

Orthodoxy and politics in Latvia

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In 2011 researcher Nils Muiznieks in his analysis on Latvian - Russian relations pointed out that Orthodoxy in Latvia is an important social phenomenon and provides an channel for Russia to exercise its soft power in Latvia.²¹⁷ The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov in his interview for the newspaper "Rossijskaya Gazeta" in 2008 noted that Russia's relations with Russian compatriots living abroad would actually be based on the principles of soft power and one of the sources of soft power were the values that were attractive in the eyes of inhabitants of another country. When a foreign policy is based on such values a certain country can also affect political decision-making in the target country. Orthodoxy as a value can serve as such a resource; it is evident that over recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has been actively involved in the implementation of Russia's foreign policy.

However, in case of the Latvian Orthodox Church (LOC), we cannot equivocally state that it would let itself be used as an instrument of Russian foreign policy in all situations. The situation is not black and white, rather it is colourful and dependant on various factors, including the moderate and often neutral position on political issues by Metropolitan Alexander, the current Head of the LOC. Nevertheless, this does not exclude a possibility that in future the LOC's willingness to respond to the Kremlin's political appeals might increase.

The scholars have paid attention to the Latvian government's relations with the Orthodox Church during years 1920 to 1940. Nonetheless the period from year 1991 to the present day has barely been an object of study from political science perspectives. Nils Muiznieks in the book "Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's accession to the EU and NATO" indicated that there had been three major events in Latvia related with Orthodoxy: exhibition of the Tikhvin icon in Riga in 2004; the ROC Patriarch's Alexy II visit in Latvia in 2006 and inclusion of Metropolitan Alexander, the Head of the LOC, into the official delegation of the President of the Republic of Latvia for presidential visit in Russia in year 2010.²¹⁸ Muiznieks linked of each of these events with particular political events or a wider context. In addition to the abovementioned political considerations, this article will address some settings of Russia's policies towards its compatriots living abroad as well as relationships between the pro-Russian political parties in Latvia and the Orthodox Church. Latvian Old Believers do not have a "leading Patriarchate" in

²¹⁷ Muiznieks N., *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics Since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, 2011, p.63.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Moscow as opposed to the LOC; however, due to Latvian politician recent attention to Latvian Old Believer congregations this article will include the Latvian Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church (LPOOC) in its scope.

Historical background The Latvian Orthodox Church

Today the Latvian Orthodox Church constitutes the third largest Christian denomination in Latvia after Lutherans and Roman Catholics. The first Orthodox Church building in the eastern part of the Latvian territory was built in the mid-12th century. The Chronicle of Henry (Heinrici Cronicon Lyvoniae) heralded that by the end of 12th century Latgalian lord Talivaldis and his sons had been baptized in Orthodoxy; while in Vidzeme and Kurzeme Orthodoxy was established at the end of 18th century.

Although in the 18th century the Latvian territory was incorporated into the Russian Empire, initially Orthodoxy was the faith for the small Russian population. The situation changed when in the middle of the 19th century around 65,000 Latvians converted to Orthodoxy.²¹⁹ In 1844 the Russian emperor issued a decree that ordered to hold worships for Latvians in Latvian language.²²⁰ Establishment of an autonomous Latvian Orthodox Church began after the Republic of Latvia gained independence on November 18th, 1918. The first Council (meeting of parish representatives) met in Riga in 1920 and elected the Archbishop of Penza Janis (Pommers) as the Archbishop of Riga and all Latvia. An idea to establish a Church that would be completely independent from the Moscow Patriarchate circulated within the Council, however, most of the representatives voted in favour of the Moscow Patriarchate's jurisdiction. In 1921 the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Tihon passed a decree for Archbishop Janis (Pommers) recognizing the LOC's autonomy in administrative, educational and economic affairs. That meant the LOC would remain under the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate; nevertheless, for the first time in history there was a national Orthodox church in Latvia with canonical rights.²²¹ Part of the Latvian society and the government at that time looked on the Orthodox Church with suspicion, seeing it as a structure of the pre-revolutionary Tsarist regime. Left-wing political groups accused Archbishop Janis for supporting Monarchism, while the right-wing monarchists - Russian émigrés - attributed him Latvian nationalism.

²¹⁹ Gavrilin A.V. (ed.), *Orthodox Church in Latvia. Historical Essays.*(1) Riga: Baltic-Slavic Community for Cultural Development and Cooperation, 1993, p.3.

²²⁰ See *Orthodox in Latvia*, Latvian Bible Society. <http://www.bibelesbiedriba.lv/religiju-enciklopedija/kristietiba/pareizticiba-latvija.html>.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

The government took no hurry to recognize the Latvian Orthodox Church; a similar situation was in Finland, Estonia and Poland, where the Orthodox Churches were pushed to alienate from the Moscow Patriarchate. Estonian President K.Pets came up with the idea to combine the Orthodox Church in the Baltic countries in a single Autocephalous Church, but the idea was not implemented. The Estonian Orthodox Church moved under jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchate in 1923²²², but the LOC maintained links with the Moscow Patriarchate. In 1926 the "Regulation of the Orthodox Church's position in the Republic of Latvia" was adopted; it emphasized the autonomy of the LOC; the regulation stated that "The Head shepherd is completely independent of authority of any existing Church outside Latvia"²²³ Nevertheless, the canonical link to the Moscow Patriarchate (MP) was not eliminated. The Moscow Metropolitan Sergy in 1927 published a statement, a call to be loyal to the Soviet state. In the same year Pommers wrote to Sergy that: "We, who have stepped outside the Soviet citizenship and confirmed our faithfulness to the Republic of Latvia with an oath, in fact, have to be considered as gone from the Russian Orthodox Church, which requires loyalty to the Soviet ruling in Russia."²²⁴ The canonical link to the MP remained; however, the LOC distanced itself from support to the Soviet ruling in Russia. After death of the Archbishop in 1936, the Synod of LOC took over the governance and in the same year the Council decided to join the Constantinople Patriarchate's jurisdiction. The fourth Census that took place in 1935 listed 174,389 Orthodox believers, which formed 8.94% of the population.²²⁵

After the Soviet occupation in 1941 the Moscow Patriarchate decided to eliminate the autonomy of the LOC. During World War II the German forces supported orthodoxy in occupied territories in Latvia and Russia, in order to turn people against Soviet rule.²²⁶ In time period between 1944 and 1970 the Soviet authorities closed down 60 Orthodox parishes and many priests were repressed.

After restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia the LOC was again able to decide on its jurisdiction and further development. In December 1992 the All-Latvia Orthodox Conciliar Meeting came together and decided to maintain autonomy under the jurisdiction of the MP. In 2010 the All-Latvia Conciliar Meeting elected the Synod and adopted the statutes of the Church. In 2010 the

²²² Gavrilin A.V. (ed.), *Orthodox Church in Latvia. Historical Essays.* (5) Rīga: Filokalia, 2006, p.30.

²²³ Strods H., *Metropolīts Augustīns Pētersons: dzīve un darbs, 1873-1955.* Rīga : Latvijas Universitātes žurnāla "Latvijas Vēsture" fonds, 2005. pp.214-215.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.80.

²²⁵ See Orthodoxy in Latvia, Latvian Bible Society. <http://www.bibelesbiedriba.lv/religiju-enciklopedija/kristietiba/pareizticiba-latvija.html>.

²²⁶ Obozny K. Collaboration and Church Revival in all German occupational territories in years 1941 - 1944 : the activities of the Pskov Mission and the Baltic Exarchate. In: Gavrilin A. (ed.), *Orthodoxy in Latvia. Historical Essays.* (7), Rīga: Philokalia, 2008, p.70.

LOC included 121 parishes, 88 priests and about 370,000 Orthodox believers.²²⁷ It is possible that the actual number of Orthodox believers has been exaggerated. Most worship take place in Russian, but there are about 30 Latvian congregations.²²⁸ There are two Orthodox women's monasteries and one men's monastery in Latvia.

The Latvian Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church

Old Believers have inhabited the territory of Latvia since 17th century; they migrated due to the Orthodox Church schism in Russia. The first organized group of Old Believers appeared in the Duchy of Courland in year 1659. While in 1660 near to town of Dinaburg (Daugavpils) the first prayer house was built, which is considered to be the first Old Believers church.²²⁹ The proclamation of the Republic of Latvia in 1918 strengthened the legal position of Old Believers in Latvia. The Old Believers were recognized as one of the traditional confessions in Latvia; during years 1920 – 1930 the Old Believers' parishes received governmental grants like other traditional denominations in Latvia.²³⁰ Arnold Podmazovs wrote that "these years for Old Believers in Latvia was the first experience of living in circumstances where the secular power treated them favourably, thus the Old Believers expressed their gratitude with loyal attitude towards the state of Latvia."²³¹ Year 1991 was a turning point when after the atheistic Soviet period the Old Believers exercised their legal right to recover their property and the freedom to preach their doctrine freely. Currently there are two Pomorian Old Believer parishes operating in Riga: the Grebenshchikov Old Believers Parish and The Emergence of God (*bogojavlenskaja*) Pomorian Old Believer parish. These two parishes are canonically included in the Latvian Pomorian Old Believers Church, which is governed by elected bodies - the Central Council and the Spiritual Commission.²³²

In 2010 The Old Believers celebrated the 250th anniversary of Riga Grebenshchikov Parishes church. Today on its basis is established childrens' Sunday school, a unique library, publishing house, steel workshop and a shelter for the poor. Parishes publishing department has the only printing press for Old Believers in the Baltic States and Poland. In 2006 Grebenshchikov Theological School of the Latvian Pomorian Old Believers Church was opened. Together there

²²⁷ See On reports that religious organizations provided for the Latvian Ministry of Justice on year 2010. http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/re_l_org_2010_parskats.pdf.

²²⁸ See Orthodoxy in Latvia, Latvian Bible Society. <http://www.bibelesbiedriba.lv/religiju-enciklopedija/kristietiba/pareizticiba-latvija.html>.

²²⁹ Podmazovs A., Old Believers in Riga. Riga: Latvian Old Believer Society, 2010, p.61.

²³⁰ Podmazovs A., Old Believers in Riga. Riga: Latvian Old Believer Society, 2010, p.84.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., p.72.

are 42 Old Believer priests working in Latvia.²³³ Besides the parishes there are two Old Believers community organizations in Riga: Latvian Old Believers Society (founded in 1908 and its activities were restored in 1994.) and I.N. Zavoloko Old Believers Society (founded in year 1999)²³⁴. Ivan Klementjev, a member of the Latvian parliament, and the Riga City Council member Ivan Ivanov (both are members 'Harmony Centre' parties) are members of Latvian Old Believers Society.

The report that Latvian Pomorian Old Believers Church submitted to the Ministry of Justice in 2010 indicated that the Latvian Old Believers parishes had 2,336 members and 34,449 people attended their church services²³⁵; while Arnolds Podmazovs in his book "Riga Old Believers" which was published in 2010 stated that the total population of the modern Old Believers and their descendants in Latvia reached 80,000²³⁶. They are mostly Russians, but there are also Belarusian, Ukrainian and other nationality Old Believers.

Legal Status

Status of religious organizations in Latvia is regulated by the Law on Religious Organizations which was adopted in 1995.²³⁷ However, some denominations have sought a special attitude towards themselves by the Latvian authorities. Therefore, in June 8th 2004 the Cabinet signed contracts between the Latvian state and the so-called traditional denominations, including Orthodox and Old Believers Churches and sent to the Parliament for ratification. The idea of such agreements was initiated in 2000 after the Latvian parliament approved the contract between the Republic of Latvia and the Holy Seat that determined the status of Catholic Church in Latvia; other denominations were concerned that Catholics would achieve a privileged position in relations with the state. In 2005 The Latvian Ministry of Justice also sought other ways to adjust its relations with religious organizations and prepared several bills on the legal status of separate religious denominations. The new framework of unilateral legislation was expected to restore the practice that existed until 1940.²³⁸

Several years of discussions resulted in passing separate laws in 2008 that regulated the relations between the traditional confessions and the state. "The Law

²³³ See On reports that religious organizations provided for the Latvian Ministry of Justice on year 2010. http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/rel_org_2010_parskats.pdf.

²³⁴ Podmazovs A., Old Believers in Riga. Rīga: Latvian Old Believer Society, 2010, p.58.

²³⁵ See On reports that religious organizations provided for the Latvian Ministry of Justice on year 2010. http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/rel_org_2010_parskats.pdf.

²³⁶ Podmazovs A., Old Believers in Riga. Rīga: Latvian Old Believer Society, 2010, p.58.

²³⁷ See Law of Religious Organizations. <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=36874>.

²³⁸ Rubevskis J., Traditional religious bodies' status, the constitution and human rights. Politika.lv. 18.10.2005. <http://politika.lv/article/tradicionalo-religisko-konfesiju-statuss-satversme-un-cilvektiesibas>

on Latvian Orthodox Church" stipulates that the Latvian Orthodox Church will govern its chaplain activities, whose support can be received in the National Armed Forces, ports, airports, medical and educational institutions.²³⁹ The head of the LOC Metropolitan Alexander with satisfaction expressed his view that the passing of a separate law is a historic event, which the Orthodox had been waiting for 20 years. Metropolitan said: "The greatest dignity should be expressed for our Members of Parliament; their work refers to the level of relations between the Latvian state and our Latvian Orthodox Church."²⁴⁰ Notably, by request of the LOC the law grants a special status and public support for the branch of the Holy Trinity-Sergius Monastery for females in Valgunde. In a similar way as the Catholic holy site in Aglona, the Orthodox Women's Monastery in Valgunde will be provided with aid from the state.

Similarly as for the LOC a special law has been adopted a law for the Latvian Old Believers. The Law on Religious Organizations in 1995 offered opportunities for the LOC and the LPOOC to teach Christian religious instruction in schools as Latvian Evangelical Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Baptist denominations teachers could. In addition, this Christian religion and ethics teaching is financed from the state budget.²⁴¹

Property

In summary, the Latvian Orthodox Church did not encounter major problems in property matters after the restoration of Latvian independence. The religious freedom in the country after 1991 averted the aggressive policy of the Soviet authorities against the Orthodox Church and its religious buildings. During two decades the LOC has renovated 26 churches and built 13 new. The LOC currently owns 121 places for worship.²⁴² Institute of European Studies (Riga) in collaboration with the Moscow Patriarchate Cultural Council organized a round-table discussion "The role of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Pomorian Old Believers Church preservation of cultural heritage in the Baltic countries." The event was attended by representatives of both Churches, representatives of the Latvian State Inspection for Heritage Protection and MP Sergei Mirskij (Harmony Centre). It is important to note that Alexander Gaponenko, the head of the organizing institution the Institute of European Studies, was a key initiator of the referendum *on the Russian language as the official state language* in 2012. The Latvian Orthodox Church representatives were not responsive to the event

²³⁹ See The Latvian Orthodox Church Act. <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=184626>

²⁴⁰ The Latvian Parliament adopted the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church.2008-11-13, <http://www.pravoslavie.lv/index.php?newid=2116&id=6&lang=LV>.

²⁴¹ See the Law on Religious Organizations, <http://www.likumi.lv/doc.php?id=36874>.

²⁴² See On reports that religious organizations provided for the Latvian Ministry of Justice on year 2010. http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/rel_org_2010_parskats.pdf.

organizers' offer to seek for money to preserve churches in the European Union. Clergy indicated that LOC had no problem with the preservation of cultural heritage and therefore no public figures can help them; they said that the discussion was pointless because all church buildings belonged to the Church, not the state, and so the owners had to care for the condition of property themselves. A. Gaponenko pointed out for journalists that the LOC's negative attitude was a reaction to the fact that the organizers firstly agreed with the Moscow Patriarchate on organization of the event, and only then turned to the Latvian Orthodox Church.²⁴³

Old Believers' representatives reacted differently and stated that the state was giving only LVL 4,000 for maintenance of its churches, and Old Believers were running short in funds for maintenance. Old Believers owned 69 churches.²⁴⁴ According to the representatives of Old Believers, rural parishes were dying out and the churches were falling in a miserable situation. Different response by representatives of both Churches towards various initiatives of socio-political activists was noteworthy. The LOC, under governance of Metropolitan Alexander, is more reserved for political affairs, while the Old Believers have recently been involved in deeper dialogue with the government. One of the areas of this dialogue was the fuss about the Russian language status in Latvia.

Officials' attitude towards the Orthodox Church

Today senior Latvian officials are trying to show symbolic support for the Orthodox Latvian population. The support was showed as Vaira Vike-Freiberga helped to organize arrival of the Tikhvin icon of the Mother of God to Latvia in June 2004; as the ROC Patriarch Alexy II was hospitably welcomed to Latvia in 2006, and as President Valdis Zatlers delivered a greeting speech on Orthodox Christmas. The paramount importance of the Alexy II official visit in Latvia should be noted. The Moscow and All Russia Patriarch Alexy II visited the Latvia from May 27th to 29th, 2006 upon invitation by the Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga.

It was the first visit of such kind since the establishment of Orthodoxy in Latvia. Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga presented the Patriarch the Three Stars medal while Alexy II presented the restored First Class Order of Holy Princess Olga to the President of The Republic of Latvia. Witnesses of the visit said that the Patriarch in talks with Latvian officials expressed great understanding of the

²⁴³ Александрова Ю. Православная церковь Латвии отказывается от европейских денег. 06.10.2010. Vesti Segonia, <http://www.ves.lv/article/143365>.

²⁴⁴ See On reports that religious organizations provided for the Latvian Ministry of Justice on year 2010. http://www.tm.gov.lv/lv/jaunumi/rel_org_2010_parskats.pdf.

Latvian-affairs and did not talk about the national minorities or any other controversial political issues. It is possible that the Patriarch had a different view of what is happening in the Baltic States, because once he had lived in Estonia.

Political experts rated Patriarch Alexy's visit in Riga as an enhancing factor for emotional background in bilateral relations. During the formal reception in honour of the Patriarch's visit to Latvia the Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga said that it was a special event not just for the Orthodox, but also the whole nation of Latvia.²⁴⁵ The Latvian Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis expressed his hope that the visit of the head of the ROC in Latvia could be seen as a sign that Russia might be ready for a constructive dialogue with Latvia. Significantly, the head of Russian presidential administration's office Modest Kolerov before the visit of the Patriarch said that Russia would assess the program for Patriarch Alexy II visit to Latvia because it would show the priorities that Latvia would rise in its relations with Russia.²⁴⁶

Language issues

On the February 18th, 2012 a referendum on the Russian language as a second national language of Latvia was held. Against changes in the Constitution voted 821,722 people or 74.8% of the vote, but for the Russian language as a second official language voted 273,347 people or 24.88%.²⁴⁷ With democratic procedure the Latvian citizens chose to stay with one official state language, namely Latvian. On 13th of March, 2012 Latvian Old Believers' leaders signed a letter to the Speaker of the parliament Solvita Aboltina that stated their concerns about the situation related with the referendum; increase of ethnic tension was caused by ethnic policies in Latvia, which allegedly questioned the ancient traditions of Old Believers and Latvian relations. In the Old Believers' letter to Speaker of the Saeima Solvita Aboltina it was pointed out that Latvia had to give up reservations that Latvia included when the signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.²⁴⁸ The letter was signed by an MP from party Harmony Centre Vladimir Nikonov, who is also the leader of Rezekne Old Believers Cemetery Society. Old Believers' representatives said that they want the Russian language to have a status of official language (not state language); in

²⁴⁵ The President: Patriarch Alexy II's visit was a special event for the Latvian people. Apollo, 28.05.2006. <http://www.apollo.lv/zinas/valsts-prezidente-patriarha-aleksija-ii-vizite-ir-ipass-notikumslatvijas-tautai/333055>.

²⁴⁶ Russia will assess the program for Patriarch Alexy II's visit in Latvia. Delfi, 26.05.2006. <http://www.delfi.lv/news/world/other/krievija-izvertes-patriarha-aleksija-ii-vizites-programmulatvija.d?id=14555830>.

²⁴⁷ 18th February, 2012 referendum on the draft law "Amendments to the Latvian Constitution." <http://web.cvk.lv/pub/public/30256.html>

²⁴⁸ Старообрядцы указывают Аболтине на рост этнической напряженности в Латвии. Vesti Segodnia, 20.03.2012. <http://www.ves.lv/article/209280>.

practice this would mean that Latvian as the state language would lose its positions in all major cities in Latvia.

The Speaker of the Saeima stated in her response that the Old Believers' desire to raise the status of Russian language was not possible to implement, because Latvian language even twenty years after the restoration of independence was not fully stabilized throughout the country and in all functions. Solvita Aboltina also pointed out that assurance of sustainability of the Latvian language was the right and duty of the state and the society, because Latvia is the only country in the world, which is capable of taking responsibility for the future of the Latvian language.²⁴⁹

The head of the LOC Metropolitan Alexander regarding the language referendum said that "the Russian language in Latvia should be of public importance", but refrained from stronger wording. Metropolitan Alexander pointed out the need for people who do not understand Latvian to be able to receive answers in Russian in hospitals or other facilities. It should be noted that in reality this takes place informally. Usually Alexander's statements include calls for mutual understanding and unity between Latvians and Russians rather than calls of a political nature. In an interview for "the Latvian Radio 4" the head of the LOC did not want to evaluate what the year of 2011 had been in economic and political terms, leaving these issues to professionals of these areas and opting to talk about spiritual values.²⁵⁰

So far the Latvian Orthodox Church has not afforded to demonstrate paternalistic attitude towards Russians living in Latvia as the Moscow Patriarchate representatives tend to do. This paternalistic desire to decide in which confession should be chosen by Russians living in Russia and abroad, is a norm for Russian compatriot policy. In addition the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) representatives do not forget to instruct foreign policy makers, when traveling around the world and consolidating the Russian World. Moscow Patriarchate's external relations representative Metropolitan Ilarion advertised Patriarch Kirill's new book in Riga in March 2012. During the presentation event Ilarion said that the elderly should be granted a Latvian citizenship without knowledge of the state language, because it was difficult for them to learn another language.

²⁴⁹ Speaker's of the Saeima reply to Old Believers on April 13th, 2012.

http://www.staroverec.lv/index.php?a=otvet_aboltina&m=161&l=1

²⁵⁰ Metropolit Aleksandrs: No Dieva nāk miers, savstarpēja cieņa, mīlestība un labs prāts. Latvijas Radio 4, 07.01.2012. <http://www.latvijasradio.lv/zinas/raksts.php?id=32137&gr=53>

Celebration of feast

Another touch point between orthodoxy and politics is celebration of feast. In Latvian national holiday calendar as Christmas days are set 24th, 25th and 26th of December. In contrast, Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas on 7th of January. At the time when the LOC moved to the jurisdiction of the Constantinople Patriarchate in years 1936 to 1940, Latvian Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants celebrated Christmas at the same time in December. However, with the transition to the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Latvian Orthodox Christians resumed to celebrate the birth of Christ on 7th of January. The discussion on designation of the Orthodox Christmas day as a national holiday was held in several parliamentary terms. That happened again in relation with the referendum of 18th of January, 2012. The leader of political party Harmony Centre Nils Usakovs in an interview for newspaper NRA stated that that one of the three major tasks to be carried out after the referendum is recognition of the Orthodox Christmas as a public holiday.²⁵¹ While politicians representing parties Unity and the National Association pointed out that in Latvia was not possible to celebrate religious holidays of all denominations at the national level, thus it should be left as believers own concern. The MP from party Unity Maris Caklais stressed the importance of strengthening the unity of society in ethnic and linguistic as well as inter-confessional means: "and if we divide the Latvian society by the principle of feast celebration, then who will say that it will be in favour of integration of our society, that it will strengthen our unity, that it won't cause further divisions between the people of Latvia?"²⁵²

There is also another option in Latvia, which states that proclamation of the Orthodox Christmas as a holiday would help to unite the society. In a discussion between spiritual leaders and politicians "The Spiritual Dimension and Policy", which was held in Riga Castle on 7th of February, Latvian Roman Catholic Archbishop Zbigniew Stankevic proposed Orthodox Christmas to be declared as an official holiday.²⁵³ In response Stankevic's suggestion, the head of the LOC Metropolitan Alexander said that the Orthodox and Old Believers did not ask much, at first it would be sufficient to announce shortened working days during Orthodox Christmas, even up to two in the afternoon, so that in the festive evening they could sit with the family around a *samovar* drinking tea or coffee.²⁵⁴ At the same event, Metropolitan Alexander said that the LOC for some time would

²⁵¹ Atkal uzvirmo „kariņš” ap pareizticīgo Ziemassvētkiem. Kas Jauns, 22.02.2012.

<http://www.kasjauns.lv/lv/zinas/73117/atkal-uzvirmo-karins-ap-pareizticigo-ziemassvetkiem>.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Clerics and politicians are calling for moral reconciliation. <http://spektrs.com/audio-gramatas-lasijums-mp3/garidznieki-un-politiki-aicina-uz-moralo-izligumu/>.

²⁵⁴ Atkal uzvirmo „kariņš” ap pareizticīgo Ziemassvētkiem. Kas Jauns, 22.02.2012.

<http://www.kasjauns.lv/lv/zinas/73117/atkal-uzvirmo-karins-ap-pareizticigo-ziemassvetkiem>

distanced itself from requirements of some politicians to recognize the Orthodox Christmas as the national holiday, because the politicians had made this question is too politicized and they did not care about Christmas, but their political ambitions.

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The story of the indigenous people

Russia builds its policy towards compatriots living in Latvia on the idea of Latvia as a country that emerged in 1991, rather than a continuation of the existing state before World War II. The doctrine on continuity of Latvian state was the legal and political basis for Latvian citizenship policies after year 1991. The doctrine of continuity explains that the Republic of Latvia, founded in 18th of November, 1918, has continued an uninterrupted *de jure* existence in spite of the Soviet occupation and annexation which took place in 1940.²⁵⁶ Divergent views on this aspect continue as a certain confrontation between the Russia's policy on the compatriots living abroad and Latvia's position regarding citizenship and language laws. Russia's foreign policy implementers try to emphasize the view that the Russians are not Soviet immigrants but a basic nation. The entering of Orthodoxy and the Old-Orthodoxy (Old Believer) in the Latvian territory in the past centuries is used to support this contention.

The Moscow Patriarchate has been involved in implementation of the compatriot policy; however, the Latvian Orthodox Church so far has not been a particularly active member of the policy. Politicians from parties For Human Rights in United Latvia (FHRUL) and the Harmony Centre (HC) in various seminars and discussions use Orthodoxy and Old Believers factors to justify their political positions. The HC attention to Old Believers has been manifested as Riga City Council, led by the leader of the HC Nils Usakovs, supported preparation of exhibition "Riga Grebenshchikov parish: the spiritual-cultural heritage and our time" in spring 2011. Old Believers should be perceived as favourable addition to Riga's cultural and economic life, which has enriched Latvia. However, the HC politicians try to speak only about the historical process of migration, but avoid mentioning the Soviet Union's targeted policies in the 20th century, under which migrants from other Soviet republics, mostly Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, were sent to Latvia. Moscow directly implemented the artificial modification of the composition of the Latvian population; this has caused concern about threats for Latvian national identity nowadays.

The FHRUL with Tatiana Zdanok in forefront in 2008 organized an exhibition "Russians in Latvia", which was held in the Moscow House in Riga (the Moscow

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Levits E. The 4th May Declaration within the Latvian legal system. www.ltn.lv/~ap-klubs/index.htm

city council owned house in Riga) and one of the financial supporters was the government of Moscow city. Part of the exhibition was devoted to the history of Old Believers in Riga. Tatiana Zdanok explained that she wanted to organize an exhibition to show that Russians are indigenous people in Latvia that have made a significant contribution to Latvian culture, art and science. The FHRUL's motivation to support the Orthodoxy and Old Believers in Latvia is related to the desire to justify its claims regarding change in language and citizenship policies. Such claims are well in line with Russia's policy toward compatriots living abroad. Within the framework of abovementioned policy, the official Moscow sees Russian-speaking residents of Latvia as its foreign policy resource. If disregarding some MPs, for whom faith itself is an important motivation, the Harmony Centre and the FHRUL see the opportunity to increase their political capital by supporting Orthodoxy. This was indicated by Metropolitan Alexander's responds to the IR magazine reporter's question: „if politicians often come to him?” The head of the LOC replied: "During the election period. Then again, forget us until the next election. That is their psychology."²⁵⁷

On 27th of November, 2007 during a meeting of the President's "Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations" the ROC's Patriarch Kirill " expressed a view that the Church had established good cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Moscow Mayor's Office to implement the policies for Russian compatriots living abroad.²⁵⁸ One of the areas of this cooperation is implementation of the joint project, the Russian World. However, in context of Latvia, we should distinguish the different levels of involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Latvian Orthodox Church in the Russian compatriot policy. If the ROC sees its special mission in establishment of the Russian World then the Latvian Orthodox Church treats the Russian compatriot policy with reluctance and carefulness.

Whatever topics are brought up in Russian policy on compatriots living abroad, those affect to a greater or lesser extent the Orthodox population of Latvia. Russia criticizes Latvia for restricting Russian language and its citizenship policies. In order to justify its political demands, Moscow uses the argument of the Russians as native inhabitants of Latvia, concealing the forced demographic changes in Latvia during the Soviet occupation. The pro-Russian political party representatives in Latvia claim that the Old Believers are an ancient population of Latvia, concealing

²⁵⁷ Metropolitan Alexander: a man without a beard is like a woman. Puaro, 12.04.2012. <http://www.puaro.lv/lv/puaro/metropolits-aleksandrs-virietis-bez-bardas-ir-ka-sieviete>.

²⁵⁸ Speech by Head of the Department for External Church Relations Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, at the meeting of the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations (Moscow, November 27, 2007). <http://www.mospat.ru/index.php?page=38903>.

the fact that the share of Russian population (including the Old Believers) before the Soviet occupation in 1940 was around 9% of the total population of Latvia, compared to about 30% at the time when Latvia regained its national independence. The long lasting presence of Old Believers in Latvia is being used to substantiate demands to change the Latvian citizenship policies, virtually denying the continuation doctrine of the Latvian state.

It can be seen that the current head of the LOC Metropolitan Alexander supports an increased focus on the Russian language, but avoids confrontational communication with public authorities, and the active participation in Russia's compatriot policy. The situation may change in future, when due to one or another reason the LOC will be another leader. Seeing how much the Moscow Patriarchate's current leadership supports Russia's power elite and how paternalistic it behaves against Russians in Russia and abroad, there is a possibility that the ROC in future would like to turn the Latvian Orthodox Church in a similar position.

Alexy's, the Previous Patriarch of the ROC, visit to Latvia is generally seen as a positive development in the Latvian-Russian relations. The current Head of the ROC Patriarch Kirill participation in Russian foreign policy implementation does not give similar hopes for his expected visit to Latvia.