

## PUBLIC TRUST AND PARTICIPATION DEPENDING ON ETHNICITY IN LATVIA

**Maija Vorslava**

*University of Latvia, Latvia*  
*Address: 19 Raina Blvd., Riga, LV 1586, Latvia*  
*e-mail: vorslava.maija@gmail.com*

**Lilita Seimuskane**

*University of Latvia, Latvia*  
*Address: 19 Raina Blvd., Riga, LV 1586, Latvia*  
*e-mail: lilita.seimuskane@gmail.com*

**Maris Pukis**

*University of Latvia, Latvia*  
*Address: 19 Raina Blvd., Riga, LV 1586, Latvia*  
*e-mail: maris@lps.lv*

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*Low public trust in public power institutions is still an urgent problem among the Member States of the European Union. According to the latest Standard Eurobarometer 80 data, the trust continues decreasing. In Latvia trust indicators are also markedly low – 17% residents of Latvia trust in the national parliament, 21% – in the government, but the indicator of trust in political parties is explicitly critical – it constitutes only 6%. Since the Eurobarometer research only includes citizens' opinion, we can assume that the trust indicators are even lower.*

*The population of Latvia consists of the Latvians, who are the titular nation – 59.6%, the Russians – 27% and other national minorities, for instance, the Ukrainians and the Byelorussians. The issue of the integration of the Russian speaking people has been topical in Latvia since the mid 90ties, however, as a result of the unsuccessful integration policy, there is still an alarming number of non-citizens in Latvia, which, according to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs of Latvia data, in 2012 constituted 17% of the population of Latvia and which is the third highest indicator in the European Union.*

*Democracy in Latvia can only function well when all residents of Latvia, regardless of their ethnicity, undertake the responsibility for their country and participate in the public and local government administration. Therefore this publication aims at researching whether the indicators of public trust and participation differ, depending on the ethnicity of residents in Latvia. The authors also wanted to find out whether the issue of ethnicity has vital importance with regard to the improvement of public trust and participation in Latvia.*

*The research is based on the public opinion poll that was conducted by the authors and the Marketing and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS) in Latvia in July 2012. In order to elaborate the research design, a case study method has been used. The data analysis methods, such as the grouping of statistical data and their depiction in tables and document analysis, have been used.*

*The research results show that the trust in national level institutions is affected by different factors, including the ethnicity issue. The acquired research data in correlation with the nationality structure in statistical regions acquired in 2011 Population Census process in Latvia, affirm already mentioned conclusion, than public power institutions in Latvia (data of the Central statistical Bureau of Latvia) are more positively evaluated by respondents in regions with most number of Latvians, i.e. Vidzeme region (87% Latvians), Kurzeme region (76% Latvians).*

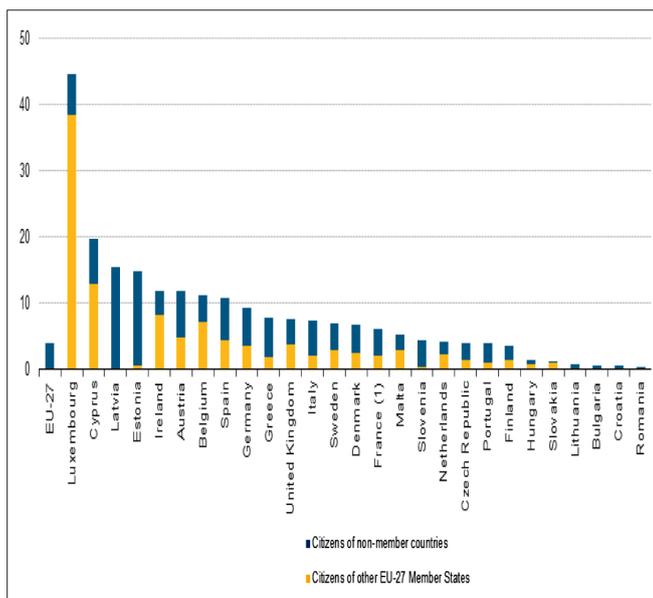
**Keywords:** *citizens' trust, local governments, national government, participation, ethnic composition.*

### Introduction

One of the globalization features is migration; especially topical is the migration of workforce. The reasons for migration are diverse – the search for better living standards, the opportunities for work and education and other. During last half a century the rapidly increasing international migration has raised justified disquiet and anxiety about the national state traditions and the identity of the core nation in its own country because the ethnic composition has drastically changed in many countries over the last century. Therefore the

migration issues are particularly addressed in the process of political decision-making (Castles and Miller, 2009). Latvia has had a particularly bad effect of the free movement of workforce in the European Union because in the 21st century approximately 200,000 nationals or 9% of all the population have emigrated from Latvia (Hazans, 2011). The same way due to the World War II consequences a large number of inhabitants from the Soviet Union entered Latvia, as a result of which Latvia is populated by 59.6% of the Latvians, who

are the core nation of Latvia, 27% of the Russian inhabitants, as well as by other minorities – the Byelorussians – 3.6%, the Ukrainians – 2.5% and other (Statistical Yearbook of Latvia, 2013). Consequently, the issue of integrating the Russians has been topical in Latvia since the mid 1990ties, but due to the unsuccessful integration policy in Latvia there is still an alarmingly large number of non-citizens, which is the third highest indicator in the European Union. According to Eurostat, the official statistics board of the European Union, data that have been gathered about Year 2011 the highest proportion of the people who are non-citizens is found in Luxembourg – 43% from the total number of residents. As the second comes Cyprus where 20% of the total number of residents are not citizens and as the third – Latvia where 17% people of all the population are non-citizens or the citizens of another country (see Figure 1). However it should be mentioned that both in Cyprus and Luxembourg the large proportion of the people who are not the citizens of the given country is constituted by the citizens of other European Union Member States, whereas in Latvia and Estonia we can see an alarmingly large number of the non-European Union countries' citizens that includes the citizens of Russia and non-citizens (mainly former Soviet Union citizens, who are permanently resident in these countries but have not acquired any other citizenship).



**Figure 1. Share of non-nationals in the resident population (% of total number of population), 2012**

Source: Eurostat.

Residents' unwillingness to participate in the processes of political decision-making and the low trust in the national parliament and government of one's own country is an issue of the same topicality as the migration in the European Union (Seimuskane, Vor斯拉va, 2013).

In the Member States of the European Union, including Latvia, the indicators of public trust in the national parliaments and governments are measured twice a year amid many other indicators. The latest Eurobarometer 80 (Public Opinion in the European Union, Fieldwork: November 2013) data show that on average 25% residents trust the national parliament of their country and 23% residents have trust in

their national government, the trust in the national parliament and government of one's own country among the European Union Member States continues decreasing. According to public trust in the public power of each country, the countries can be divided into four large groups:

- countries with medium-high level of public trust. This group includes Sweden (trust in Parliament – 34%, trust in Government – 57%), Finland (58%; 50%), Austria (54%; 50%), Luxembourg (41%; 51%), Malta (51%; 48%); the Netherlands (41%; 37%), Belgium (48%; 48%), Denmark (58%; 40%), and Germany (44%; 38%);
- countries with medium level of public trust. This group ranks Estonia (35%; 38%), Hungary (34%; 37%), Slovakia (28%; 29%), United Kingdom (24%; 24%), and the Republic of Cyprus (18%; 26%);
- countries with low level of public trust. This group lists France (14%; 24%), Poland (17%; 19%), Latvia (17%; 21%), Lithuania (11%; 20%), Ireland (18%; 17%), Bulgaria (14%; 20%), the Czech Republic (12%; 16%), Croatia (12%; 16%), and Romania (11%; 16%);
- countries with very low level of public trust. This group includes Portugal (11%; 15%), Greece (12%; 10%), Spain (8%; 9%) and Slovenia (6%; 10%). Italy (10%; 10%),

In Latvia trust indicators are markedly low and Latvia belongs to those Member Countries of the European Union whose level of public trust is defined as low – 17% residents of Latvia trust in the national parliament, 21% – in the government, but the indicator of trust in political parties is explicitly critical – it constitutes only 6% and is one of the lowest in the European Union. Since the Eurobarometer research only includes citizens' opinion, we can assume that the trust indicators are even lower. Comparatively larger trust is felt by the residents of Latvia towards local governments, in autumn 2013 Eurobarometer 80 data showed that 48% of the residents of Latvia trusted in local governments.

It is in every country's interests to maintain the social peace and enhance country's stability on the basis of the mutual trust of inhabitants and inhabitants' trust in the power of the state and local governments. The aforementioned leads to the conclusion that there is a problem in Latvia – society's trust in the public power and participation in political processes is low, however, another important aspect is that the degree of trust and participation among various ethnic groups differs, which, in the opinion of the authors of this article, is a significant problem. Public trust and participation on the given basis in Latvia has not been properly researched yet. Therefore the authors of this article have set the task for this article to research the situation concerning the issues of public trust and society's participation in Latvia and how these issues are influenced by the ethnic composition of the population of Latvia, particularly, the large number of Russian-speaking residents in Latvia. The stability in the country is only feasible when either large ethnic groups of society – the core nation or the Latvians and the Russians – trust and participate in the political processes.

In order to study this problem, the authors have created a theoretical frame through which they have dealt with such concepts as public trust and political participation as well as the aspects of political participation motivation. In

the research part the authors have used the method of case analysis so as to analyse the case of Latvia – how ethnicity influences participation and public trust in the state and local governments. The analysis of political documents, grouping of statistical data, analysis and imaging have been performed. In order to perform in-depth research of participation habits and differences of public trust among the Russian-speaking people and the Latvians, the authors have used the opinion poll, conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and the Market and Public Opinion Research Centre (SKDS).

### **Political Participation Motivation and Public Trust**

Residents' participation in national processes and public trust in power have always been a topical issue for the researchers of politics since both these important aspects ensure the legitimacy and stability of power in the country. Those researchers of politics who regarded elections as the principal and only instrument of democracy (Dahl, 1956, Sartori, 1987) held an opinion that the application of other types of participation is unnecessary, obstructive and can even pose a threat to the stability of democracy. Robert Dahl argued that the majority of people are not interested in the issues concerning politics and only a very small part of people make decisions in various groups of society. While researching the reasons for residents' non-participation, R. Dahl concluded that a greater probability of participating in political processes was observable when a resident positively valued the probable benefit from the participation, reasoned that it was essential to achieve an alternative solution to the existing one and believed that they would be able to contribute to the change of results. According to R. Dahl, those individuals who possess the necessary knowledge and skills will get involved as well as when the individual is ready to overcome various circumstances in order to act successfully.

At the final stage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the theory of participation democracy became topical and recognized (Almond&Verba, 1965, Pateman, 1975) – it values participation as significant and necessary for democracy since the participation raises residents' awareness of democratic procedures, teaches tolerance, responsibility and enhances the interest in politics and political skills but public administrators must give an account to the residents.

Residents' tendency to get involved in different public processes varies – it was substantiated by researcher Robert Inglehart in his written work "The Silent Revolution" (1977). He concluded that there were two types of orientation: materialistic (material welfare, state security, stable economics) and post-materialistic (when the material values lose their importance, individuals' involvement in decision-making processes, participation in the solution of different problems at one's work and/or place of residence, advancement towards more humane society come forward). R. Inglehart has made a conclusion that through the change of generations and at the time when welfare replaces poverty society's orientation also changes – the post-materialistic values substitute the materialistic ones.

Political scientist Sidney Verba (1970) has researched the social aspects of political behaviour. Political behaviour is associated with the participation in those cases when the activities by which an individual attempts to influence the process of decision-making or the very political decisions

are observed. Political behaviour depends on upbringing, acquired education and social status. The question why some people are politically active while others are not interested in political processes has always been urgent. S. Verba's explanation for it relates to the resources, available to the individual and personal initiative.

As to residents' participation in political processes, a major role is played by the civil society because not always residents possess sufficient motivation, knowledge and skills to get involved in the political processes individually. The civil society or community can take several forms. People unite in social movement and interest groups, which is essential in the political performance. Not only the representation of specific interests but also the relationship between the society and the government often depend on the performance of these organisations. The consolidation in groups is facilitated by the possibility that joint and coordinated performance is likely to attract more attention from the society (Putnam, 1995).

In order to form an active civil society, people must train themselves to do it, it is necessary to train the skills of the involvement in interest groups and democratic procedures. Such skills as arguing, presentation and persuasion must be trained. Participation also has a psychological impact on the individual – it enhances civic consciousness and the interest in politics. Participation has the function of interaction which teaches tolerance, solidarity, reciprocal respect, mutual trust, the sense of justice and lenience. Participation encourages the feeling that the individual belongs to the society and emphasizes the common interests of society (Pateman, 1975).

As to the civil society and residents' motivation to get involved in political processes, theorists admit that the trust among the members of society or the social trust is important. Sociologist and political scientist Robert Putnam (1995) was one of the first who spoke about the necessity for organisations to socialize their members by teaching them trust, cooperation and solidarity. R. Putnam argued that trust also characterizes people's readiness to accept and fulfil the decisions made by state power. In his opinion, the political and civil culture of society is characterized by the knowledge about political events, keeping track of political processes and also the attitude towards them as well as the political life in general. Individual's involvement in political processes depends on the motivation and the sense that his/her action will be beneficial, profitable or useful otherwise. Although democracy gives an individual the best opportunities to influence the political situation and conditions in the country, more often it remains unused. Since democracy defends individuals' rights and safeguards their interests, it is not remarkably necessary for oneself to get involved actively in the adoption or suggestion of laws.

Whereas the fact that social trust also enhances political trust in power has been emphasized, for instance, by researchers Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1965): "Belief in the benignity of one's fellow citizen is directly related to one's propensity to join with others in political activity. General social trust is translated into politically relevant trust."

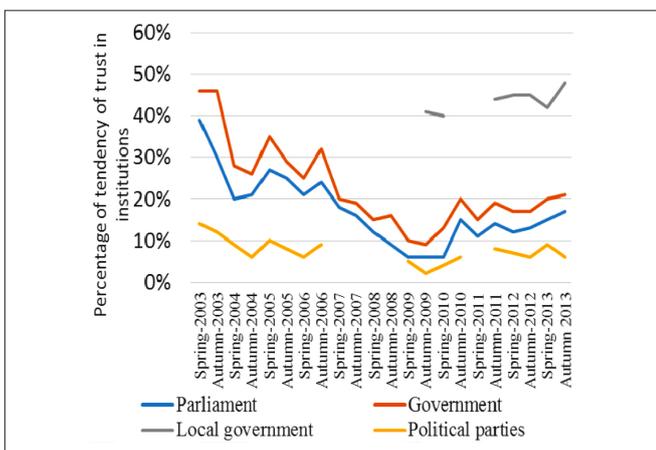
To ensure that the country is developing and the political leaders implement reforms, undertake risks and take the country in the chosen direction, public trust plays a crucial role because it shows voters' support for the chosen policy.

Public trust in power ensures the stability, viability, and vitality of a democratic country (Warren, 1999).

The reviewed theory leads to the conclusion that in democratic society public trust plays a vital role in the provision of the stability and development of the country. Residents' participation and public trust are mutually supplementing phenomena because individual's participation in political processes facilitates public trust concerning power and trust among society members. The same way we conclude that participation skills depend on individual's motivation, social status, upbringing, acquired civil education and collaboration skills.

### Analysis of the Case of Latvia

Political and civil participation is essential in Latvia, otherwise the residents can dangerously become alienated from the state. Society's tendency to become alienated from the power in Latvia is observable from the public trust indicators. For example, in 2003 the government was trusted by 46% of Latvian citizens, the Parliament – by 39% of citizens, and the political parties – 14%. Over last ten years public trust has decreased by half. In autumn 2013, according to Eurobarometer 80 data, the government is only trusted by 21%, the Parliament – 17% and political parties – 6% of citizens (See Figure 2). Local governments enjoy comparatively much higher trust level – local governments are trusted by 48% of citizens, which is a relatively good indicator also among the European Union countries. Although these data are not pleasing in general, the fact that the Eurobarometer studies do not include the data on non-citizens should be taken into account and the number of non-citizens is considerably large in Latvia, constituting 17% of all population. This suggests that, in fact, society's support for the power at the local and national level is much lower.



**Figure 2. Political Trust in Governing Institutions (percent, %)**

Source: Standard Eurobarometer (2003–2013).

In democratic society one of the main political involvement mechanisms is the participation in the elections at the local and national level. 46% of citizens participated in the last local government elections, which were held in June 2013, but 59.4% of those having the right to vote took part in the last Saeima elections in 2011 (Source: The Central Election Commission of Latvia, 2013). It is not that these indicators are critically low but voters' activity during last elections was the

lowest since the restoration of independence in Latvia. As to the elections of local governments, the issue about providing the possibility for the non-citizens of Latvia to participate in local government elections is still urgent in Latvia. In several European Union Member States, including Estonia, where the problem of non-citizens is similar to Latvia, a non-citizen is provided with an opportunity to vote in local elections if he/she has resided in the particular local government for a certain period of time. In comparison to other European Union countries, such an opportunity does not exist in Latvia. The Latvian government offers the Russian-speaking residents to acquire the Latvian language and go through the naturalization process as the only opportunity for receiving voting rights in the elections at the local and national level.

Likewise the residents of Latvia have taken part in a row of referenda over the recent years. As one of the referenda examples, we can mention the referendum in 2012 in which it had to be decided whether the Russian language should be granted the status of the second official language. Although, according to the Central Election Commission data, 78.9% of those having the right to vote voted against such an initiative, this referendum played a vital role in the mutual relationship between the Latvians and the Russians as well as this referendum strikingly revealed the attitude of the Russian-speaking people towards the ongoing processes in the state of Latvia.

While evaluating the involvement, the participation in political parties, non-governmental organizations, the organization and attendance of rallies and protest actions should be regarded as equally important elements with the participation in elections and referenda. Over last five years the number of public organizations, their unions, associations and establishments has risen by 12%. According to the data of the Register of Enterprises, 14,704 organizations were registered in Latvia in August 2011. However, these organizations unite a comparatively small part of the residents of Latvia – moreover, it tends to decrease. There is also a tendency for linguistically segregated – Latvian and Russian-speaking – non-governmental organizations to form (Golubeva, Ijabs, 2009). The involvement of the residents of Latvia in political parties is explicitly low, which can be explained by residents' alienation from power. The research paper „Democracy Level in Latvia. Democracy Audit”, which was published by the University of Latvia in 2005 and in which the methodology, elaborated by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), was used, showed that only 1.5% of residents were taking part in political parties at that moment. There is no reason to think that in 2014 this situation might have improved.

Equally important residents' involvement mechanisms are the meetings with the local and national level deputies, the visits to the commissions of the Saeima, the sittings of the Cabinet of Ministers and local governments, addressing collective and/or individual applications to the public and local government bodies. The analysis of whether the residents are provided with such opportunities shows that the inhabitants of Latvia are given plenty of opportunity to get involved in the state and local government performance. Pursuant to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, there are several ways in Latvia how society's representatives can turn to the Parliament:

- private person's application to the Saeima;
- a meeting with the Members of the Saeima;
- visits to the sittings of the Saeima commissions;
- a legislative initiative.

The same way as the opportunities for residents to get involved in the performance of the Saeima that are prescribed by the laws and regulations of the Republic of Latvia, the residents can also participate in the performance of the government and local governments. In order to illustrate the wide opportunities for residents to get involved, it must be said that, if a resident has a wish, by prior announcement, he/she can attend the sittings of the Parliament of Latvia, the government and local governments, as well as can make a speech there, and, if his/her opinion is substantiated and justified, most probably resident's opinion will be heard.

Taking into account that residents' civil activity is low, the government and the Saeima of Latvia as well as the local governments consider the opportunities and constantly introduce new participation mechanisms. On February 1, 2012 the President of Latvia announced the Amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima that provide the inhabitants with a completely new instrument – a collective application by which the parliamentary agenda can be influenced. The collective application, as it is defined in the Rules of Procedure of the Saeima, or the agenda initiative provides that a particular number of inhabitants may submit a law or the amendments to a law that must be included in the agenda of the Saeima.

At the moment the interest in local government referenda has also increased and the legislation obliges the government of Latvia to prepare a respective draft law. There are ongoing discussions about the problems of the introduction of local government referenda (Vorslava, 2013). The main issues are proposed:

- which issues can be reasonably voted by residents in a referendum;
- how to make sure before the referendum that the voted result will be feasible;
- how to make sure that the issues under review do not contradict the basic principles of the Constitution;
- how to ensure technically that the referendum data are plausible if they are organized electronically or in a mixed system.

Although the government and the Saeima constantly attempt to introduce new participation mechanisms, there is no discussion about the main issue – in order to ensure the involvement and active participation of a resident of Latvia in the political and civil processes, several other pre-conditions must be established. First of all, a resident must understand what the power is doing and the way how he/she can influence the political processes. This factor in Latvia is influenced by both the knowledge of official language and the level of civic education. Secondly, residents must be motivated to get involved – feel that they will be able to have some impact.

Although in the curricula of general education schools of Latvia civic education issues are included in the contents of various social science subjects, Latvian school children's achievements in civic education are lower than the indicators of other EU countries and over the last decade they have worsened (Čekste, Geske, Grīnvelds, Kangro, 2009). As a result the Latvian youth stand out against the background of

both the Baltic States and other European countries by poorer knowledge about the system and principles of civil society as well as about the civic participation and mutual collaboration skills, which manifests itself as a negative attitude towards the state. In general the results of civic education are better in schools with the Latvian language of instruction than in schools which implement minority education curricula. It is indicative of larger alienation of minority schools from the state. Latvian and minority school children have different views on their link with Latvia and Latvian citizenship.

While analysing the political documents in Latvia, the political document "The Guidelines of National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy 2012–2018" must be mentioned with regard to society's participation and differences that are observable among the Russians and the Latvians in Latvia. This document provides several important cognitions regarding the participation problems in Latvia and the following factors are mentioned as the most essential and influencing ones:

- Residents do not believe in their ability to influence the social and political processes in the country.
- The level of Latvian young people's civic education is insufficient which results in scanty participation skills to get involved in the political processes.
- Non-citizens are not motivated enough to acquire the citizenship that allows for the political participation.

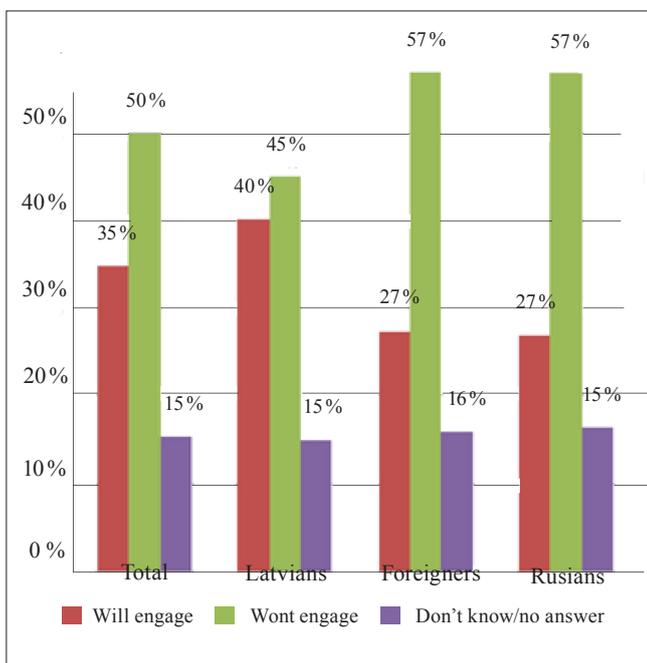
On the basis of Eurobarometer 78 data, the residents of Latvia most frequently obtain the information about the processes in the state, the local governments and the European Union directly from the media – television (83%), the Internet (56%), the radio (38%), and the press (29%). Therefore, when speaking about participation and trust in power, the attention should be drawn to the analysis of media environment and it must be found out how reliable are individual media as a source of information in the opinion of the Russians and the Latvians. The differences among the Latvians and the Russians are important. For instance, the Latvian Public Television is trusted by 88% of the Latvians and 56% of the Russians but the commercial channel "the First Baltic Channel", which is broadcasting in Russian, is trusted by 27.6% of the Latvians and 62% of the Russians. The press, which is written in Latvian, is trusted by 80% of the Latvians and 41% of the Russians, but the press, which is written in Russian, is trusted by 27% of the Latvians and 72% of the Russians (Šulmane, 2010). The aforementioned data confirm that the society of Latvia is split; the Latvians and the Russians formulate their opinion on the basis of the information that is provided by different information spaces. Therefore we conclude that there are grounds to hold a view that the Latvian and Russian participation habits and trust in the state of Latvia are relevantly different, and it requires in-depth researches.

#### **Public Trust and Participation depending on Ethnicity in Latvia**

In order to comprehend the participation habits and trust in the national and local power of these two large ethnic groups – the Latvians and the Russians –in depth, the authors use the Latvian residents' poll, conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS in July 2012. In this article the authors analyse the data, obtained from the study, on the basis of the ethnic principle.

This poll aimed at researching the level of trust of the residents of Latvia and residents' readiness to use various participation forms and factors that influence society's involvement in the performance of local governments. Stratified random sampling was used in the poll and 1050 inhabitants of Latvia at the age from 15 to 74 years were surveyed, including the residents from all regions of Latvia in the selection, which is representative selection in the case of Latvia and allows making conclusions regarding the society of Latvia in general. The survey data was analysed using SPSS statistics program.

To find out whether the residents are ready to get involved in the local performance, the residents were asked a question – *Would you be ready to involve if the decision made by the local government contradicted the interests of local residents?* While analysing respondents' answers, obtained through the study, in the distribution between the Latvians and the representatives of other nationalities, we stated that the Latvians had relatively more often (40%) expressed their readiness to get involved in particular activities, if the local government of district/republic adopted a decision that would interfere with their interests, than the representatives of other nationalities in total (27%). If we look at the distribution of answers concerning the same question only between the representatives of two nationalities – the Latvians and the Russians in Latvia, we acquire evaluation that is similar to the previous one. The Russian representatives less frequently (27%) had expressed readiness to get involved in particular activities in case the local government of district/republic adopted a decision that would not comply with the interests of local inhabitants (See Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Citizens's readiness to get involved in activities in case local authority adopted a decision which interfered with their interests (percentage of all respondents)**

Source: Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS, 2012 (n=1050).

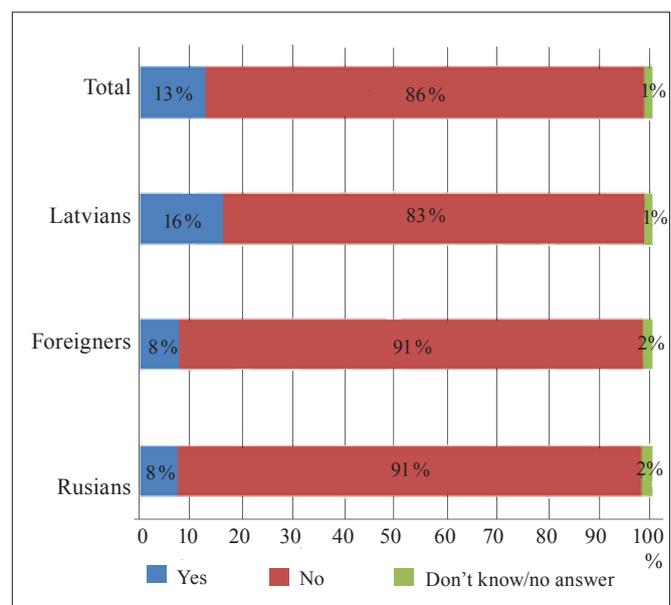
The surveyed representatives of various nationalities more often pointed out that they would not get involved in any kind of activities in relation to the decisions of local government. 45% of the surveyed Latvians pointed it out, comparatively

more frequently – 57% of other nationality and Russian people had expressed a view that they would not get involved in any activities, even if the local government made a decision that would harm their interests (See Figure 3). By other nationality people this study means all residents, except for the Latvians. The fact that the opinion of other nationality people coincides with the opinion of the Russians can be explained by the tendency for other nationalities (for instance, the Ukrainians, the Byelorussians) to speak Russian and thus the information is received from the mass media in Russian.

Considering the options of advocating for residents' interests in the local government and its institutions, the respondents were offered to assess several forms of participation. After aggregating the study data according to the average value, the majority of respondents found such 5 forms of advocacy and influencing self-government's decisions effective:

- local elections – 6.35
- use of mass media in advancing a particular agenda – 6.29
- use of social media in advancing a particular agenda – 6.28
- personal contacts with members and officials of the local government – 5.94
- local referendum – 5.81.

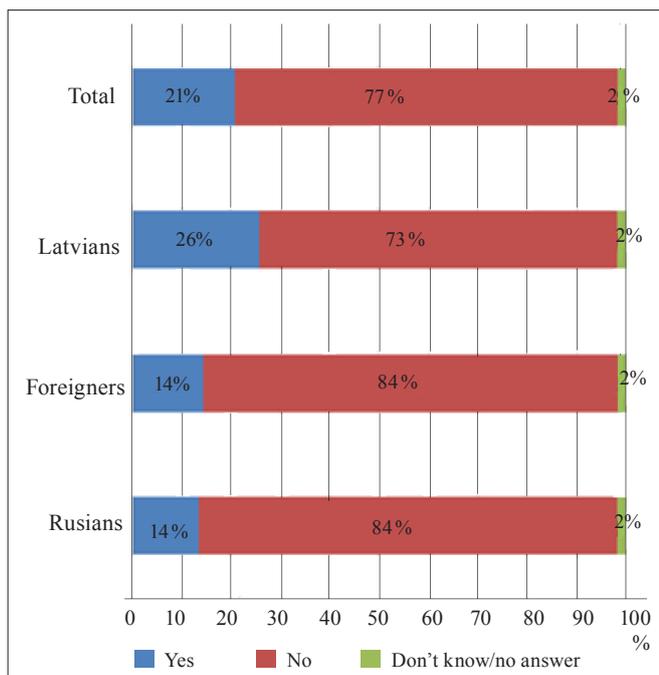
Pursuant to the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, only the citizens of the Republic of Latvia can participate in local elections but the manifestations of residents' involvement in the mass and social media are difficult to measure. Taking into account the fact that the study shows a quite low indicator of residents' activity in relation to the decisions of local governments, which may affect inhabitants' life, the authors researched how much and how often over last three years the study respondents have used an individual opportunity to discuss and solve an urgent issue together with a local deputy or official.



**Figure 4. Whether citizens's had any personal contacts with deputies of the local government during the last three years (percentage of all respondents)**

Source: Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS, 2012 (n = 1050).

Although in general the residents had prioritized such a way of interaction quite highly among the given ways of participation, respondents' answers reveal that over last three years only 13% of all respondents replied that they have met a local deputy to discuss an urgent issue (See Figure 4), slightly more often 21% – a local official. Over last three years 86% of the surveyed people have not met a local deputy, but 77% – none of the local officials. By comparing respondents' answers among the Latvians and other nationality people, one can conclude that the Latvians have used this opportunity more frequently (16%), but other nationality and Russian people very seldom – only 8%.



**Figure 5. Whether citizens's had any personal contacts with official members of the local government during the last three years (percentage of all respondents)**

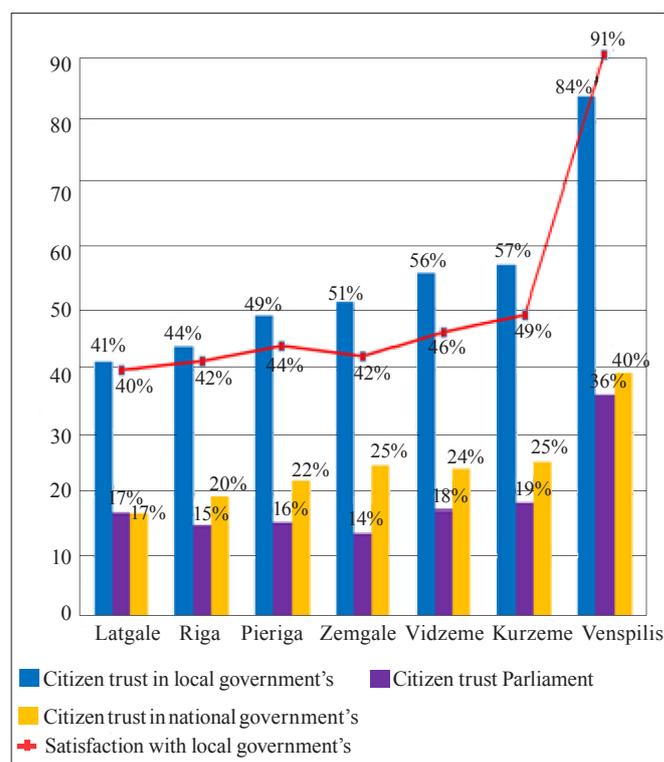
Source: Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS, 2012 (n = 1050).

Although the surveyed have indicated the meeting with a local official more often than with a local deputy, in this aspect also the Latvians have done it comparatively more frequently (26%), but other nationality people in total and the Russians have used this opportunity nearly two times less (14%) (See Figure 5).

The most frequent answer of the surveyed respondents is that over last three years they have met neither a local deputy nor an official. It was pointed out by 91% of other nationality and Russian people regarding the meeting with a local deputy and nearly 85% – regarding the meeting with a local official.

It can be concluded from the obtained study results that, in comparison to the Latvian people, other nationality people are more detached from the local government.

In both cases concerning the Latvians and other nationality people the reason for their non-involvement could be not only misinformation but also the lack of information about the variety of the legal means which can exert an influence on the state or local decisions. The lack of knowledge about one's opportunities also lessens the wish to meet the representatives of power.



**Figure 6. Coherence between public appraisal of local governments' performance and trust in different level of public authorities – local government, national parliament and government (percentage of all respondents)**

Source: Author's calculations on survey conducted by Lilita Seimuskane and SKDS, 2012 (n = 1050).

The acquired research data in correlation with the nationality structure in statistical regions acquired in 2011 Population Census process in Latvia, affirm already mentioned conclusion that public power institutions in Latvia are more positively evaluated by respondents in regions with most number of the Latvians, i.e. Vidzeme region (87% Latvians), Kurzeme region (76% Latvians) (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2012).

Whereas in regions where the proportion of the Latvians is less than half – in Latgale (46%) and Riga (40%) respondents have assessed their trust in the national government as the lowest (Figure 6).

In general the obtained data lead to the conclusion that, in comparison to the Latvians, the Russian nationality residents tend less to participate in local governments' performance as well as they feel less trust in the local and national level power in Latvia. The reason for such indicators might be the inability of the Latvian language and the attitude towards the state in general as well as an opinion that their participation is not likely to have a positive effect. Although the tendency for the Russian nationality residents to participate is lower than for the Latvians, the Latvians do not tend to get involved in local governments' performance actively either. On the basis of the conducted analysis of the case of Latvia, the authors have made conclusions in the final part concerning the issue of participation and public trust in Latvia depending on the ethnicity as well as have expressed suggestions how to improve the situation.

## Conclusions

- Within the context of participation and public trust, a crucial role in the case of Latvia is played by the split in society which is facilitated by the ineffective integration of the Russian speaking people in Latvia and the existence of two different media spaces.
- Despite the broad opportunities for the participation in the state and local government related processes that are secured by the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, residents use this opportunity rarely and inactively. For instance, half of the surveyed respondents replied that they would not take any action even if the local government adopted a decision in contradiction to their interests.
- In order to enable the residents of Latvia to participate in the state and local governments' performance, several pre-conditions must be in place: the residents must know the Latvian language, must have good civic education and developed participation skills in the state administration processes.
- Having compared the opportunities for residents' participation in local government's performance and decision-making that are consolidated by the legislation of the Republic of Latvia, it is found that residents value these participation mechanisms as less effective. They are more optimistic about the possibilities to participate in local elections, the use of mass and social media to make an issue topical, personal contacts with local government's deputies/officials, local governments' referenda and signature collection, and petitions.
- The study results show that, in comparison to the Latvians, the Russian people are more detached from the local and national level power in Latvia. For instance, the Latvians have relatively more often used an opportunity to meet a local official, 26% of the Latvians have done it, but other nationality people in total and Russian people have taken this opportunity almost two times less (14%).
- The involvement in political processes among the Latvians and the Russians is lessened by the low and insufficient level of civic education.
- But among the Russians an additional obstacle is the lack of knowledge of the Latvian language that diminishes the possibilities to get involved in political processes even more.
- In order to enhance public trust in the local and national level power, we should take into account the problems of both these ethnic groups to get involved in the solution of the state and local government related issues.

## Suggestions

- In order to facilitate participation and restore the public trust in power in Latvia, the government and local governments in Latvia should constantly seek new ways how to inform and educate the society about the issues that are relevant to the state. At the contemporary time of information and opportunities, we must be able to arouse the interest of the youth and

middle-aged people in the issues that are related to the public administration and explain the role of residents themselves in democracy.

- Local governments are advised to conduct a self-assessment procedure of participation process in order to evaluate the strong and weak stages of the process on a compulsory basis, to perform an audit of the organizing and decision-making procedures, and to assess the compliance with residents' needs and communication forms. The present situation in Latvia already shows that, in order to express their opinion, the residents use the ways of collaboration and communication beyond the official participation framework.
- In order to improve the level of civic education, schools should introduce the subjects that are related to state administration. By these subjects the schoolchildren should be taught about the power distribution principle, various responsibility spheres of public institutions, the process of decision-making in the state and local governments as well as the possibilities for a resident to influence these processes.
- Particular attention should be paid to role-plays during which the young people learn about the basic principles of the non-governmental organizations, labour unions, political parties and local governments' performance and undergo practical training how to influence the processes.
- A targeted integration policy whose basic principle is to motivate the Russians to learn the Latvian language shall be formed at the state level. The politicians must be able to give the Russians an explanation of what opportunities they will be given by this, including the possibility to participate in the parliamentary and local elections as well as the involvement in other state administration related issues.
- The politicians must draw attention to reducing the effect of two media spaces. First of all, to ensure that the Latvian public television is available to everybody in the frontier regions so that the inhabitants would not have to use the information that is broadcast by the Russian speaking media, and, secondly, to consider the contents of media so that it would be comprehensible and attractive to both the Latvians and the Russian speaking people.

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