

**National Defence Academy of Latvia  
Center for Security and Strategic Research**

# **The Possibility of Societal Destabilization in Latvia: Potential National Security Threats**

**Executive Summary  
of the Research Project**

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# **The Possibility of Societal Destabilization in Latvia: Potential National Security Threats**

## **Summary**

### **I. Introduction**

The conflict in Ukraine has brought security issues of the Baltic States, a region that is frequently mentioned as a potential risk region for similar military operations, to the front of international agenda. The possibility of a Ukraine-like scenario taking place in Latvia is suggested by such factors as the latter's geographical proximity to Russia, its comparatively large proportion of Russian speaking population, the fact that it belonged the Russian empire and the Soviet Union historically, as well as the disparity in military potential between Russia and the Baltic States. Taking this into account, research was undertaken from January 2015 to March 2016, to find out the views of the Latvian public on a variety of issues linked to national security. The research was undertaken primarily in the context of a hybrid war, with the goal of finding out what the potential was for the application of non-military means in Latvia to achieve goals which are hostile to the state. The results of the research provided an insight into views on the Latvian state, the sense of national belonging, the influence of the media, an understanding of the most significant threats and the spread of Russia's narratives within Latvia, as well as about Latvia's defence system and policy.

The research was undertaken in four consecutive parts. Initially, 20 in-depth interviews were undertaken throughout Latvia, with the respondents being chosen in proportion to national representation and according to gender, age, ethnicity, place of residence and education. In the first part, the aim of the interviews was to obtain the opinions of all of the largest groups in society about security issues. The second part from January to April 2015 contained a nationally representative quantitative survey with 1025 respondents, using the questionnaire developed based on the data obtained in the interviews. The results of the quantitative survey were used to define the groups which were the most susceptible to Russia's informational and psychological influence. The third part of the research included 20 in-depth interviews with representatives from these particular groups to obtain a deeper insight into their opinions, attitudes and possible behaviour. In the fourth part of the research, a representative quantitative survey with 650 respondents was undertaken in Latgale from January to February 2016, as the concept of a

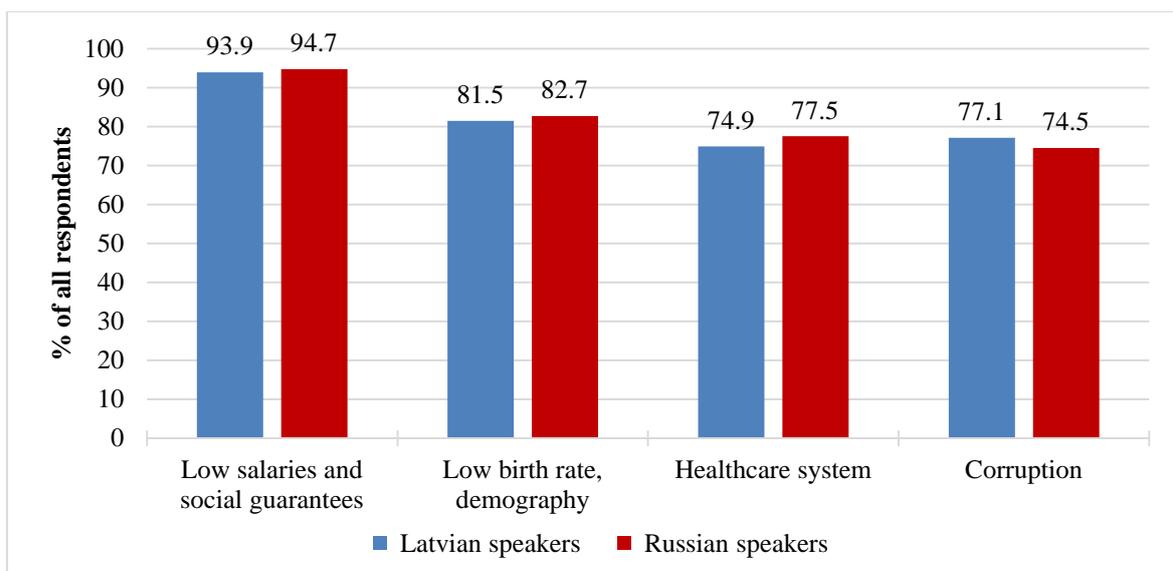
“Latgale People’s Republic”, similar to the “Doneck and Luhansk People’s Republics” in Ukraine, was aired publicly within the context of the crisis in Ukraine. Data collection in the first three parts of research was undertaken in collaboration with the *FACTUM* and survey in Latgale with *SKDS* sociological survey agencies, and included other survey data as well.

This research provides an answer to the question, how great the potential for protest, which could be used as one of the means of new generation warfare, exists within Latvian society. It was established that people on low incomes in Latvia, and those with a low or medium level of education, the unemployed, those involved in physical labour, approximately half of Russian speakers, people living in Latgale and Rīga, 18–25 year olds, as well as people older than 46 years, were the most open to Russia’s influence. The results of the research confirmed that Latvian society really is polarized on ethnic and citizenship issues, as well as on issues which touch on the relationship between the state and society. However, one of the main conclusions from the research was that differences in political views do not create a foundation for broad social destabilization movements, due to the characteristic political passivity within Latvian society, as well as the negative example from the conflict in Ukraine.

## **II. Divisions within society in Latvia**

At the basis of this research is the assumption that all of the most significant divisions within society must be looked at in an integrated way as a potential risk to national security. During the course of the research it was clarified that two significant social divisions, which are a threat to the state’s security exist in Latvia. The first of these relates to the ethnic structure of society, which is referred to in this research as the horizontal division. Latvia is ethnically composed of just under 40 % of ethnic minorities – Russians (26.9 %), Belarusians (3.3 %), Ukrainians (2.2 %), Poles (2.1 %) and other nationalities (3.4 %). It is true that consistent with data from the 2011 census, 62.1 % of respondents use the Latvian language within the family, 37.2 % – the Russian language, and only 0.7 % indicated that they use a different language<sup>i</sup>. Taking into account the small proportion of other languages used in Latvia, the language used within the respondents’ families, not their ethnicity, was used as the main indicator of ethnic division in the analysis of the survey data,.

**Figure 1. The four main threats to Latvian society.**

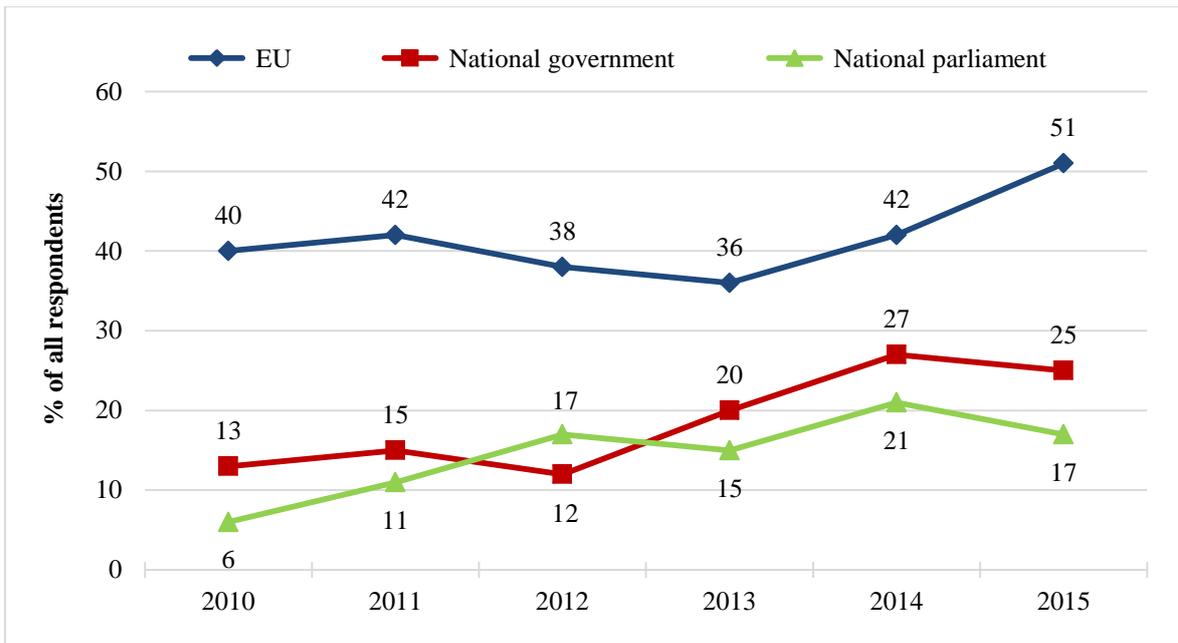


Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

Significant differences in political views between Latvian speakers and Russian speakers were found through a range of questions. Views differed, for example, in relation to Russia's role in the Ukrainian crisis, and relations between Latvia and Russia and the re-birth of fascism in Latvia. However, it should be emphasized that Latvian and Russian speakers can be divided in an even finer way. Within these segments, differences in opinions and attitudes can be established within each language group. As a consequence, it would be incorrect to assume that these are two monolithic groups with opposite viewpoints.

There are also a lot of issues on which Latvian speakers and Russian speakers hold similar views, especially in relation to the improvement of living standards as a priority area for improving Latvia's security, as well as in their understanding of the most serious threats (Fig. 1). In a survey which was undertaken in Latgale in 2016, a question was also included about the flood of refugees into the European Union as one of the most significant threats to Latvian society. 82 % of respondents in Latgale acknowledged that this was a threat, and in this aspect too, it could be concluded that respondents using the Latvian language and the Russian language within the family held similar views.<sup>ii</sup> Overall, a negative attitude towards the politicization of the ethnic division could be seen within society, as 57 % of respondents in the Latgale survey agreed with the statement that: "Rather than solving important problems (for example, social and economic ones), politicians prefer dividing Latvians and Russians".<sup>iii</sup>

Figure 2. Trust in institutions, Latvia.

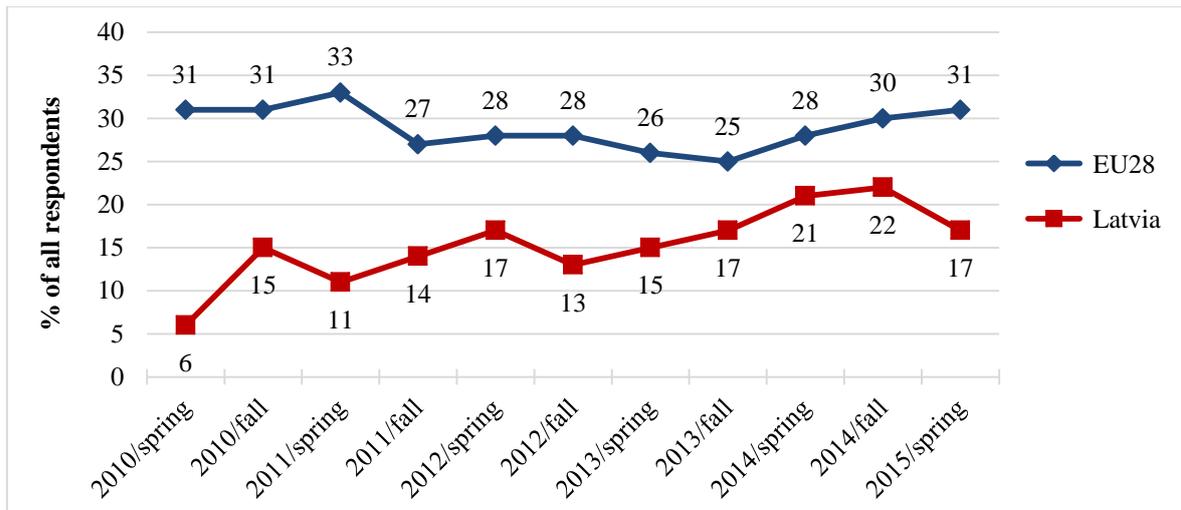


Source: Eurobarometer, STANDARD EB. (2010–2015). To what degree do you trust certain institutions?

Estrangement between society and the state was identified in this research as the second most important dimension of societal division, and will be referred to as the vertical division. An enemy finds it easier to achieve its goals if a society considers its nation as unsuccessful, and is convinced that the political elite does not care about the interests and needs of its people to the degree that the loss of its current statehood will bring about better living conditions. The Russian annexation of Crimea could be mentioned as an example, as this had comparatively high support within the community.<sup>iv</sup> In this way, significant vulnerability in security can develop if war is implemented by non-military means as a consequence of society's dissatisfaction with the state's social and economic development. One of the obvious indicators of this problem is the low trust in state institutions. For example, trust in the national government and parliament in Latvia is much lower than trust in European institutions (Fig. 2).

The depth of the division in the relationship between society and the state can be best perceived in a comparative perspective, which graphically reveals that this problem is more serious in Latvia than in many other EU member states. For example, trust in the state parliament in Latvia is lower than the average in the European Union (Fig. 3), even though this indicator has improved in recent years. But there are other signs which reveal problems in the relationship between the state and society.

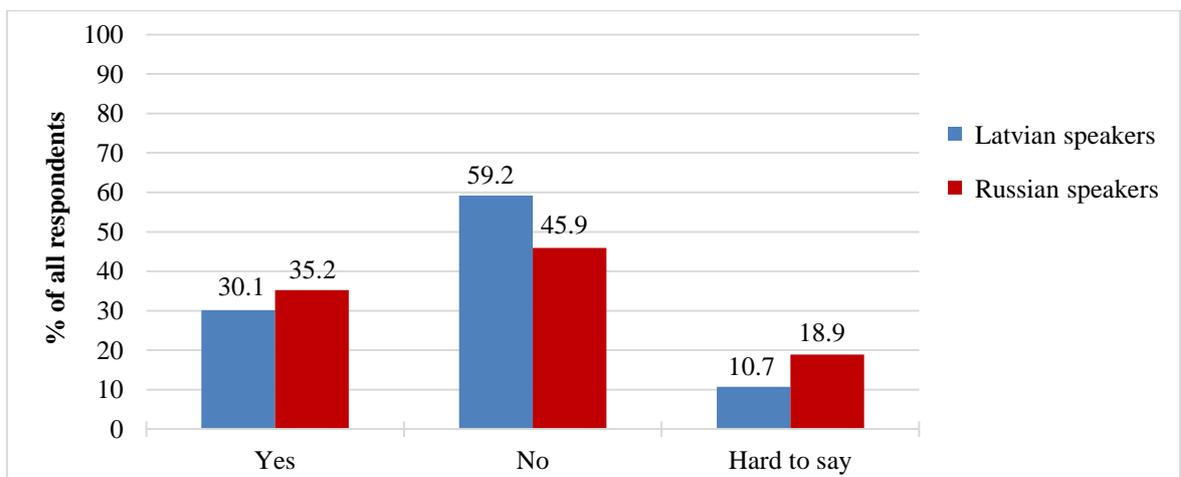
**Figure 3. The number of people who tend to trust the national parliament.**



Source: Eurobarometer, STANDARD EB. (2010–2015). To what degree do you trust certain institutions?

For example, more than 60 % of Latgale’s inhabitants consider that radical changes are needed in the state, and also consider that there is a need to change the political elite.<sup>v</sup> A comparatively high desire by people to leave the state can also still be seen (Fig. 4). Irrespective of ethnic belonging, more than 30 % of the people in Latvia are prepared to leave Latvia for better economic circumstances. The data from the *TNS* survey in April 2015 is similar.<sup>vi</sup> According to the *TNS* survey, 24 % of the inhabitants of Latvia who are of an economically active age would like to leave Latvia to look for work in other countries. 54 % of respondents indicated that they would look for work in other countries due to financial considerations.<sup>vii</sup>

**Figure 4. Would you move to another country if you had an opportunity to earn more and receive greater social guarantees?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

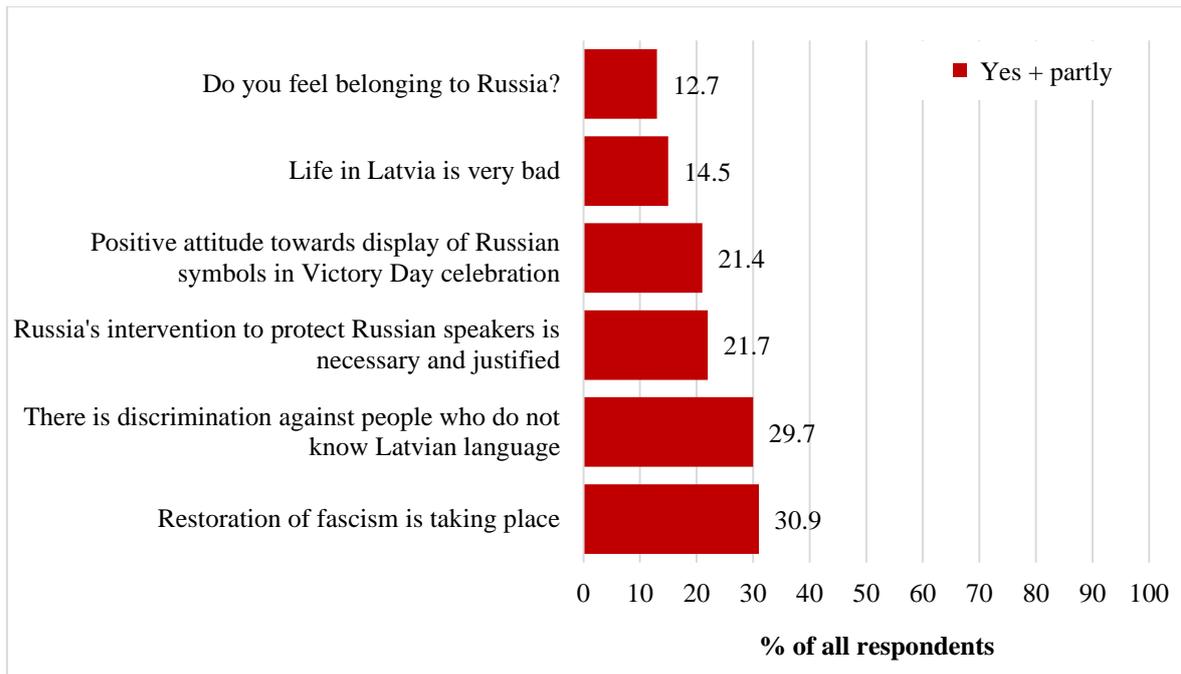
This is a warning signal about problems in the state's relationship with society in Latvia. In conjunction with the ethnic divide, this creates favourable conditions for advancing the narrative about Latvia as, on the whole, an unsuccessful state. Both the vertical as well as the horizontal divide in Latvian society could be used to destabilize the situation. From a national security viewpoint, both problems must be analysed and resolved in an integrated way, as the risk potential could increase if dissatisfaction with social economic processes in the country are co-joined with the problem of ethnic integration.

### **III. The extent of Russia's influence in Latvia**

A number of studies have been done in Latvia and around the world describing and measuring Russia's activities against Latvia. For example, about the narratives which Russia uses against Latvia in the media<sup>viii</sup>, about the activities of Russia's *trolls* on the internet<sup>ix</sup>, about organizations through which Russian finance flows into Latvia for public diplomacy activities<sup>x</sup>. After the annexation of Crimea and the warfare in Eastern Ukraine which followed it, a number of international publications and researchers, including the creators of the BBC film "World War Three: Inside the War Room" have named Latvia as the next potential target of Russia's hybrid war. However, up till now, no research has been conducted which would analyse how effective Russia's attempts to strengthen and increase its influence on Latvian society have been. The results of research by the Centre for Security and Strategic Research show that Russia's influence in Latvia is limited.

It is difficult to foresee the kind of innovative means of hybrid warfare Russia could potentially use in Latvia, but, the types of narratives that Russia uses to create ethnic tension, discredit state administration institutions and to increase support for its activities can be seen through observation of Russia's activities in Ukraine. Already in 2011, Latvia's Constitution Protection Bureau reported that "Russia's foreign policy is targeted at undertaking defamation campaigns against Latvia by blaming it for "rebirth of Fascism", "overwriting the history", or presenting Latvia as a "failed state" with a special emphasis on deliberate discrimination of the Russian-speaking community".<sup>xi</sup> Six questions were used in this study to measure the support for the narratives used by Russia about Latvia (Fig. 5). If necessary, it would be easier for Russia address and mobilize the people who already support these narratives, rather than those who don't agree at all with these views.

**Figure 5. Support for Russia’s narratives about Latvia, all Latvia.**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

One of the goals of Russia’s Compatriot Policy has been to help ethnic Russians maintain their connection with Russia.<sup>xii</sup> To the question: “Do you feel a belonging to Russia?” 12.7 % of respondents throughout Latvia answered “yes, definitely”, and “rather yes”.<sup>xiii</sup> Another instrument which Russia uses to create positive emotions towards Russian culture and history, is the promotion of the 9<sup>th</sup> May or Victory Day celebrations and the use of Russian symbols at this event.<sup>xiv</sup> Of all respondents in Latvia, 21.4 % “positively” and “very positively” value the “display of Russian flags in cars and Georgian ribbons during the May 9th (Victory day) celebrations.”<sup>xv</sup>

Russia also attempts to discredit the state of Latvia, describing the economic situation in Latvia as *catastrophic*.<sup>xvi</sup> The following question was asked to explore support for this narrative: “How do you rate your life in Latvia?”. To this question, 14.5 % of respondents responded that life is “bad” or “very bad”.<sup>xvii</sup> Another important topic in Russia’s Compatriot Policy is the protection of human rights and the protection of Russian speakers in other countries.<sup>xviii</sup> 21.7 % of all respondents “agree” or “partly agree” that “the rights and interests of Russian speakers in Latvia are violated on such a scale, that Russian intervention is necessary and justified.”<sup>xix</sup> An even higher percentage of respondents – 29.7 – “agree” that “there discrimination against people who do not know Latvian language in Latvia.”<sup>xx</sup> Another narrative which Russia has used against the Ukrainian

government and also uses in Latvia, is accusations about the re-birth of fascism.<sup>xxi</sup> 30.9 % of respondents “agree” or “partly agree” with the Russia’s claim that “restoration of fascism is taking place in Latvia.”<sup>xxii</sup>

**Figure 6. Support for Russia’s narratives about Latvia, language and citizenship (%).**

	Language spoken at home		Citizenship	
	Latvian	Russian	Citizen	Non-citizen
Do you feel belonging to Russia? (Definitely yes + Rather yes)	3.6	28.3	9.6	29.0
How do you evaluate your life in Latvia? (Bad + Very bad)	13.2	16.1	13.6	17.0
What is your attitude towards the display of Russian flags in cars and Georgian ribbons during the May 9th (Victory day) celebrations? (Positive + Very positive)	6.1	47.8	14.9	56.6
Are the rights and interests of Russian speakers in Latvia violated on such a scale, that Russian intervention is necessary and justified? (Yes + Partly yes)	10.0	41.3	18.1	40.7
Is there discrimination against people who do not know Latvian language in Latvia? (Yes)	13.9	56.5	24.5	58.4
Russia claims that restoration of fascism is taking place in Latvia (for example, remembrance day of the legionnaires, March 16). Do you agree? (Yes + Partly yes)	17.0	55.1	26.2	59.3
Number of respondents	658	355	871	121

Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

As these narratives about Latvia are mostly being spread by media in the Russian language and especially through Russia’s media, greater support for them can be found in groups within the community which admit that they regularly use Russian media (see the section on “The influence of Russia’s media on Latvian society”). As a consequence, comparatively more Russian speaking than Latvian speaking respondents agreed with these narratives (Fig. 6). However, contrary to the assertions which can often be read about in the foreign media<sup>xxiii</sup> and heard about from foreign experts,<sup>xxiv</sup> Russian speakers and non-

citizens too are not homogeneous groups in this respect. About half of the Russian speaking residents of Latvia don't agree with these six Russian assertions about Latvia or are neutral towards them. In the same way, about half of the non-citizens do not support these Russia's narratives or are neutral towards them, despite the fact that Russia has been for decades purposefully describing non-citizens as the most discriminated group in Latvia.

**Figure 7. Support for Russia's narratives about Latvia in the regions and cities (%).**

	Region / city				
	Riga	Daugavpils	Rezekne	Rest of Latgale	Rest of Latvija
Do you feel belonging to Russia? (Definitely yes + Rather yes)	14.9	33.0	15.6	13.1	9.3
How do you evaluate your life in Latvia? (Bad + Very bad)	5.9	56.1	38.4	37.9	28.2
What is your attitude towards the display of Russian flags in cars and Georgian ribbons during the May 9th (Victory day) celebrations? (Positive + Very positive)	34.0	55.2	45.7	24.3	11.5
Are the rights and interests of Russian speakers in Latvia violated on such a scale, that Russian intervention is necessary and justified? (Yes + Partly yes)	36.0	50.5	11.7	13.1	11.6
Is there discrimination against people who do not know Latvian language in Latvia? (Yes)	35.3	63.2	43.0	43.4	21.2
Russia claims that restoration of fascism is taking place in Latvia (for example, remembrance day of the legionnaires, March 16). Do you agree? (Yes + Partly yes)	48.9	55.2	29.0	29.5	16.7
Number of respondents	323	151	113	383	547

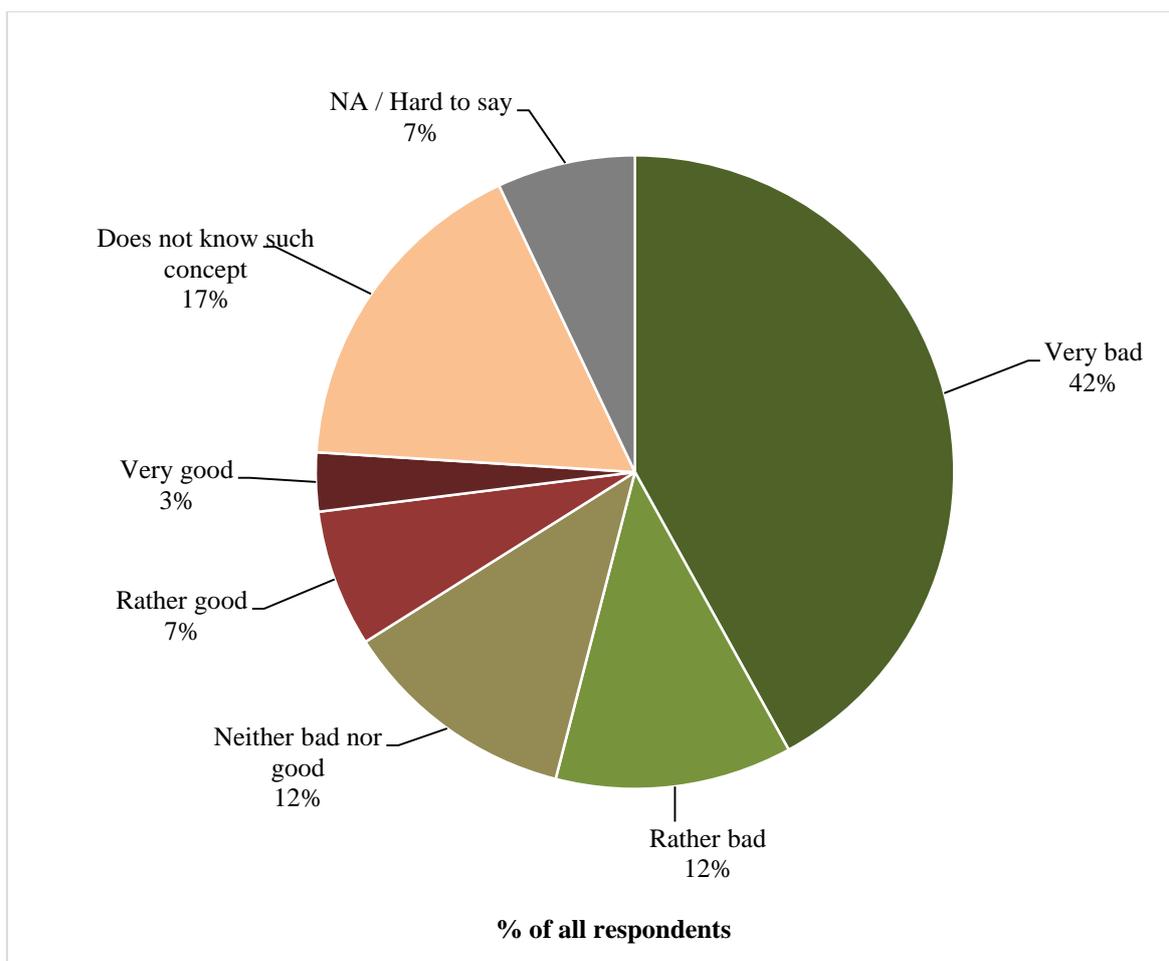
Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia". SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

Looking at other demographic data, varying levels of support for these Russian narratives exist among different groups in society, no group is immune to them. In Latvia, of all income groups, people with low incomes (under 200 euros per month per family member), the unemployed and blue collar workers, are in comparison the most open to Russia's influence. In Latgale, comparatively more people, even with relatively high incomes (over 400 euros per family member), support these narratives too. In Latvia and in Latgale as well, people with a low or medium level of education are more open to these narratives. Of the age groups in Latvia, these narratives are supported least by 26–45 year-old respondents, a little more by those 18–25 years old, and the most by those older than 46 years. In Latgale, dividing up respondents by age, the smallest support is in the age group from 18 to 25 years, while support is equally high among other age groups.<sup>xxv</sup>

As support for these narratives can be found mainly among Russian speaking residents of Latvia, their geographical distribution conforms to the ethnic composition of Latvian cities and regions too. The highest support for these narratives can be found in Latvian cities and region with the largest numbers of Russian speaking residents – in Daugavpils, Rīga, Rēzekne and the rest of Latgale (Fig. 7). Support for these narratives is relatively minimal in the rest of Latvia. However, Rīga is different than Latgale. Subjective satisfaction with life in Latvia is the highest in Rīga. Looking at it objectively, the highest average wages are in Rīga – almost twice as large as in Latgale<sup>xxvi</sup> – and the level of unemployment is also the lowest in Latvia.<sup>xxvii</sup> Good socio-economic conditions are an important pre-condition for societal stability. People who have stable work and an income, who have something to lose and are satisfied with their material circumstances are less likely to protest, take part in demonstrations and to seek change in existing political system. This is why particular attention was focussed on Latgale in the research, rather than on Rīga.

The results of the survey undertaken in Latgale show that even though there is a higher proportion of Russian speakers in this region than elsewhere in Latvia and, therefore, also greater support for Russia's narratives about Latvia, an opposing trend can be observed there as well. The group of respondents who use the Latgalian dialect in everyday communication were identified in the survey, and the survey results show that the highest level of patriotism and support for Latvia's geo-political orientation towards the West is within this group. For example, 78 % of those who speak in the Latgalian dialect indicated that they would support Latvia if Russia started activities directed against Latvia.<sup>xxviii</sup>

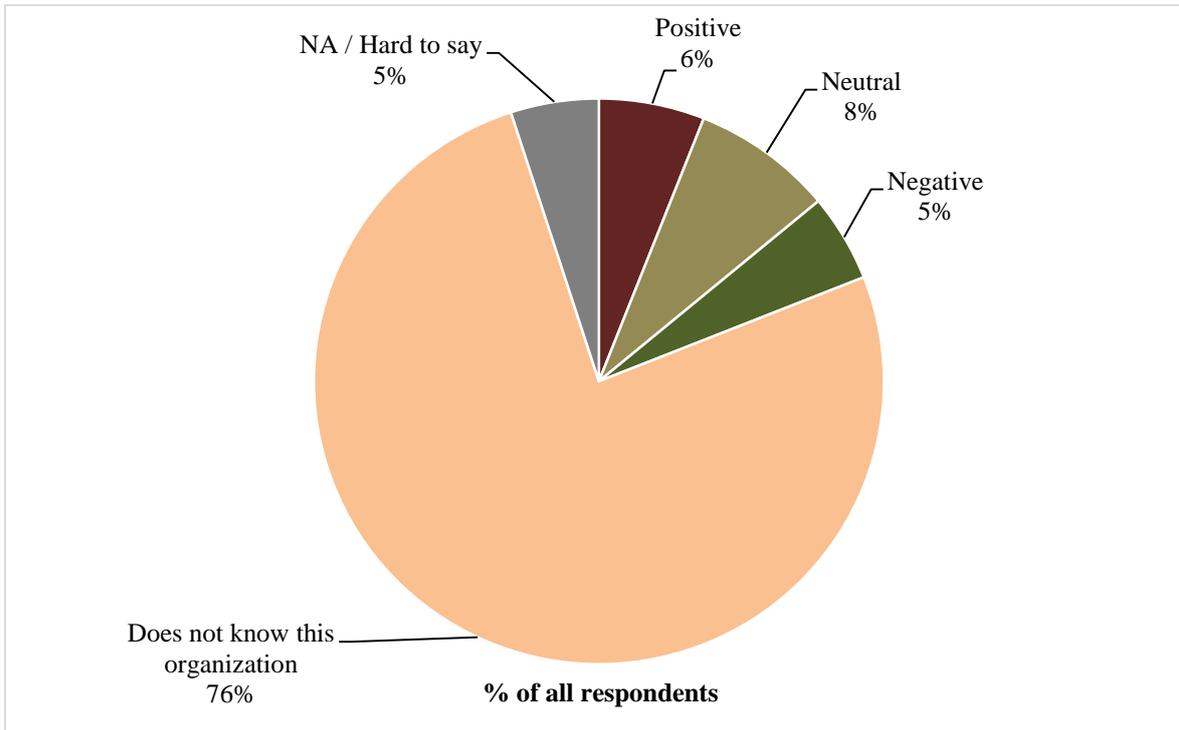
**Figure 8. Attitude towards the initiative “Latgale People’s Republic”**



Source: SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

The results of the research provided the opportunity to establish that support for Russia’s narratives cannot in any way be considered as a basis for separatist tendencies, because support for the “Latgale People’s Republic” initiative in Latgale is low overall (Fig. 8.). 54 % of respondents in Latgale indicated that they had a negative attitude toward this concept, 17 % don’t know anything about it, 12 % were neutral, 7 % found it hard to respond to this question, but only 10 % of the residents of Latgale had a positive attitude towards it.<sup>xxix</sup> On this question too, those who speak in the Latgalian dialect are the most critical, as 83 % of them had a negative attitude.<sup>xxx</sup> As a consequence, one can conclude that the BBC film “World War Three: Inside the War Room” which portrayed a broad uprising in Daugavpils with the goal of establishing the “Latgale People’s Republic,” is based on fantasy, not reality.

**Figure 9. Attitude in Latgale towards The Federal Agency for the Compatriots Living Abroad “Rossotrudnichestvo”**



Source: SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

The research also revealed that, overall, the influence of Russia’s public diplomacy activities is low. The majority of respondents in the Latgale survey do not recognize the local activists who facilitate ideas supporting Russia’s interests, and the number of respondents who rate their activities positively is very low. For example, only about 4 % of respondents in Latgale rate Ilarions Girss and Aleksandrs Gaponenko positively, but more than 55 % had never even heard of these people.<sup>xxxii</sup> Such organizations as the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, “Rossotrudnichestvo”, the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation and others which promote Russia’s interests, had low recognition as well (Fig. 9).

Another important aspect which shows that Russia’s influence in Latvia should not be overrated, is a behavioural analysis of Latvian society. The answers to six questions (Fig. 5), which reflect support for narratives promoted by Russia, allow only the expressed attitudes of the respondents to be examined. But, people’s attitudes don’t always lead to action, which is why indicators that predict people’s future behaviour were also analysed in the Latvia-wide survey (Fig. 10). An analysis of these three indicators indicated that despite the significant support for Russia’s narratives, the possibility of widescale protests and significant support for Russia’s potential provocations in Latvia is unlikely.

**Figure 10. Indicators for predicting future behaviour in Latvia.**

Perception of capacity to influence the world	<b>Low, external</b>
Social norms	<b>Keeping a low profile, not protesting</b>
Current behaviour	<b>Politically and socially inactive</b>

The locus of control, or the perception of capacity to influence the world around one, shows whether people consider that they control events in their lives (a high, internal locus of control), or believe that events in their lives are determined by external conditions (low, external). In Latvia, only 3 % of respondents feel control over events in their lives.<sup>xxxii</sup> People, especially those with low paying jobs, believe that they cannot change anything even in their own working environment. As indicated by one of the respondents: “[people] are afraid to talk, as they could lose their jobs.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> People feel that they have even less control in relation to issues that are far removed from their everyday lives. Many of them just want to be left alone and don’t want to get involved in problem situations: “There isn’t the initiative to dig everything up, all of the problems which are occurring. Everyone wants to live a comfortable and safe life.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> Russia will find it difficult to mobilize people to new and risky activities, when they don’t believe that their actions can influence anything in their lives and in Latvia.

In the greater part of Latvian society, it is not acceptable to stand out among others or to protest. The majority of Latvian society does not wish to stand out from the crowd. Only 1 % of respondents are ready to ignore the existing norms within society and to stand out from others.<sup>xxxv</sup> Protesting is also not socially acceptable: in Latgale 56 % of respondents agree with the assertion that “there’s no point to protests and demonstrations as nothing will change anyway”. Only 24 % disagree with this.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In the nationwide survey, the replies to this question were similar. It would be difficult to mobilize people for broad protests if they don’t wish to stand out and don’t believe that it is possible to achieve changes through protests and demonstrations.

Looking at the currently demonstrated behaviour, the majority of the people in Latvian society are neither socially, nor politically active. Participation in non-government organizations, political parties and interest groups is low, especially in Latgale.<sup>xxxvii</sup> In this respect Latvia is similar to other post-communist Central and Eastern European nations, where there is disillusionment in politics and a low level of political participation within society.<sup>xxxviii</sup> At the same time, people don’t know about pro-Russian organizations and

their leaders and don't follow them. These organizations lack support and mechanisms to mobilize society. Russia would find it difficult to artificially develop the skills and networks needed to mobilize people and to do this within a short period. Reviewing these predictive indicators of future behaviour in Latvia, it is unlikely that people who agree with Russia's narratives would transform this attitude into action.

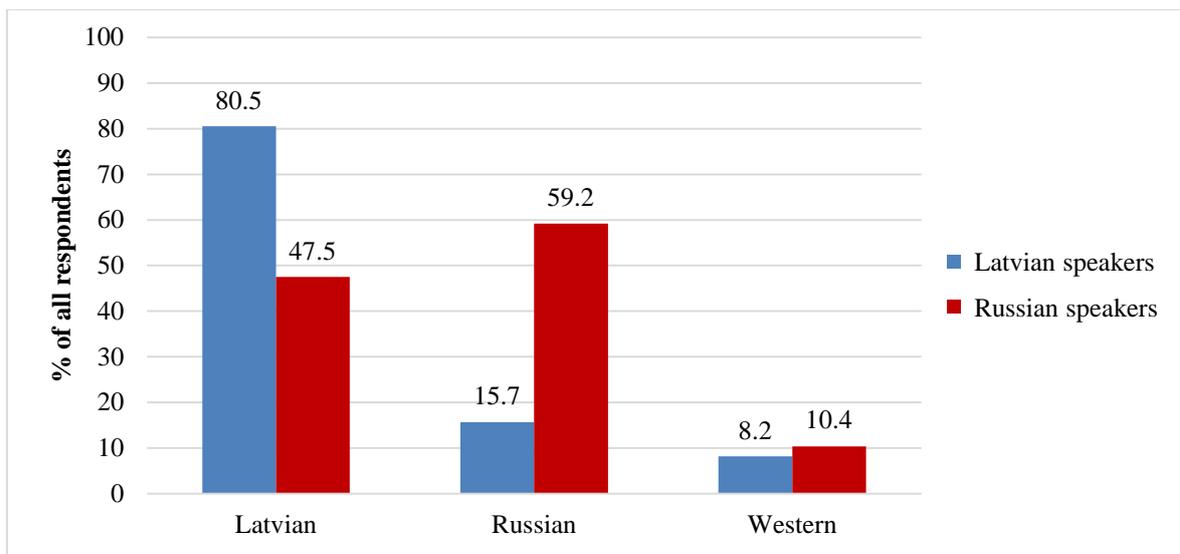
Even though considerable support exists in Latvia for the narratives which Russia is attempting to spread about Latvia, it would be difficult to mobilize society for broad protests and unrest. It is unlikely that support for Russia's narratives will lead to action in Russia's interests. At the same time, potential for polarization exists within society. There are topics which people avoid discussing, such as language, history, integration, non-citizens, so that conflict situations don't arise. These emotional and divisive issues, can lead to deviation from the usual behaviour. Furthermore, the possibility that even a minimal support for aggressive activities against Latvia could be used by Russia to portray it as a widespread support in media also cannot be excluded.

#### **IV. The influence of the Russian media on Latvian society**

The Latvian media space is diverse and saturated. Media content is available mainly in the Latvian and Russian language, corresponding with the nation's ethnic composition. Media content in the Russian language is created by media which is registered in Latvia, as well as media from Russia which is available in Latvia. The Latvian media space is characterized by not only the availability of content in two languages, but also their differences for Latvian and Russian speaking target audiences. These differences in content have developed and have existed since the renewal of Latvia's independence, and this provides the basis for academics and media experts to speak about two information spaces as a long-term problem within Latvian society.<sup>xxxix</sup>

In asking respondents about the origins of the type of media which they regularly consume – Latvian, Russian or Western, it was established that the majority of respondents mentioned the Latvian media as the most frequently consumed – 68 %, while 32 % indicated regular consumption of Russian media, whereas only 8.9 % used Western media.<sup>xl</sup> This corresponds with other research on media consumption which shows that the Latvian media dominates all of the main media categories.<sup>xli</sup> However, differences exist between Latvian and Russian speakers in relation to their use of the media (Fig. 11). Latvian speakers admit that they mainly consume Latvian media, whereas Russian speakers indicated that they consume information from both the Latvian as well as the Russian media space.

**Figure 11. Regular consumption of media.**

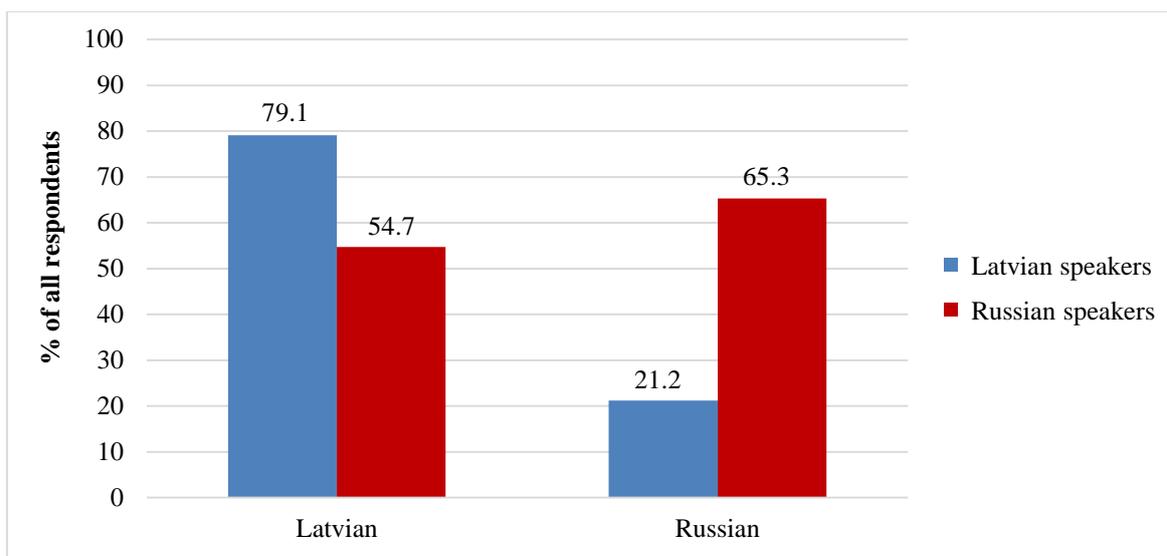


Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

Trust in the media (Fig. 12) is similar to media consumption trends – Latvian speaking residents trust the Latvian media much more than the media from Russia. Even though half of Russian speakers trust the Latvian media, the number of people who believe Russia's media is about 10 % larger in this demographic group. Therefore, one could say that the influence of Russia's media on the Latvian speaking environment is fairly low – only one sixth of this group admit to the regular consumption of Russia's media, and the level of trust in Russia's media is almost four times lower than for Latvian media. The significance of Russia's media among Russian speaking residents is significantly larger, but the influence of the Latvian media can also be observed in this group. However, it should be emphasized that more than half of the Russian speaking residents – 55 % – trust the Latvian media which opens up opportunities for communication with the Russian speaking audience.

Overall, 68 % of Latvian society regularly uses the Latvian media, and 70 % trust the Latvian media (13.7 % trust completely and 56.3 % sooner trust).<sup>xlii</sup> Whereas, in total only 32 % of residents regularly consume Russia's media, and 38 % admit that they trust Russia's media (5.2 % trust completely and 32.7 % sooner trust).<sup>xliii</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that the Latvian media in Latvia has a substantially larger influence than Russia's media. The influence of Russia's media approximately corresponds to the country's ethnic composition, as no more than 40 % of respondents admit that they consume and trust Russia's media.

**Figure 12. The number of people who trust Latvia's and Russia's media.**

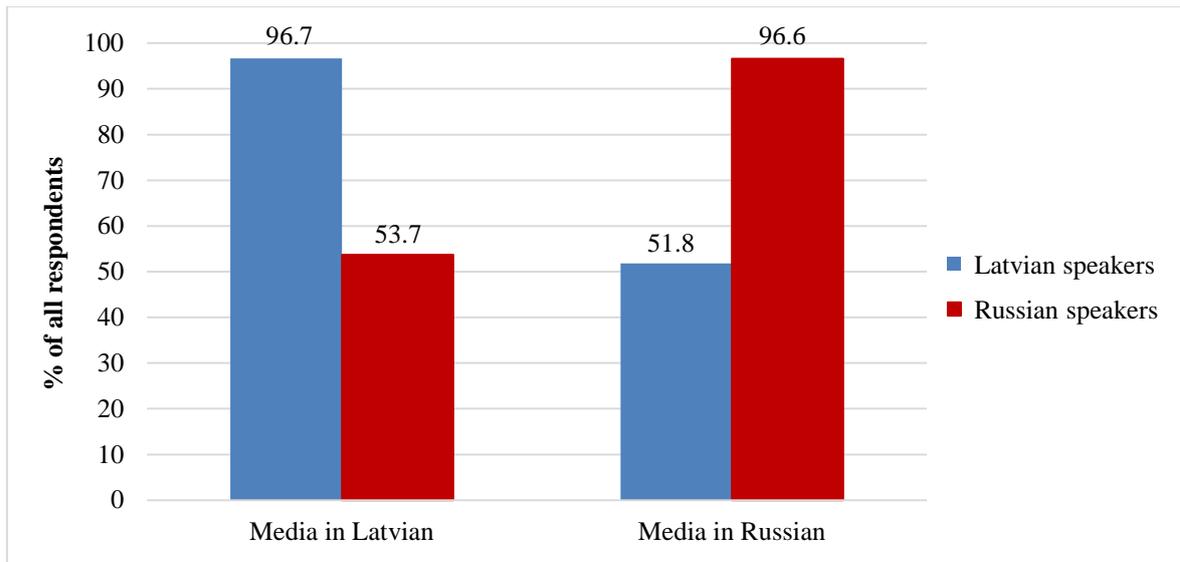


Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

The respondents were also asked about the language in which they obtain information from the media (Fig. 13). Latvian speakers use media mainly in the Latvian language and partly – in the Russian language. Whereas, the data about the use of the media by Russian speaking population is in the opposite proportion – they use media mainly in the Russian language and partly – in the Latvian language. The most significant thing is the fact that 46 % of Russian speakers don't obtain any information from the Latvian language media. At the same time these respondents are open to information in the Russian language from both Latvia, as well as from Russia's media. In the situation of an information war, this is a risk to national security, as approximately one fifth of Latvian society cannot be reached through media in the state language.

Differences in the use of the media correspond with differences in views. Views on the crisis in Ukraine could be mentioned as a striking example. Respondents were asked how they'd describe the conflict in South Eastern Ukraine. From the data obtained, it is obvious that the Latvian speaking group of residents, to a large degree, reflected pro-Western narratives. 65 % of Latvian speakers see this conflict as Russia's war with Ukraine, while 53 % consider that this is a war between the Ukrainian government and separatists, while 45 % consider it to be a civil war. In contrast, the majority of Russian speaking respondents – 66 % – indicated that it is a civil war, 49 % consider that it is a conflict between the Ukrainian government and its citizens, whereas 48 % are convinced that Russia is fighting with the West on Ukrainian territory.<sup>xliv</sup>

**Figure 13. The language in which information is obtained from the media.**



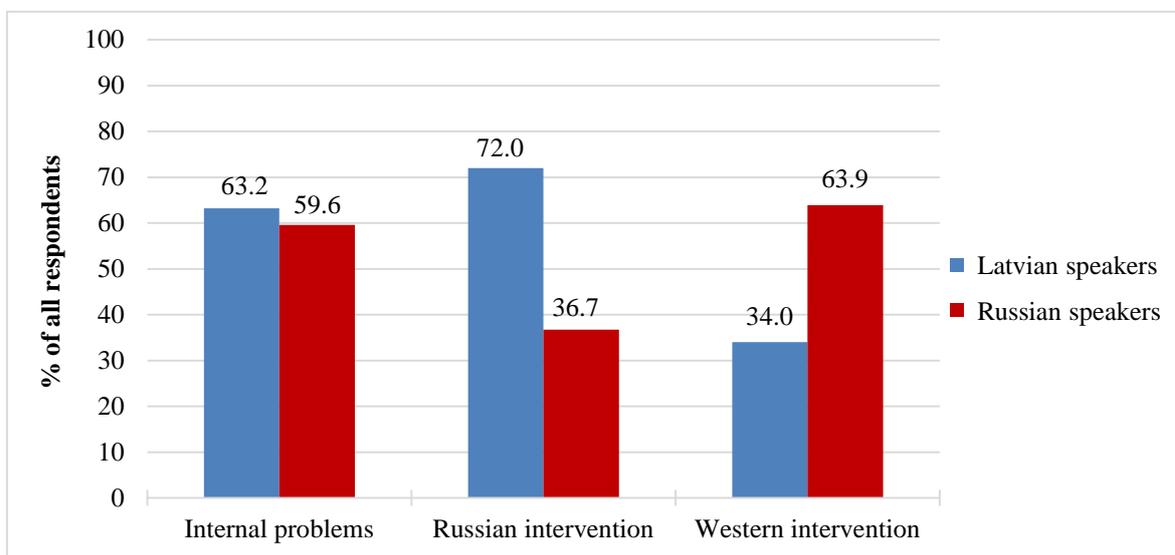
Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

Differences in Latvian and Russian speakers' views on the Ukrainian crisis' geo-political aspects can also be established in the question about its causes (Fig. 14). Both groups, at an approximately equal level, consider that the crisis in Ukraine was caused by internal problems and that the former President, V. Yanukovich was unable to provide prosperity, order and development. 64 % of Latvian speakers and 60 % of Russian speakers agreed with this assertion. But, a difference in opinions could be observed on the question of geo-political intervention in Ukraine's internal matters. 72 % of Latvian speakers were convinced that the crisis was caused by Russia's intervention, whereas on the Russian speaking side, this view was supported by only 37 %. In contrast, 64 % of Russian speakers considered that the root of the problem was intervention by the West, but only 34 % of Latvian speakers agreed with this view.

The survey also provided an opportunity to evaluate the degree to which Latvian society is experiencing concern about Russia's media as a threat to state security. When respondents were asked to evaluate the most important actions which should be taken for Latvia's security and defence (Fig. 15), restrictions on the activity of Russia's media were mentioned as the least important of the options offered. An improvement in the welfare of the people was named as the most important of the actions to be undertaken as 93 % of respondents in Latvia and 86 % in Latgale considered this to be important. The second most important step in the view of the respondents was the provision of access to Latvian media in the borderland zone – 61 % of the respondents in Latvia and 46 % of those in

Latgale chose this. A little less than half of the respondents in Latvia and Latgale agreed that an increase in the size of the Latvian army and the purchase of effective and modern military equipment were important measures for strengthening Latvia’s security and defence.

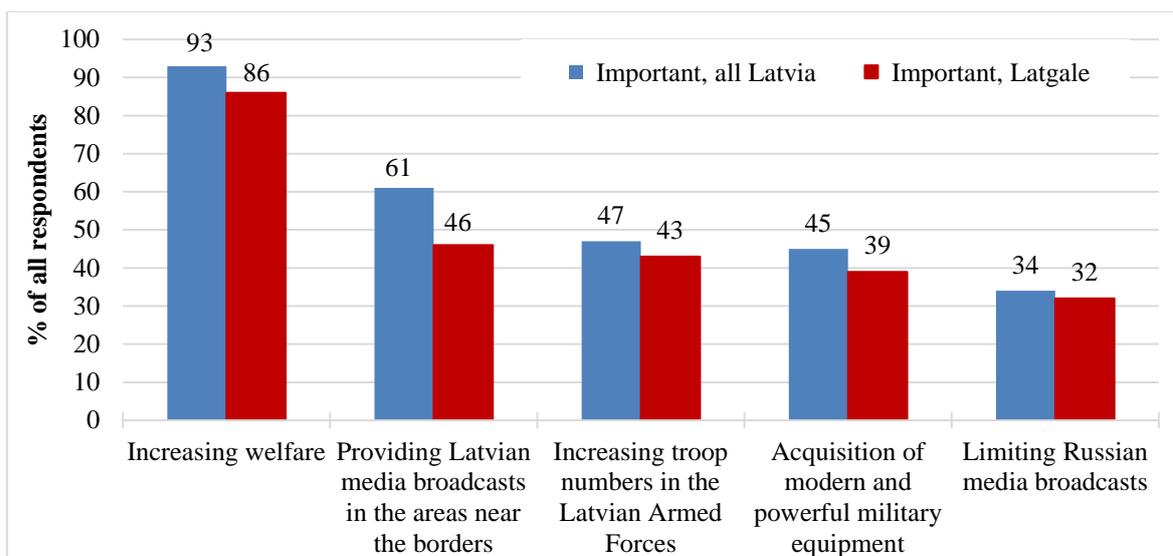
**Figure 14. What caused the crisis in Ukraine?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

By analyzing the data reflected in Figure 15 from the angle of the language used in the family, it can be established that Latvian speakers support all possible measures for improving Latvia’s security to a greater degree, whereas Russian speakers consider that the most important measure is the improvement of the people’s welfare. 93 % of Latvian and Russian speaking respondents in Latvia considered this to be the most significant measure for Latvia’s security and defence. The provision of access to Latvian media in the borderland zone was supported by 73 % of Latvian speakers and 40 % of Russian speakers. An increase in the size of the Latvian army was considered important by 59 % of Latvian speakers and 27 % of Russian speakers. A similar distribution of responses can be observed in relation to the importance of the acquisition of modern and effective military equipment – this idea was supported by 55 % of Latvian speakers and 27 % of Russian speakers in Latvia. A restriction in the operation of Russia’s media was supported by 47 % of Latvian speakers and only 11 % of Russian speaking respondents in Latvia.<sup>xlv</sup> In relation to the role of the media, it should be emphasized that Russian speakers support the strengthening of the Latvian media space (40 % support) much more than a restriction of Russia’s media (11 % support) to facilitate Latvia’s security.

**Figure 15. Which are the most important measures for Latvia's security and defence?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

It can be concluded that Russia's media definitely have an influence on Latvia, especially in relation to the Russian speaking audience, but its scope of influence in the sense of its consumption and trust does not exceed 40 % of inhabitants. The most effective way of decreasing the influence of Russia's media is to strengthen Latvia's media space and to search for ways of maintaining communication with all of Latvia's Russian speaking residents.

## **V. The perception of threats within Latvian society**

The majority of respondents do not consider Russia to be the main threat, as a range of domestic problems are considered to be more important than external threats (Fig. 16). This conclusion is applicable to both the results of the survey undertaken throughout Latvia in the spring of 2015, as well as to the results of the survey undertaken in Latgale in the spring of 2016, although the results of the survey undertaken in 2016 also indicate concern by respondents about the deterioration in the security situation in the EU as a whole. Russia, to a certain degree, is considered a threat – overall 48 % of respondents in Latvia consider this to be the case, whereas 43 % disagree with this. Whereas, in Latgale, Russia's policies are considered a threat by only 26 % of respondents. From the views expressed by participants in the survey undertaken throughout Latvia, Russia's policies are considered to be only the seventh most significant threat, coming in behind factors such as "low wages and a lack of social and employment guarantees" (94 %), "a low birthrate and

the general demographic situation” (82 %), “corruption” (76 %), “problems in Latvia’s health care system” (76 %), “crime” (58 %) and “problems relating to societal integration” (49 %).

**Figure 16. Which are currently considered to be the greatest threats to the inhabitants of Latvia?**

	Latvia	Latgale
Low wages and a lack of social and employment guarantees	94 %	88 %
Influx of refugees into the European Union	–	82 %
Low birthrate and the general demographic situation	82 %	77 %
Problems in Latvia’s health care system	76 %	68 %
Corruption	76 %	68 %
Crime	58 %	61 %
Problems relating to societal integration	49 %	34 %
Russia’s policies	48 %	26 %
Substantial presence of other nationalities in Latvia	36 %	27 %
Separatist sentiments and secessionism in the Latgale region	33 %	30 %
Terrorism	32 %	65 %
Natural disasters and ecological problems	29 %	42 %
Decrease of EU, NATO, and U.S. influence in the world	29 %	28 %
Mandatory use of the Latvian language at work and in government institutions	22 %	26 %

Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

The residents of Latgale consider Russia’s policies to be one of the least important threats. However, it should be noted that those residents of Latgale who use the Latgalian dialect everyday in the home, tend to the view that Russia’s policies are a threat. If Russia’s policies are seen as a threat to Latvia by 37 % of Latvian and only 16 % of Russian speakers, then 50% of Latgale’s residents, who use the Latgalian dialect on a daily

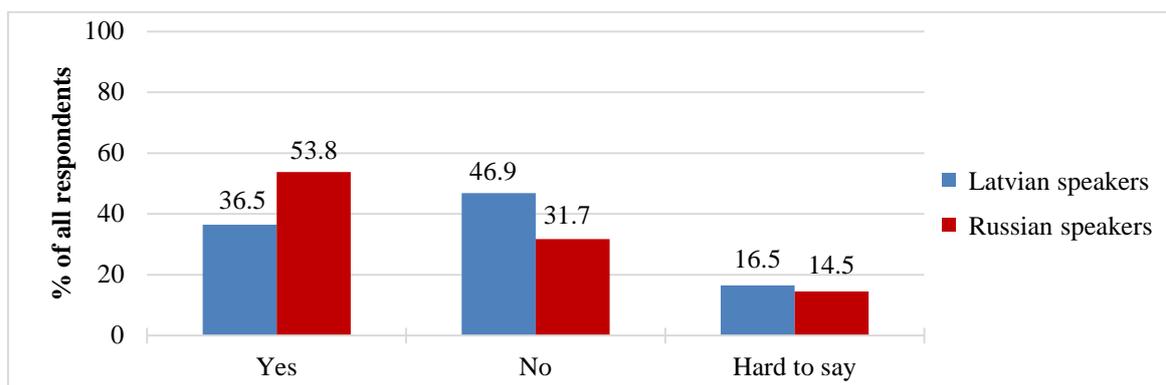
basis, consider Russia's actions to be a threat.<sup>xlvi</sup> However, overall it can be concluded that an absolute majority of respondents mentioned various domestic problems as the most important, not the threats emanating from Russia. The results of the Latgale survey also show that as a result of the flood of refugees and terror acts in European countries, respondents' concerns have increased significantly about the flow of refugees into the EU (and Latvia) and potential terrorist threats.

In terms of threat perception, the views of Latvian speakers and Russian speakers differ only in relation to foreign policy and societal integration (the use of Latvian as the official language; the presence of other nationalities in Latvia). On all other issues, there is hardly any difference between Latvian and Russian speakers. But Russia and its policies, feasibly, is the most divisive topic. Significant differences exist between Latvian and Russian speakers in rating Russia's policies as a threat to Latvia. 64 % of Latvian speakers consider that Russia is a threat, but only 19 % of Russian speakers agree with this.<sup>xlvii</sup>

The survey data also provided an opportunity to clarify the views of respondents about the reflection of potential Russian aggression against the Baltic States in the Latvian media. On this issue, 43 % of respondents looked at the Latvian media critically and agreed that the media tends to exaggerate Russia's hostile intentions against the Baltic States.<sup>xlviii</sup> More than half of Russian speakers – 54 % – and almost one third of Latvian speakers agreed that the Latvian media exaggerates the possibility of military aggression from Russia (Fig. 17).

Latvian society is also split on the question of how Latvia should relate to Russia in the context of the Ukrainian military conflict. Overall, Latvian society is not in a hurry to condemn Russia for its military aggression against Ukraine. Responses to the question "How should Latvia develop its relationship with Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis?" show that 35 % of Latvian society would prefer the maintenance of good relations with Russia and would not wish to get involved in the Ukraine crisis. 26 % of those surveyed would prefer maneuvering between the position of the West towards the Ukrainian crisis and the necessity of maintaining good relations with Russia. Only about a quarter – 26 % of all respondents – preferred strong criticism of Russia for its role in the Ukrainian conflict.<sup>xlix</sup>

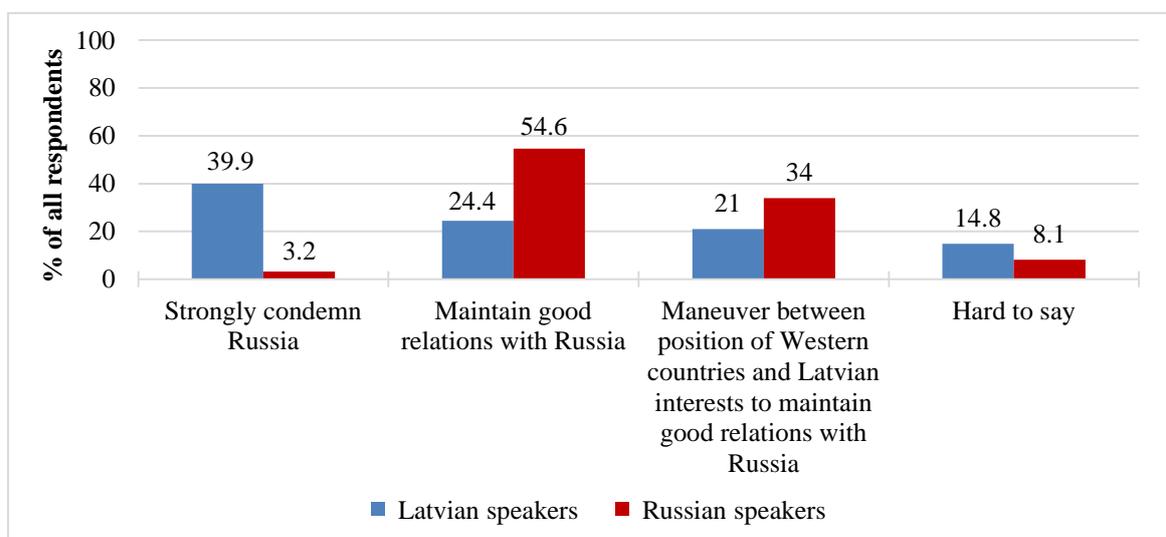
**Figure 17. Does the Latvian language media exaggerate Russia’s potential aggression against the Baltic States?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

Differences between Latvian and Russian speakers on this issue were significant (Fig. 18). As could be expected, Latvian speakers tend to take a stronger position against Russia, but only 40 % chose this option, whereas 24 % of them chose good relations with Russia as their option and 21 % preferred maneuvering between Russia and the West. In this way, opinions on the issue of how to treat Russia in the context of the Ukraine crisis, were divided even among Latvian speakers. Whereas, Russian speakers tended to criticize Russia’s policies towards Ukraine to a lesser degree. A convincing majority – 55 % – considered good relations with Russia as the most important thing, and 34 % chose maneuvering between the West and Russia. Only 3 % supported a strong stand against Russia in connection with its military aggression against Ukraine.

**Figure 18. How should Latvia develop its relationship with Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis?**



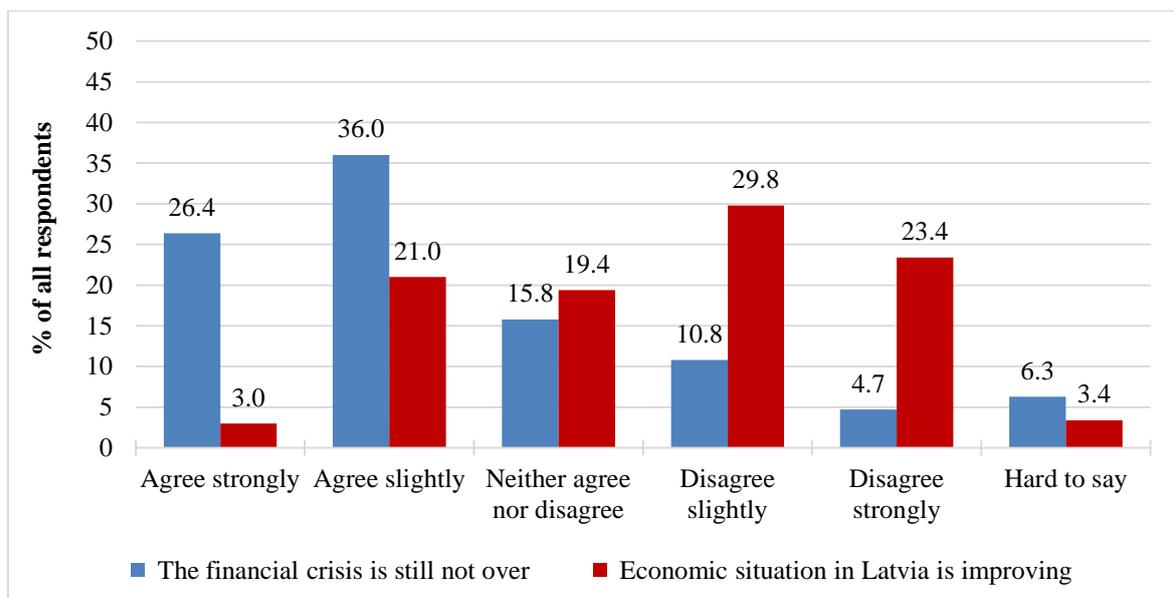
Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

Thus, 48 % of respondents drew attention to Russia as a source of threat, but at the same time more than 70 % of all respondents expressed the view that trade with Russia is of critical importance to Latvia's economy.<sup>1</sup> Latvian and Russian speakers' views on this issue were divided: Russian speakers were more certain that the development of Latvia's economy was dependent on good relations with Russia. Bearing in mind the predominance of the economic issue in Latvian society's view about state security and the dominating opinion that economic cooperation with Russia is important for Latvia's economic well-being, it can be concluded that the majority of society, including a sizable proportion of Latvians, want Latvia's politicians to maintain good relations with Russia.

## VI. Socio-economic aspects of national security

One of the narratives put forward by Russia is of Latvia as an economically weak and undeveloped country. As Latgale is the region with the greatest economic hardship in Latvia, particular attention in the survey was focussed on questions about the economic situation and the evaluation of individual well-being. It is important to emphasize that in analysing this issue it is not necessary to divide up respondents' views separately according to the language used within the family, as on these issues a polarization of views cannot be established. In looking at the economic situation, the majority of respondents in Latgale – 62 % – consider that the economic crisis in Latvia is still not over, but 53 % disagree with the assertion that the economic situation is improving (Fig. 19).

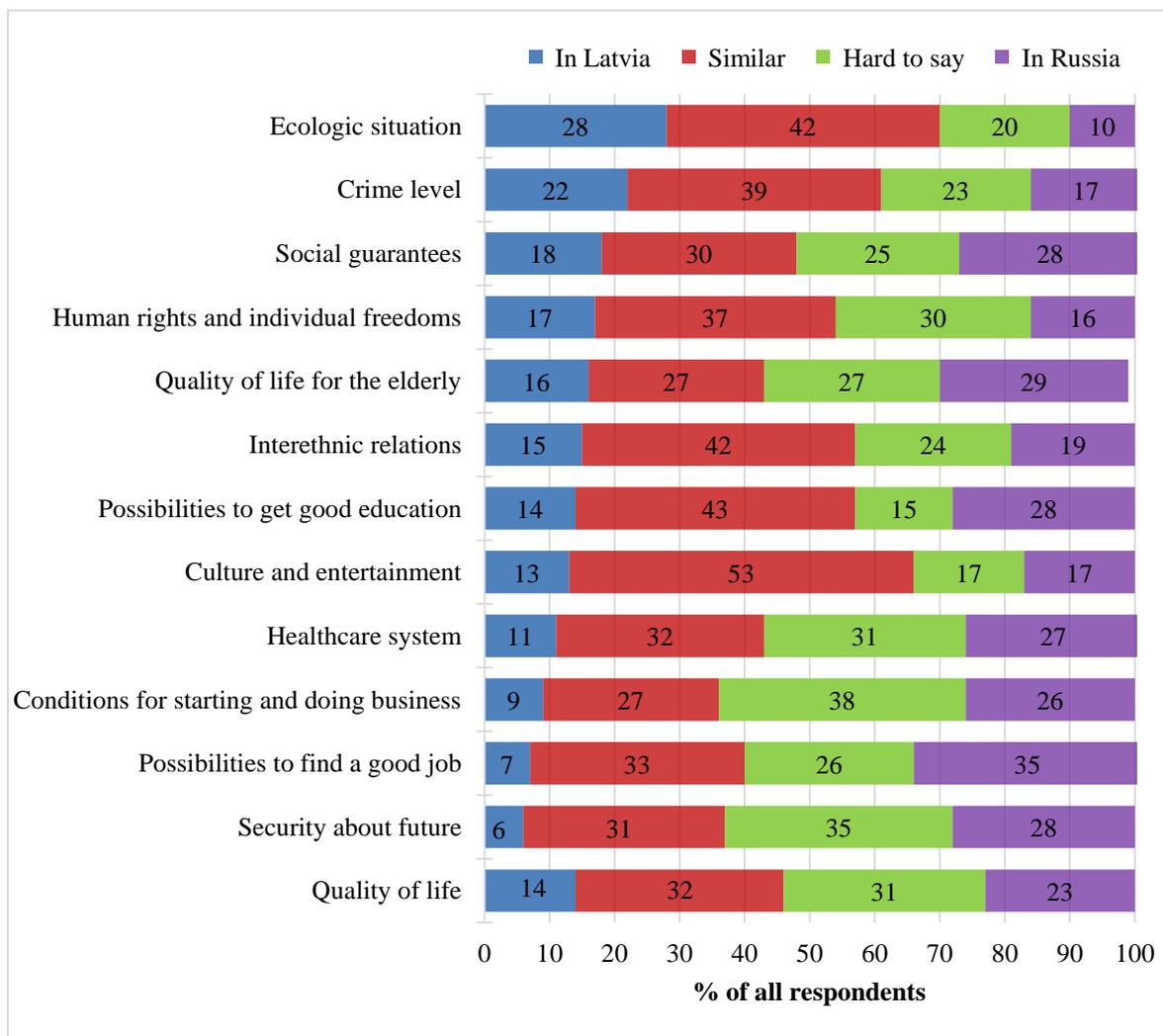
**Figure 19. Evaluation of the economic situation.**



Source: SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

A question on the comparison of the quality of life in Latvia and Russia was also included in the survey (Fig. 20). In this respect different views could be seen depending on the language spoken within the family. So, for example, among Russian speakers the view convincingly dominates that life in Russia is more comfortable in a variety of areas. In their view, better conditions for finding work (35 %), life in one’s old age (29 %), for gaining a better education (28 %), for receiving social guarantees (28 %), security about the future (28 %) and for receiving health care (27 %) exist in Russia. At the same time only 16 % of Russian speaking respondents from Latgale have been to Russia in the past four years, which shows that basic information about living conditions in Russia has been obtained from Russian language media. This shows that Russia’s media has been successful in their communication about a better quality of life in Russia.

**Figure 20. In the opinion of Latgale’s Russian speakers, where is life more comfortable?**



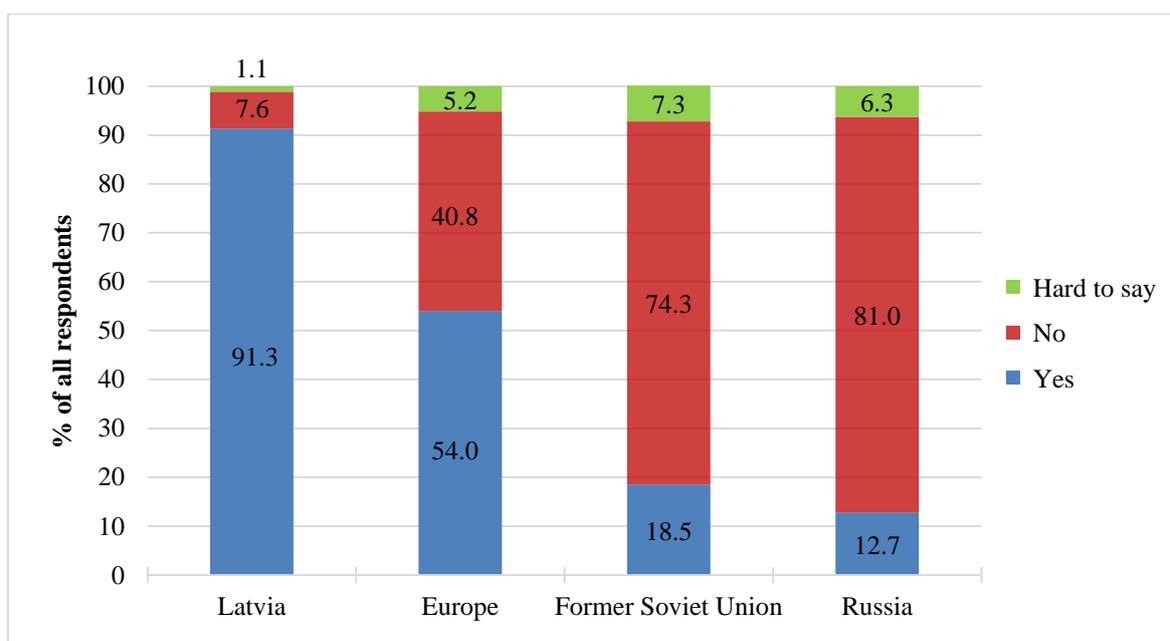
Source: SKDS. (2016). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

Support for the view that life in Latvia and the Latgale region was better during the USSR period than it is now, was found among all of Latgale’s respondents. Only 22 % of the residents of Latgale considered that living conditions improved in Latvia and Latgale after the fall of the USSR, but 38 % of respondents disagree with this viewpoint. Therefore, the assessment of the economic situation within society in Latgale is relatively depressive overall.

## VII. Views on Latvia’s participation in the EU and NATO

To understand society’s attitude to Latvia’s participation in the EU and NATO, which is the main indicator of Latvia’s pro-Western orientation, it is useful to analyse Latvian society’s sense of belonging (Fig. 21). The majority of respondents expressed the opinion that they feel a belonging to Latvia (91 %). A little more than half of the respondents felt a belonging to Europe, and in a section of society there is still a feeling of belonging to Russia and the former Soviet Union as well. As a consequence, a dual identity can be observed in Latvian society, as the feeling of belonging to Latvia was expressed in conjunction with a feeling of belonging to Europe, the former Soviet Union and even Russia. This reflects the dramatic historical changes which took place in Latvia in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and the impression which this left on society’s consciousness.

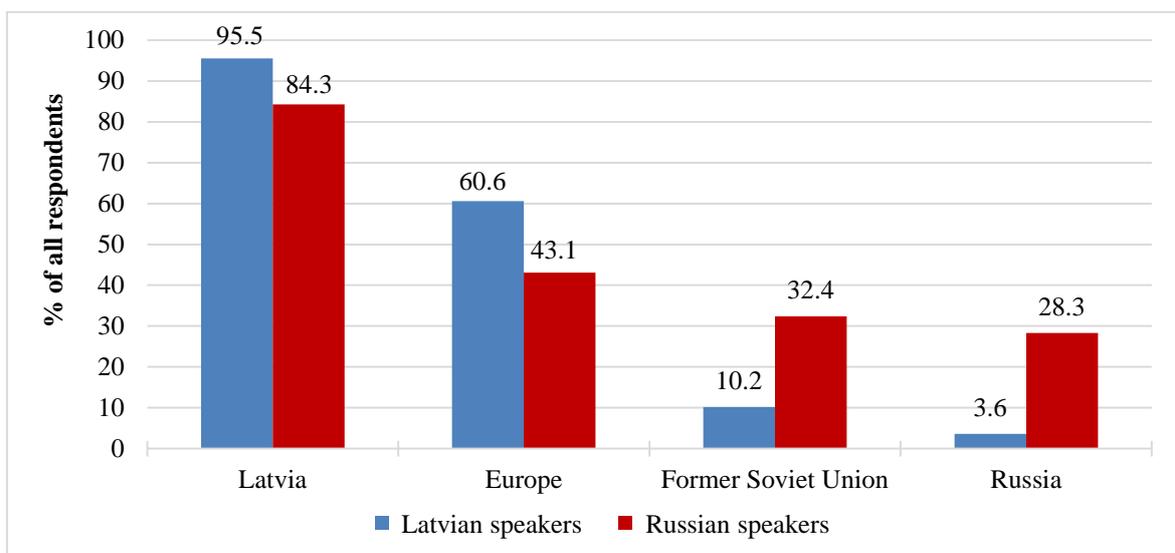
**Figure 21. Do you feel a belonging to Latvia, Europe, the former Soviet Union or Russia?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

In analysing this data in the context of respondents' language use (Fig. 22), it can be concluded that a feeling of belonging to the former Soviet Union and Russia can be observed mainly in the Russian speaking population. In Latgale, where there is the largest proportion of Russian speakers in the region (60.3 %<sup>li</sup>), there is a high feeling of belonging to Europe – 66.9 %<sup>lii</sup>. The highest feeling of belonging to the former Soviet Union can also be observed in this region – 34.6 % – and to Russia – 19.8 %.<sup>liii</sup> The feeling of belonging to Latvia in the Latgale region is 89.1 %<sup>liv</sup> – a little less than the average indicator in all regions. Therefore, Latgale can be considered to be the region where the respondents have the highest level of differing identities. This is also confirmed by in-depth research of the Latgale region where a high sense of belonging to both Latvia (88 %) and Europe (50 %) was found through the survey. A point of interest is that respondents in Latgale feel a greater sense of belonging to the former USSR (32 %), than to Russia (only 19 %).<sup>lv</sup> As a consequence, a certain nostalgia for Soviet times can be observed, which is characteristic mainly of respondents over 45 years of age.

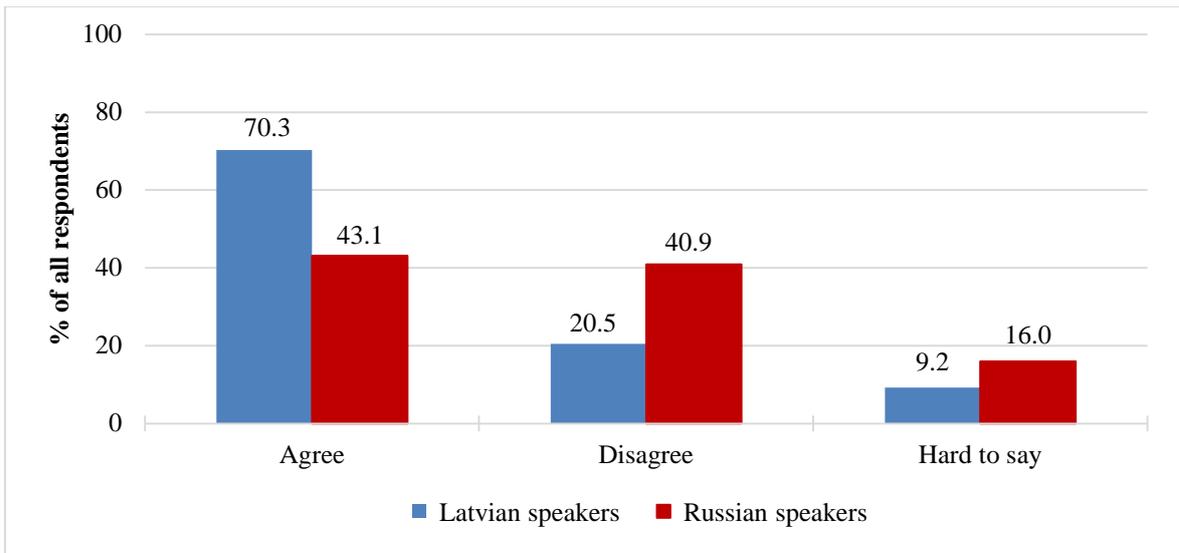
**Figure 22. Do you feel a belonging to Latvia, Europe, the former Soviet Union or Russia?**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR's research on "Current Security Problems in Latvia".

The majority of Latvian speakers support Latvia's participation in the EU and NATO (Figs. 23 and 24), but the views of Russian speakers on this issue are divided. The number of Russian speaking respondents who are for or against Latvia's participation in the EU, is almost equal – 43 % and 41 % respectively. But the number of Russian speaking respondents, who are against Latvia's participation in NATO, is larger than that of the supporters – 48 % and 38 % respectively.

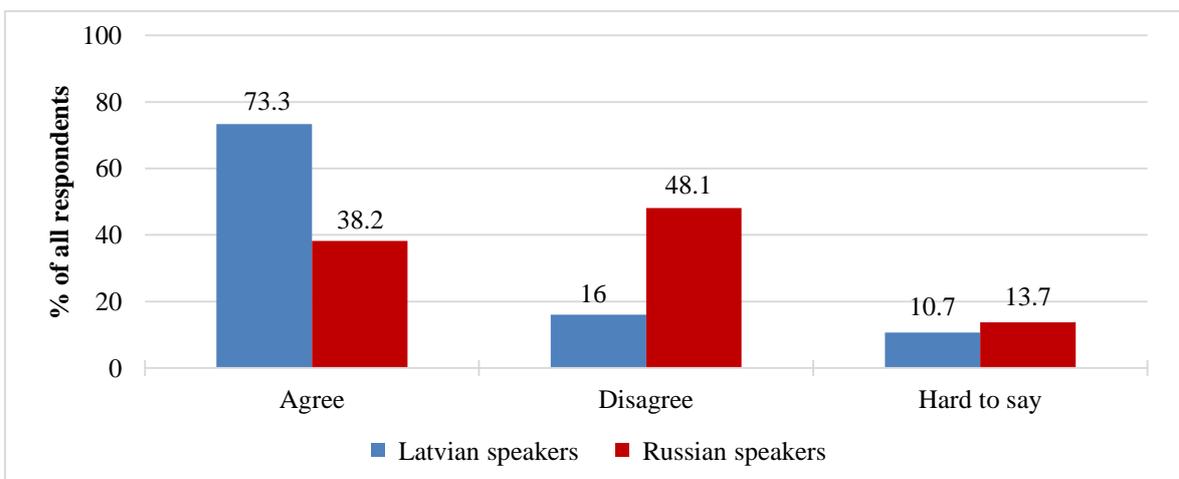
**Figure 23. Latvia joining the EU was the right decision.**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

In-depth interviews with people who were potentially the most open to Russia’s influence provided a deeper insight into their opinions about the advantages and drawbacks which participation in the EU has provided. The most frequently mentioned positive aspects of the EU were the freedom of movement, improvements in infrastructure, EU funding for various development projects, the free movement of goods and the attraction of investors. According to the respondents, the negative aspects were the decimated manufacturing sector in Latvia, emigration, the increased cost of living and the introduction of the euro which has aggravated the economic situation, as in the subjective view of those interviewed, the euro is worth less than the lat.

**Figure 24. Latvia joining NATO was the right decision.**



Source: FACTUM. (2015). Survey for the needs of the NDAL CSSR’s research on “Current Security Problems in Latvia”.

In relation to society's appraisal of Latvia's participation in NATO, the view of the majority is that the decision to join the alliance has been the correct one. But, the number of Russian speaking respondents who are against Latvia's participation in NATO is larger than those supporting it – 48 % and 38 % respectively.<sup>lvi</sup> The view of those living in Latgale about whether NATO strengthens Latvia's security, is divided as 30 % of respondents agree, 39 % disagree and 19 % neither agree nor disagree. Among the supporters those using the Latgalian dialect (58 %) and Latvian speaking respondents (41 %) dominate, with Russian speakers overwhelmingly expressing a negative position, namely, 47 %.<sup>lvii</sup> Bearing in mind the conflicting attitude of respondents towards the EU and NATO, the in-depth interviews revealed that this could be explained by the lack of basic information and understanding in Latvian society about the main areas of competence and implemented policy of the EU and NATO, as well as the main benefits for Latvia. For example, Russian speakers tended to mix up NATO and the UN, which is to a certain degree connected with the similarity of their abbreviations in the Russian language.

## **VIII. Conclusions**

Even though there are large groups in Latvia which support Russia's narratives about Latvia, the analysis undertaken in the research permits the conclusion that the possibility of mass protests and broad, active support for provocations started by Russia are unlikely. The majority of people do not believe that their actions can change anything or that changes can be brought about by protests, and also don't wish to stand out from the crowd. Political and social activism within Latvian society is very low. Therefore, it would be difficult for an external factor to cause mass protests and unrest.

Differences in political views between Latvian and Russian speaking residents can be observed in Latvian society. People have opposing views on a range of issues, for example, about the interpretation of historical events, relations between Latvia and Russia, participation in NATO, the crisis in Ukraine and others. In the sense of geo-political orientation, the Latvian speaking section of society has a more pro-Western world view, whereas Russian speakers tend to be more pro-Russian. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that about half of Latvia's Russian speakers and non-citizens do not support Russia's narratives, and as a consequence they cannot be considered to be homogeneous groups, as there is a diversity of views even among these groups. It is also important to emphasize that the existence of differing political views cannot in any way be interpreted

as a disloyal or hostile attitude towards the Latvian state, as the major proportion of society – both Latvian and Russian speakers – feel a belonging to Latvia.

Despite the fact that the highest support for Russia's narratives can be seen in Latgale, this is not a basis for separatism. A powerful contrasting tendency was also observed in Latgale – speakers of the Latgalian dialect expressed patriotic views and attitudes, supporting Latvia's Western geo-political orientation to the largest degree. It was also established that the effectiveness of Russia's public diplomacy activities in Latgale was low. Consequently, it can be concluded that the BBC film "World War Three: Inside the War Room" and other similar ideas are based on fantasy, not reality.

Overall in Latvian society, among both Latvian and Russian speakers, there is a characteristically high dissatisfaction with political and economic processes in Latvia. Despite the trend towards increasing trust in state institutions, the division between the state and society should continue to be considered to be a national security issue. The high *departure* potential in the circumstances of external threat could significantly reduce the state's capacity for resistance.

The unity of Latvian society, loyalty to the state and sense of belonging to the state could be increased in all groups in society by focussing on problem issues which unify instead of dividing society. There is consensus among Latvian and Russian speakers that issues relating to economic and personal security are more important than external threats to state security. As a consequence, improving the welfare of society as a political priority could be the platform, on which constructive dialogue between Latvians and ethnic minorities could be developed. Of course, the question of whether an increase in economic well-being can really reduce the ethnic division in Latvian society remains open, but it could reduce Russia's opportunities to advance the narrative that Latvia is a failed state.

The views of Latvian and Russian speakers differ on the issue of whether Russia is a threat to Latvia. Even though Latvians tend to look on Russia as a threat to a greater degree, Latvians and the majority of Russian speakers consider that good relations with Russia are significant for Latvia's economic development. Only half of Latvian society consider Russia to be a threat. Almost three quarters of respondents, in one way or another, want Latvia's government to maintain good relations with Russia, despite the military conflict in Ukraine. Therefore, a large proportion of Latvian society, especially Russian speakers, will most likely consider public announcements by representatives of the Latvian government and politicians, in which Russia's policies towards Ukraine are criticized, to be non-productive.

The impact of Russia's media on the Latvian speaking audience is limited, but it does have an influence on the Russian speaking audience. As media content in the Latvian language does not reach almost half of Russian speakers, particular attention should be focussed on communication with this section of society, including an explanation of Latvia's policies in the EU and NATO context. From a state security aspect, the primary task is to strengthen the Latvian media space, providing Latvia's media broadcasts throughout the country and expanding and improving its content.

## Footnotes

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