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**RUSSIA-BALTIC RELATIONS AFTER  
CRIMEA'S ANNEXATION:  
REASONS FOR CONCERN?**

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## Russia-Baltic Relations After Crimea's Annexation:

### Reasons for Concern?

Agnia Grigas, PhD

When the Baltic states gained NATO and EU membership ten years ago, the dual accession was believed to have resolved the security dilemma of the Baltic states vis-a-vis their regional hegemon Russia. In fact, before Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, a territorial assault on the Baltic states seemed implausible even while Moscow's efforts to maintain influence in the Baltic region left no doubt. Nevertheless, like Crimea, all three states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are of strategic importance to Russia. While Crimea serves as the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet and a pathway to the Mediterranean, the Baltic states possess ice-free ports and a window to the West that have made them targets of Russia's expansionism since the times of Peter the Great.<sup>1</sup> As the Russian armies surrounded the eastern and southern borders of Ukraine, where separatist sentiment was stirring, various commentators (myself included<sup>2</sup>) argued that the Baltic states do have reason for concern. On the one hand, as NATO members, the Baltic states have the security of Article V not afforded to Ukraine. On the other hand, Moscow's ability to conduct a shadow war in Ukraine, the increasing Russian military activity in the Baltic sea region, and Vladimir Putin's insistence of protecting Russian 'compatriots' abroad are all legitimate red flags for the Balts and their allies.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Russian Quest for Warm Water Ports". *GlobalSecurity.org*, <<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/warm-water-port.htm>>.

<sup>2</sup> See Agnia Grigas, "How Putin carries out power grab". *CNN*, 4 March 2014, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2014/03/02/opinion/grigas-putin-compatriot-policy-crimea/>>; Agnia Grigas, "Who's next on Putin's List?" *openDemocracy*, 12 March 2014, <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/agnia-grigas/who%E2%80%99s-next-on-putin%E2%80%99s-list-Ukraine-Putin>>. Russia's former oligarch and dissident Mikhail Khodorkovsky also cited the Baltic States as next in Russia's expansionism: BNS, "Khodorkovsky: Baltic states may be next target, if Russia not stopped". *The Lithuania Tribune*, 7 May 2014, <<http://www.lithuaniantribune.com/67672/khodorkovsky-baltic-states-may-be-next-target-if-russia-not-stopped-201467672/>>.

## *Russia's Policies*

The Baltic states have been facing repeatedly Russian military exercises as well as violations of their air space, even following NATO membership. In light of the events in Ukraine, Russia's military activities were increasingly worrisome. For instance, in March 2014 the Russian Baltic Fleet conducted unexpected tactical exercises along the Baltic coast.<sup>3</sup> At the same time Poland invoked Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which entitles any NATO member the right to consultation whenever their territorial integrity, political independence or security is threatened.<sup>4</sup> As a result, NATO increased its air presence in the region by deploying six warplanes to the Baltic states, and sending 600 troops to the Baltic states and Poland to reassure them that the alliance is taking its security commitments seriously.<sup>5</sup> In June, NATO support was demonstrated again when ten member countries (US, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Norway and the UK) kicked off military exercises in the Baltic states with some 4,700 troops and 800 military vehicles. Russia viewed NATO's military build-up as a sign of aggression and deployed its own 24 warships and bombers to Kaliningrad, a Russian territory sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea.<sup>6</sup>

More troubling and potentially with more consequences in the Baltic states than Russia's military show, has been Putin's policy of venturing into foreign territories with the goal of protecting Russian 'compatriots.' The Kremlin justified Crimea's annexation as a means to protect the local Russian population and reinforced the view that Russia's compatriot policy was just a pretext for Moscow's land grab - as had been the case in 2008 in Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>7</sup>

Russia's compatriot policies are officially meant to protect ethnic Russians living in nearby countries. These policies, now outlined in Russia's 'National Security Strategy to 2020', were initially introduced in 2000 during Vladimir Putin's first presidential term. They call for the

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<sup>3</sup> "Baltic Fleet holds exercises in framework of surprise inspection". *ITAR-TASS News Agency*, 3 March 2014, <<http://en.itar-tass.com/russia/721751>>.

<sup>4</sup> "Secretary General announces North Atlantic Council to meet following Poland's request for Article 4 consultations". *NATO News*, 3 March 2014, <[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_107711.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_107711.htm?selectedLocale=en)>.

<sup>5</sup> "U.S. troops head to the Baltics". *The Baltic Times*, 23 April 2014, <[http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/34750/#.U4K\\_a3aWm8s](http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/34750/#.U4K_a3aWm8s)>.

<sup>6</sup> "Russia sends 24 warships, bombers to Baltic drills as NATO stages war games". *RT*, 12 June 2014, <<http://rt.com/news/165464-russia-baltic-drills-nato/>>.

<sup>7</sup> See more in Grigas, "How Putin carries out power grab".

political, economic and – implicitly - military protection of the rights and interests of Russian citizens and ethnic Russians living abroad. Furthermore, Article 61 of the Russian Constitution states that “the Russian Federation shall guarantee its citizens defense and patronage beyond its boundaries.” In other words, Russia will protect Russian citizens outside of Russia’s territory.<sup>8</sup> In practice though, Russian policies include not only Russian citizens, but also ethnic Russians, Russian speakers, and sometimes even simply Russia-sympathizers. Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, when justifying Russia’s actions in Ukraine, stated: “We are talking here about protection of our *citizens and compatriots*, about protection of the most fundamental of the human rights – the right to live – and nothing more.”<sup>9</sup> In March 2014 Putin also stated that the Russians are the largest divided nation in the world and his policies imply that he seems set on reuniting the ethnic Russians into the Russian state.<sup>10</sup> In practice, Russia’s compatriot policy can facilitate territorial gains in the former Soviet republics, particularly where there is a receptive, concentrated, and significant population of Russian speakers, and particularly when territories, where Russian speakers reside, are adjacent to the Russian border.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Russia’s ‘Compatriots’ in the Baltic States*

The Baltic states possess a number of factors that would facilitate Russia’s policies of ‘compatriot protection’: large, concentrated populations of Russian speakers that reside on Russia’s border. Estonia and Latvia have particularly large ethnic Russian minorities, with about 24 percent and 27 percent of the general population respectively, while Lithuania’s Russian population falls just under 6 percent. Percentages of Russian speakers, rather than ethnic Russians, are even higher, since other Baltic minorities, such as the Polish, Ukrainians, Belarusians, or people of mixed ethnic origin, have often adopted Russian as their primary language. Latvia’s Russian speakers made up nearly 34 percent of the population, Lithuania’s Russian speakers totaled 15 percent, and Estonia’s could be as high as 30 percent though

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<sup>8</sup> Jaak Treiman, Juris Bunkis and Daiva Navarrette, “Vladimir Putin’s shopping list: Which country could be next?” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 April 2014, <<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0424-treiman-ukraine-russia-estonia-latvia-l-20140424-story.html>>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> President of Russia Office, “Address by President of the Russian Federation”. 18 March 2014, <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>>.

<sup>11</sup> See more in Grigas, “How Putin carries out power grab”.

Tallinn does not report such figures.<sup>12</sup> While Russian speakers may not identify themselves as Russians, they greatly matter in the post-Soviet context because they often rely on Russian media and are thus more receptive to the Kremlin's viewpoints. Second, Russian 'compatriot' policies target not only Russian citizens or Russians, but a much broader group that has any cultural or linguistic affinity towards Russia.

Over the past decades Russia has expanded great efforts to maintain political, economic, and social ties with the Baltic Russians and Russian speakers. There are numerous cultural, academic, veteran, and other organizations, associations, communities, unions, funds and centers in the Baltic states which are oriented to local ethnic Russians and Russian speakers (61 in Estonia, 81 in Latvia, 97 in Lithuania<sup>13</sup>). Media reports suggest that *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World), a Russian government-sponsored foundation established by Putin in 2007, funds a number of Baltic organizations.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the Russian government also tries to promote educational opportunities for Russian speakers. For instance, the Russian Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science reserves more than 90 scholarships for graduates of Estonian schools to study in Russian universities.<sup>15</sup> Moscow has also actively criticized Baltic minority policies, particularly the decision in the early 1990s by Tallinn and Riga not to grant automatic citizenship to Soviet-era Russian migrants in Estonia and Latvia. While Estonian and Latvian citizenship policy has been much analyzed in the past as a source of tensions with Russia and an arguable violation of Russian minority rights,<sup>16</sup> today it matters once

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<sup>12</sup> Estonia's exact figures of Russian speakers are harder to come by as the Estonian census does not report such information.

Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011".

<[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d)>.

Meilutė Ramonienė (editor), "Miestų gyventojai, gimtąja įvardiję rusų kalbą". *Kalbos Lietuvos miestuose: sociolingvistinis žemėlapis*, <<http://www.kalbuzemelapis.flf.vu.lt/lt/zemelapiai/miestu-gyventoju-gimtoji-kalba/miestu-gyventojai-gimtaja-ivardije-rusu-kalba/>>.

<sup>13</sup> "Каталог «Весь Русский мир»." *Фонд «Русский мир»*, <<http://www.russkiymir.ru/catalogue/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Donata Motuzaite, "Moscow, We Have a Problem in Lithuania". Re:baltica, 19 March 2012,

<[http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money\\_from\\_russia/a/603/moscow\\_we\\_have\\_a\\_problem\\_in\\_lithuania.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money_from_russia/a/603/moscow_we_have_a_problem_in_lithuania.html)>

"Что финансирует в Латвии фонд Путина «Русский мир»?". TVNET/Re:baltica, 22 March 2012,

<[http://rus.tvnet.lv/novosti/kommjentarij/195556-cto\\_finansirujet\\_v\\_latvii\\_fond\\_putina\\_russkiy\\_mir](http://rus.tvnet.lv/novosti/kommjentarij/195556-cto_finansirujet_v_latvii_fond_putina_russkiy_mir)>. Sulev Vedler, "Moscow's Spin Machine in Estonia". Re:baltica, 20 March

2012, <[http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money\\_from\\_russia/a/608/moscow%E2%80%99s\\_spin\\_machin\\_e\\_in\\_estonia\\_.html](http://www.rebaltica.lv/en/investigations/money_from_russia/a/608/moscow%E2%80%99s_spin_machin_e_in_estonia_.html)>.

<sup>15</sup> Embassy of Russia in Estonia <<http://rusemb.ee/relations/>>.

<sup>16</sup> Graham Smith, "Transnational politics and the politics of the Russian diaspora." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, No. 22, Volume 3, 2010, pp. 500-523.

again, as a condition creating a vacuum for Russian influence and facilitating Moscow's policy of handing out Russian citizenships.

### *The Situation in Estonia*

Estonia's Russian minorities are concentrated in two geographic locations. The capital of Tallinn has a Russian population that numbers more than 150,000 and makes up about 37 percent of the capital's population.<sup>17</sup> Tallinn's Russian speakers are an even larger group, totaling 46 percent of the population.<sup>18</sup> As such, left-leaning political parties favored by Russian minorities have long dominated Tallinn's local politics. Since 2005 the two Mayors of Tallinn have been of the Centre Party, which counts 75 percent of ethnic non-Estonians as its supporters.<sup>19</sup> The current Mayor, Edgar Savisaar of the Centre Party, was investigated in 2011 by the Estonian authorities for being 'Moscow's agent of influence' and allegedly receiving 1.5 million euro in party funding from the head of Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin. Tallinn has also experienced notable ethnic tensions. In 2007 Tallinn was rocked by riots of Russian speakers over the decision by the Estonian government to relocate a Soviet war memorial. According to Estonian perceptions, Moscow was instrumental in inciting unrest and discontent by spreading false accounts in the Russian language press that the monument had been destroyed. The Russian Embassy allegedly took part in organizing the riots while Russian activists had been brought in from Russia to partake in the violence.<sup>20</sup>

The second location of concentrated Russian speakers and one that possibly has even more implications for the Russian-Estonian relations is Ida-Viru County. In Ida-Viru County, located in the east near the border with Russia, Russians number nearly 73 percent of the

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Lowell W.

Barrington, "The Making of Citizenship Policy in the Baltic States," *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*, No. 13, Volume 2, 1999, pp. 159–199.

Ruta M. Kalvaitis, "Citizenship and National Identity in the Baltic States." *Boston University International Law Journal*, No. 16, Volume 1, 1998, pp. 231–271.

<sup>17</sup> Population of Tallinn: Total: 411 063, Russians: 150 947. Statistics Estonia: Database, 2014,

<<http://pub.stat.ee/px->

[web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=PO0222&ti=POPULATION+BY+SEX%2C+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY+AND+COUNTRY%2C+1+JANUARY&path=../I\\_Databas/Population/01Population\\_indicators\\_and\\_composition/04Population\\_figure\\_and\\_composition/&lang=1](http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=PO0222&ti=POPULATION+BY+SEX%2C+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY+AND+COUNTRY%2C+1+JANUARY&path=../I_Databas/Population/01Population_indicators_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition/&lang=1)>.

<sup>18</sup> Tallinn City Government "Statistical Yearbook of Tallinn 2013". 2013, pp. 21,

<<http://www.tallinn.ee/g2677s70004>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Keskerakond on mitte-eestlaste seas jätkuvalt populaarseim partei". *Postimees*, 23 September 2012,

<<http://www.postimees.ee/982022/keskerakond-on-mitte-eestlaste-seas-jatkuvalt-populaarseim-partei>>

<sup>20</sup> See more in Agnia Grigas, "Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic states". *Chatham House*, August 2012, p. 2-3, <<http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/185321>>.

population.<sup>21</sup> The region's largest city, Narva, which is also Estonia's third largest city, is 82 percent Russian.<sup>22</sup> However the statistic that perhaps is the most significant and one that can truly be a vehicle for Russia's 'compatriot' policy is the population of Russian *citizens* (holding Russian passports) in the city of Narva. In 2013, 36 percent of the city's population (or about 23,000 people) held Russian citizenship.<sup>23</sup> With Moscow's encouragement, which eased Russian citizenship requirements in 2008,<sup>24</sup> Estonian Russians who remained stateless after Estonia's independence, took on Russian citizenship to qualify for Russian pensions, universities, and visa-free travel to Russia.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the Estonian residence permits enable them to travel freely in the EU's Schengen area, enabling them to take advantage of both worlds. The sizable population of Russian citizens is a security concern for Estonia, since Moscow's policy on protecting Russian citizens is even more explicit than protecting ethnic Russian or simply Russian speakers. Well before annexing Crimea, Russia also pursued a policy of handing out Russian passports in the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in Moldova's Transnistria, before it effectively made these territories into puppet states.

Estonian government officials and commentators generally hold the view that Estonia's Russian minority is not receptive to Kremlin's 'protectionism.' Narva college director Katri Raik argued in March 2014 that Narva's population prefers living in Estonia due to its higher standards of living, especially when compared to neighboring Russian cities, such as, for instance, Ivangorod. According to her, the Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Urmas Paet, and his view that Crimea's scenario cannot be replicated in Ida-Viru was well received by the Narva people.<sup>26</sup> In April, Jevgeni Ossinovski, the current Estonian Minister of Education and

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<sup>21</sup> Statistics Estonia: Database, 2014, <[http://pub.stat.ee/web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=PO0222&ti=POPULATION+BY+SEX%2C+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY+AND+COUNTRY%2C+1+JANUARY&path=../I\\_Databas/Population/01Population\\_indicators\\_and\\_composition/04Population\\_figure\\_and\\_composition/&lang=1](http://pub.stat.ee/web.2001/Dialog/varval.asp?ma=PO0222&ti=POPULATION+BY+SEX%2C+ETHNIC+NATIONALITY+AND+COUNTRY%2C+1+JANUARY&path=../I_Databas/Population/01Population_indicators_and_composition/04Population_figure_and_composition/&lang=1)>.

<sup>22</sup> Narva Department for Development and Economy, "Narva in Figures". 2012, pp. 9, <<http://web.narva.ee/files/5620.pdf>>, pp. 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Matt Withers, "'Narva is not another South Ossetia' Russia says". *The Baltic Times*, 1 October 2008, <<http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/21444/#.U6MkKPmSxZk>>.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Anderson, "Estonia's Russian passport holders show little sign of being 5th column". *bne*, 22 August 2014, <<http://www.bne.eu/content/estonias-russian-passport-holders-show-little-sign-being-5th-column>>.

<sup>26</sup> Katri Raik, "Каждый здравомыслящий нарвлянин хочет жить в Эстонии, а не в России". *rus.DELFI.ee*, 18 March 2014, <<http://rus.delfi.ee/projects/opinion/kazhdyj-zdravomyslyaschij-narvityanin-hochet-zhit-v-estonii-a-ne-v-rossii.d?id=68263463>>.



also an ethnic Russian, equally emphasized that Estonia's Russian minorities are not receptive to Russia's 'protectionism' and that there is no risk of secessionist sentiments, even though he admitted that tensions between the different ethnic populations still remain.<sup>27</sup> It is important not to forget that the Narva city council voted (unsuccessfully) for autonomy in 1993.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, even if today the vast majority of Estonia's Russian population is well integrated into Estonia and does not welcome Russia's interference, Russia's 'compatriot' policies coupled with the presence of a Russian minority do give reason for concern. It is always possible that a minority of Estonia's Russian population, particularly those with Russian citizenship and residing close to the border with Russia - as in the case of Narva - can always be exploited by Moscow in times of political tensions.

### *The Situation in Latvia*

In Latvia the situation concerning the Russian minorities is similar to that of Estonia. The Russian population is even more numerous and is also concentrated in two primary locations. In Riga, the capital, ethnic Russians make up 40 percent of the population,<sup>29</sup> while Russian speakers total nearly 50 percent.<sup>30</sup> While parties representing Russian interests have often been excluded from national government coalitions, Riga's local politics have been dominated by Russophone parties since 2009. In 2009 Nils Ušakovs of the Russian minority party *Harmony Centre* became the first Russian-speaking Mayor of the Latvian capital. His re-election in 2013 demonstrated the solidified political position of Russian minorities in Riga and of *Harmony Centre*. It is unlikely that *Harmony Centre* would be excluded from government coalitions in the future. Unlike Tallinn, Riga has not experienced riots or substantial ethnic tensions. In 2014 a small group protested against educational reforms dictating that 60 percent of courses be taught in the Latvian language in Latvia's Russian

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<sup>27</sup> Jan Puhl, "Estonian Minister: 'No Party Here Would Call for Secession'". *Spiegel Online*, 7 April 2014, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/minister-with-russian-ethnicity-says-estonians-still-united-a-963003.html>>.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson.

<sup>29</sup> Population of Riga: Total: 658,640, Russians: 264,808. Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011". <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff)>.

<sup>30</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d)>.

schools<sup>31</sup> but the issue had clearly lost salience from 2004 when the same issue galvanized thousands of Russian protestors.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to Riga, the region of Latgale also has a high concentration of Russians and Russian speakers. Latgale, located in the eastern parts of Latvia, borders Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania. Russians number more than 100,000 and make up nearly 39 percent of the total region's population.<sup>33</sup> Russian speakers are even more numerous, tallying 55 percent of the population.<sup>34</sup> The region's largest city, Daugavpils, has an even larger concentration of Russians that totals nearly 54 percent of the population,<sup>35</sup> while Russian speakers make up 79 percent of the city inhabitants.<sup>36</sup> Yet unlike in Estonia's Narva, both in the region of Latgale and the city of Daugavpils the number of Russian passport holding citizens is notably small – totaling 2 and 4 percent respectively.<sup>37</sup> During the last few years reports indicate that 600-700 Latgalians apply for Russian passports annually, a trend that picked up during the Latvian economic crisis of 2009<sup>38</sup>. Their motivation is primarily economic – a lower retirement age in Russia and the ability to receive Russian pensions<sup>39</sup>. The small number of Russian citizens, unlike in the case of Estonia's Narva, reduces concerns for Russia's interference in the region. While a small rally took place in April at the Latvian Embassy in

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<sup>31</sup> Steven Musch, "Russian speakers protest in Riga for preservation of their language". *Euroviews*, 13 April 2014, <<http://www.euroviews.eu/2014/04/13/russian-speakers-protest-in-riga-for-preservation-of-their-language/>>.

<sup>32</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "World Briefing | Europe: Latvia: Students Protest Language Law". *The New York Times*, 6 February 2004, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/06/world/world-briefing-europe-latvia-students-protest-language-law.html>>.

<sup>33</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011". <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff)>.

<sup>34</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011". <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d)>.

<sup>35</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011". <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-060.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=57122556-5327-45fe-aa60-c79faac333ff)>.

<sup>36</sup> Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, "Final results of the Population and Housing Census 2011". <[http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px\\_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px\\_path=tautassk\\_11\\_\\_2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px\\_language=en&px\\_db=tautassk\\_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d](http://data.csb.gov.lv/Selection.aspx?layout=&px_tableid=TSG11-07.px&px_path=tautassk_11__2011.gada%20tautas%20skait%c4%ab%c5%a1anas%20gal%c4%abgie%20rezult%c4%81ti&px_language=en&px_db=tautassk_11&rxid=72495edc-7387-43b6-ba3f-ba2598f4540d)>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Людмила Вессель, "Жители Латгалии стабильно получают российское гражданство". *Grani.lv*, 10 January 2013, <<http://www.grani.lv/latvia/31800-zhiteli-latgalii-stabilno-poluchayut-rossiyskoe-grazhdanstvo.html>>.

<sup>39</sup> Евгений Павлов, "Жители Латгалии переходят границу с Россией". *Телеграф*, 10 December 2009, <<http://telegraf.vesti.lv/news/zhiteli-latgalii-perehodyat-granicu-s-rossiei>>.

Russia calling for Latgale to become part of Russia, this sentiment can be viewed as an exception rather than the norm among Latvia's and Latgale's Russian minority.<sup>40</sup>

According a recent study organized by Kant Russian State University, only 24 percent of ethnic Russians in Latvia can be described as 'highly receptive' to Russian policy, while 42 percent of mid-income citizens and youths have adapted to Latvian society and 34 percent are indifferent to their political or social status.<sup>41</sup> The views of Latvia's Russians towards Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine have also demonstrated that Russian speakers are not a unified group and have diverging opinions. The marketing and public opinion research centre SKDS conducted a poll in Latvia in April 2014, which showed that 36 percent of Russian speakers believe that Russia's interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine is not justifiable, while 44 percent supported Russia's actions.<sup>42</sup> Overall, the success of Russian minorities in local politics, the low numbers of Russian citizenship holders, and the seeming integration into Latvian society, suggest that Russian minorities would not be highly receptive to Russia's 'protectionism' and 'compatriot policies.' Nonetheless, the large and concentrated numbers of Russian speakers in Latvia's eastern regions that border Russia do suggest that Riga may have reasons for concern regarding Moscow's 'compatriot' policies.

### *The Situation in Lithuania*

Lithuania has considerably lower percentages of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers than Latvia and Estonia. Still there are three regions with sizable populations. Like Tallinn and Riga, Lithuania's capital also has a higher proportion of Russian speakers than the rest of the country. The population of Vilnius is 12 percent Russian,<sup>43</sup> while nearly 27 percent are

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<sup>40</sup> Edgars Skvarik, "Rally at Latvian Embassy in Russia propagates Latgale as part of Russia". *Latvian information agency LETA*, 17 April 2014. <<http://www.leta.lv/eng/home/important/6E450BC2-FB58-4FDA-860C-EEBA83F9BB6C/>>

<sup>41</sup> Александр Носович, "Русские в политическом процессе Латвии: Круглый стол в Калининграде". Analytical portal RuBALTIC.Ru, 5 December 2013, <<http://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/russkie-v-politicheskom-protse-latvii-kruglyy-stol-v-kaliningrade05122013/>>.

<sup>42</sup> "Опрос: В Крымском вопросе у русских Латвии нет единодушия". *Mixnews*, 11 April 2014, <<http://www.mixnews.lv/ru/society/news/2014-04-11/148108>>.

<sup>43</sup> Statistics Lithuania, "Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief". 2012, pp. 23, <<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/download/attachments/64881183/Lithuanian%202011%20Population%20Census%20in%20Brief%20rev.pdf?version=1&modificationDate=1350633816572&api=v2>>.

Russian speakers<sup>44</sup>, many of whom include Lithuania's ethnic Poles (23% of ethnic Poles report that their mother tongue is Russian)<sup>45</sup>. Lithuania's Poles total under 7 percent of the population – just a percentage more than Lithuania's Russian population of nearly 6 percent.<sup>46</sup>

The city of Klaipėda, which is located close to the Russian territory of Kaliningrad, also has a higher concentration of Russian minorities than the Lithuanian average. Here Russians make up nearly 20 percent of the population,<sup>47</sup> while Russian speakers total 28 percent.<sup>48</sup> In March 2014 a petition was launched on an activist website *avaaz.org* for Klaipėda to join Russia, a position that Putin insinuated in 2005 and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev voiced during Lithuania's independence movement.<sup>49</sup> However, the petition barely gathered 100 signatures and does not reflect the sentiments of the vast majority of Lithuania's Russian population. Lithuania's third concentration of Russian speakers is found in the eastern small city of Visaginas, where the total population is approximately 20,000. It is the only Lithuanian city which has a Russian population of over 50 percent,<sup>50</sup> while Russian speakers number 77 percent of the population.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, Lithuania's recent media reports suggest that there is no receptiveness among the Visaginas population to the Crimean model.<sup>52</sup>

Politically, the situation in Vilnius and Lithuania is more complex than the relatively small numbers of Russian speakers imply. Since mid 2000s ethnic tensions concerning Russian speakers have become overshadowed by the Polish minority question, particularly the

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<sup>44</sup> Meilutė Ramonienė (editor), "Miestų gyventojai, gimtąją įvardiję rusų kalbą". *Kalbos Lietuvos miestuose: sociolingvistinis žemėlapis*, <<http://www.kalbuzemelapis.flf.vu.lt/lt/zemelapiai/miestu-gyventoju-gimtoji-kalba/miestu-gyventojai-gimtaja-ivardije-rusu-kalba/>>.

<sup>45</sup> Meilutė Ramonienė (editor), "Miestų gyventojų gimtoji kalba". *Kalbos Lietuvos miestuose: sociolingvistinis žemėlapis*, <<http://www.kalbuzemelapis.flf.vu.lt/lt/zemelapiai/miestu-gyventoju-gimtoji-kalba/>>.

<sup>46</sup> Statistics Lithuania, *Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief*, 23

<sup>47</sup> Statistics Lithuania, *Lithuanian 2011 Population Census in Brief*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Meilutė Ramonienė (editor), "Miestų gyventojai, gimtąją įvardiję rusų kalbą". *Kalbos Lietuvos miestuose: sociolingvistinis žemėlapis*, <<http://www.kalbuzemelapis.flf.vu.lt/lt/zemelapiai/miestu-gyventoju-gimtoji-kalba/miestu-gyventojai-gimtaja-ivardije-rusu-kalba/>>.

<sup>49</sup> "Kremliaus provokacija: prijunkime Klaipėdos kraštą prie Rusijos". *Lietuvos Rytas*, 12 March 2014, <<http://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvos-diena/aktualijos/kremliaus-provokacija-prijunkime-klaipedos-krasta-prie-rusijos.htm>>.

<sup>50</sup> Statistics Lithuania, "Gyventojai pagal tautybę, gimtąją kalbą ir tikybą". 15 March 2013, pp. 2, <[https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv\\_kalba\\_tikyba.pdf/1d9dac9a-3d45-4798-93f5-941fed00503f](https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Gyv_kalba_tikyba.pdf/1d9dac9a-3d45-4798-93f5-941fed00503f)>.

<sup>51</sup> Meilutė Ramonienė (editor), "Miestų gyventojai, gimtąją įvardiję rusų kalbą". *Kalbos Lietuvos miestuose: sociolingvistinis žemėlapis*, <<http://www.kalbuzemelapis.flf.vu.lt/lt/zemelapiai/miestu-gyventoju-gimtoji-kalba/miestu-gyventojai-gimtaja-ivardije-rusu-kalba/>>.

<sup>52</sup> Vytenė Stašaitytė, "Mitų griovimas Visagine: ar tai lietuviškasis Krymas?". *DELFI.lt*, 23 May 2014, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/mitu-griovimas-visagine-ar-tai-lietuviskasis-krymas.d?id=64856511>>.

upsurge in Lithuania's Polish party called *Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (EAPL)*. In 2008 the Polish party 'absorbed' the main pro-Russian political party, called *Russian Alliance*, and since then both parties jointly participate in elections for the Lithuanian Parliament (2008, 2012), municipal councils (2011), and the European Parliament (2014). The coalition for these elections is dominated by the EAPL. The Polish minority, with its leader Valdemar Tomashevski, has been raising issues of minority discrimination, courting Lithuania's ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, and positioning themselves as the 'voice' of all minorities in Lithuania. In the May 2014 Presidential elections Tomashevski collected 8.2 percent of the vote – a high figure considering Lithuania's total Polish population is only 6.6 percent. Tomashevski also recently embarked on a pro-Russian state policy (he openly supported Russia in the Crimea question, and was spotted wearing a Russian symbolic St. George's Ribbon, etc.). Consequently, more and more of Lithuania's Russian speakers are supporting the *Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania*,<sup>53</sup> making Russian political parties less relevant. However, the Polish minority is relevant to Lithuanian-Russian relations, because as a group Lithuania's Poles often speak Russian, follow Russian media, favorably perceive Russia's policies, and could be 'receptive' to Russia's influence.

A qualitative study of the Lithuanian Institute of Ethnic Studies, has concluded that Lithuania's Russians (as well as Latvia's Russians) are generally not receptive to Russian state policies. For the most part, they identify themselves not so much with the Russian state, but with Russian *culture*. Meanwhile, the elder generation identifies itself not with modern Russia, but with the culture of the Soviet Union.<sup>54</sup> However, both the young and the old generations identify with Russian history and its interpretation, for instance the 9th of May - celebrating the Soviet victory in the Second World War - is an extremely important event for the self-consciousness of all Russian generations.<sup>55</sup> Because many ethnic Lithuanians and other Balts negatively perceive the Soviet victory, which resulted in the occupation of the Baltic states, the issue has become a source of ethnic tensions in all three Baltic states.

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<sup>53</sup> Lithuanian National Radio and Television, "Rinkimų rezultatai ir tautinės mažumos: kokias išvadas galime daryti?". *LRT.lt*, 28 May 2014, <[http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kalba\\_vilnius/32/44532/rinkimu\\_rezultatai\\_ir\\_tautines\\_mazumos\\_kokias\\_ishvadas\\_galime\\_daryti\\_](http://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kalba_vilnius/32/44532/rinkimu_rezultatai_ir_tautines_mazumos_kokias_ishvadas_galime_daryti_)>.

<sup>54</sup> Monika Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė, "Rusai Lietuvoje ir Latvijoje: europinio, regioninio ir lokalaus identitetų sąveika". Lietuvos socialinių tyrimų centro Etninių tyrimų institutas, *Etniškumo studijos*, No. 1 Volume 2, 2011, pp. 100, <[http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/EtSt\\_Fr%20C4%97jut%20C4%97-Rakauskien%20C4%97\\_2011.pdf](http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/EtSt_Fr%20C4%97jut%20C4%97-Rakauskien%20C4%97_2011.pdf)>.

<sup>55</sup> Frėjūtė-Rakauskienė, 107.

Nevertheless, according to research by Kant Russian State University, only 5 percent of Lithuanian Russians are completely unsatisfied with living in Lithuania and could thus be receptive to Moscow's policies, while the vast majority is either completely satisfied or likely to be satisfied.<sup>56</sup> Similar to the results of Latvia, also the majority of Russians in Lithuania consider Lithuania their homeland or the city where they were born, rather than Russia or the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup> Today it is unlikely that Lithuania's Russian minority poses a significant reason for concern for the Lithuanian state. However, this generally positive situation may change if the Russian government will embark on policies stirring up and politicizing ethnic tensions, perhaps even via the Polish minority.

### *Conclusion*

Russia's recent annexation of Crimea and its efforts to destabilize the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, under the pretext of protecting Russia's compatriots, have rightly raised concerns among the Baltic states and their allies. All three Baltic states have Russian and Russian speaking minorities, which tend to be concentrated close to Russia's borders. However, as this analysis has demonstrated, the Baltic Russian population appears to be reasonably integrated into their local societies and at least on the surface does not appear to be receptive to Russia's 'protectionist' policies. When considering the issue of the Baltic Russian population, the greatest and most evident concern today stems from the sizable numbers of Russian passport holding citizens among Estonia's Narva population. Nonetheless, NATO membership, the recent military support demonstrated by NATO countries, as well as United States' \$1 billion European Reassurance Initiative appear to assuage immediate fears. Still, Kremlin's 'compatriot' policies should be carefully watched in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius. As the unrest in eastern Ukraine has demonstrated, Russia no longer relies on traditional military might, but rather on a 'shadow war', using proxy military groups. The resulting military conflict can thus be made to resemble civil war or separatist efforts by the local Russian population. Furthermore, the Kremlin's tactics do not require enlisting the local majority, but often just a minority to support its separatist aims.

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<sup>56</sup> "Русские Литвы: Кто мы такие?". Литовский Курьер, 8 November 2011, <<http://www.kurier.lt/русские-литвы-кто-мы-такие/>>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

One should not only concentrate on the policies of the Russian government. The Baltic states should also assess their policies towards their Russian (and in the case of Lithuania: also Polish) minorities. The recent political mobilization and success of Estonia's and Latvia's Russian minority parties is not an issue of concern. On the contrary, the active and especially *transparent* participation of Baltic Russians in Baltic political life will make the Baltic societies more cohesive and less vulnerable to Moscow's opaque influence. If the Baltic states are unable to fully integrate their Russian speaking populations or lose the soft power war with Russia for their loyalty, then it is feasible that these territories could become a target of Russia's pressure or influence. Modern military, security and political policies increasingly prioritize 'winning the hearts and minds' of populations and this focus should be prioritized in the Baltic states, when they consider their Russian speaking minorities.

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