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From the Concept of Friendship of Peoples and Socialist Democracy to the Emergence of Multiculturalism: Latvia's Path (1991–2004)

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Abstract. The article explores the concepts of multiculturalism and democracy in the educational context of Latvia and provides a brief historical overview of the background and evolution of these ideas. The study of multiculturalism in post-Soviet countries acquires particular significance and relevance considering the profound transformations these nations have undergone since the collapse of the Soviet Union. With the transition from a 'socialist way of life' to nation-state building, post-Soviet societies have faced unique challenges to cultural integration. The authors emphasize the importance of examining the past, including the socialist model of democracy and the Soviet concept of 'friendship of peoples', to understand the contemporary approaches to multiculturalism and the challenges of its implementation in the post-Soviet space.

The article considers multiculturalism as a scientific concept, a discourse on cultural differences, an integration policy, and a strategy for managing inter-ethnic interactions. It also investigates the changes in the Latvian educational system under the influence of different political regimes, with particular attention to the role of language and ethnicity in the educational policy and the impact of these factors on social and cultural processes.
Keywords: Latvian education, educational policy, multiculturalism, multicultural education, post-Soviet, national identity, culture.

Nuo tautų draugystės ir socialistinės demokratijos koncepcijos iki daugiakultūriškumo atsiradimo: Latvijos kelias (1991–2004)

Santrauka. Straipsnyje nagrinėjamos daugiakultūriškumo ir demokratijos sąvokos Latvijos švietimo kontekste ir pateikiama trumpa istorinė šių idėjų atsiradimo ir raidos apžvalga. Daugiakultūriškumo tyrimai posovietinėse šalyse ypač reikšmingi ir aktualūs dėl gilių permainų, kurias šios tautos patyrė žlugus Sovietų Sąjungai. Pereidamos nuo „socialistinio gyvenimo būdo" prie tautinės valstybės, posovietinės visuomenės susidūrė su unikaliais kultūrinės integracijos iššūkiais. Autoriai pabrėžia, kad, norint suprasti šiuolaikinius požiūrius į daugiakultūriškumą ir jo įgy-

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vendinimo iššūkius posovietinėje erdvėje, svarbu tirti praeitį, taip pat socialistinį demokratijos modelį ir sovietinę „tautų draugystės“ koncepciją.

Daugiakultūriškumas straipsnyje nagrinėjamas kaip mokslinė sąvoka, kaip diskursas apie kultūrų skirtumus ir kaip integracijos politika bei strategija, skirta tarpetniniams santykiams valdyti. Taip pat tiriami Latvijos švietimo sistemos pokyčiai, kuriuos lėmė skirtingi politiniai režimai. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas kalbos ir etninės priklausomybės vaidmeniui švietimo politikoje bei šių veiksnių įtakai socialiniams ir kultūriniams procesams.
Raktažodžiai: Latvijos švietimas, švietimo politika, daugiakultūriškumas, daugiakultūris švietimas, posovietinis, nacionalinė tapatybė, kultūra

Introduction

To speak about the terms ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘democracy’ in the educational context of Latvia, it is necessary to first trace the previous states of the Latvian society, in which it was confronted with concepts that, in one way or another, substituted for what we now understand by these terms. For historical reasons, both concepts were presented in Latvia’s past while it was part of the USSR. The idea of ‘democracy’ in the USSR was proclaimed within the framework of the socialist model, and the concept of ‘multiculturalism’ partially echoed the notion of the ‘friendship of peoples’, whereas in fact it served as a tool for creating a unified Soviet identity while also contributing to the erasure of individual ethnic identities and histories.

The Soviet Empire offered the world its own version of multiculturalism, outwardly more tolerant, which was presented in Soviet and early post-Soviet scholarship as inherently postcolonial, liberating the former inhabitants of the national peripheries who had suffered in the Tsarist Empire, the ‘prison of nations’. At the same time, clear signs of continuity and close ties between the Tsarist and Soviet systems were carefully concealed, including in the forms of rapid recolonisation during the early years of Soviet power (Sahni, 1997). Outwardly, the USSR supported theatrical forms of multiculturalism and other variants of negative discrimination, while advocating creolisation instead of racial and ethnic segregation. This was undoubtedly an important argument in the USSR’s ideological struggle with the West, masking internal forms of racism, orientalism, structural inequality, and other flaws typical of colonial systems. In parallel, Soviet modernity exhibited a number of contradictory features, the most characteristic of which was the remarkable variability in how the Soviet ‘metropolis’ related to different ‘colonies’ depending on their geographic and cultural proximity to Europe. This variability has been linked to the inferiority complex inherent in Russia as a second-rate empire always attempting to catch up with the West (Boatcă, 2010; Tlostanova, 2019).

The structure, mechanisms, and practices of the USSR differed in many ways from the ‘classical’ Western colonial regimes, prompting scholars to broaden the definition of colonialism and develop new methodologies suited to the Soviet case. Epp Annus noted that “the field of postcolonial studies has not considered Russian colonialism as part of its research” (Annus, 2012). However, an increasing number of publications now address these questions, including Benedikts Kalnačs’s monograph “20th Century Baltic Drama: Postcolonial Narratives, Decolonial Options” (Kalnačs, 2016). Based on these and other

studies, the authors would like to analyse how the understanding and experience of these phenomena might have influenced the theories and practices of democratic ideas and multiculturalism in Latvia in the early years after the restoration of independence.

The term 'multiculturalism' carries various meanings, encompassing a wide range of phenomena. It is viewed as a scientific concept and theoretical construct (Bernstein, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995); a specific discourse on cultural differences and attitudes towards them (Parekh, 2000); a societal condition, focusing on the complexities of multi-ethnic societies (Vertovec, 2007); and as a policy for integrating minorities and managing intercultural interactions (Banting and Kymlicka, 2006). The essence of the idea of multiculturalism can be defined by the formula: *unity in diversity*. It is about harmonious interaction of carriers of different cultures within a single political-territorial community. Political philosopher W. Kymlicka defines multiculturalism as a branch of liberalism and discusses the fairness of inequalities that result from individual choices and actions, distinguishing them from those that stem from unchosen characteristics such as race or ethnicity (Kymlicka, 1995).

Multiculturalism as a doctrine of ethno-national policy was officially proclaimed in Australia, Canada and the USA in the 1970s. The main goal of all these countries, which turned to full or partial introduction of multiculturalism, was to ensure social harmony and integration of ethnically and culturally diverse societies. However, the problems of ethnic integration were faced not only by the countries of Western Europe and America, but also by countries with a different political system, including the USSR.

In the discourse of multiculturalism, the concept of culture has largely replaced ethnicity. If earlier societies were labelled as multi-ethnic, multireligious, etc., now, it is more common to speak of multicultural societies, societies with manifestations of cultural pluralism and cultural differences. The notion of culture, which was defined by Lévi-Strauss as fundamental in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss, 1963), should also be seen as fundamental in multiculturalism. It is cultural identity that has been and still is the basis of legitimisation of nation-states, shaping their perception of the common past and the unity of their historical destiny. As long as such communities retain their cultural 'specialness' and prioritise their particular identity (e.g., class identity, as in the Soviet Union) over confessional, regional and other differences, the nation exists and builds its relations with others on the basis of its worldview.

This research explores the influence of Soviet-era ideological concepts on the development of new ideas of democracy and multiculturalism in Latvia. The objective is to analyse the evolution of ideas of multiculturalism and democracy in Latvian education, while identifying the influence of the Soviet period on the strategies and discourses surrounding social cohesion and minority inclusion. The study aims to critically assess how the ideological and structural frameworks established during the Soviet past affected the formulation of the Latvian education policy, especially in relation to democratic values and cultural diversity. The research employs a qualitative design that combines historical and discourse analysis, encompassing both an examination of the transformation of the Latvian education policy over time and a critical discourse analysis of relevant educational strategies, policy documents, and curricula.

The concept of 'friendship of peoples' and Soviet identity

One of the important political categories and generalising symbols of national identifications of the Soviet period was the concept of 'friendship of peoples'. After the October Revolution of 1917, the national policy of the young Soviet state required new ideological concepts. The concept of 'friendship of peoples' became the basis for the relations between the colonised peoples and the party fringes imposed by the authorities on their own terms and presupposed "comprehensive fraternal cooperation and mutual assistance of nations and nationalities" (Averincev, Arab-Ogly, and Iliichev, 1989). This later resulted in a strategy of resettlement of Russian specialists, teachers, military personnel and labourers to other republics in order to strengthen control over the 'titular' population of these territories.

Despite the existence of national mass media (national periodicals, radio and television broadcasting) in Latvia, as well as in other Soviet republics, the Russian language was dominant, and it further strengthened its position every year. As a result, the actual dominant status of the Russian language was finally consolidated in the Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union approved at the XXII Congress of the *Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (hereinafter – CPSU) in 1961. The status of the Russian language received ideological justification in the form of 'the language of interethnic communication', and its mastering (in the process of 'voluntary study') was supposed to promote "mutual exchange of experience and the introduction of each nation and nationality to the cultural achievements of all other peoples of the USSR and to world culture" (Programme of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, 1961). The Russian language was thus perceived as the most 'suitable' language for fostering friendship between nations. In their study, researchers from Vilnius University analysed the Soviet practice of schoolchildren writing letters to peers in other Soviet republics and socialist countries. The study reveals a clear shift in the Soviet education policy and foreign language teaching prioritising Russian not only as a language of communication but also as a language of socialist 'internationalist upbringing' (Stonkuvienė and Ivanavičė, 2024).

In Latvia, as in other Soviet republics, the education system was built according to the standard Soviet model of multi-level vertical control over knowledge consisting of orders, directives, and instructions issued from above, and reports and explanations from below. Academic research interests were concentrated and centralised within the faculty, and access to them in full (insofar as this was possible in the USSR across different fields of science) was reserved for the elite. Meanwhile, the 'living' school and university life unfolded through averaged and carefully censored practices, strictly confined within the framework of the new Soviet historical discourse which implied a new historical canon in which society was seen as a continuous antagonism between different forces hostile to each other: workers against bourgeoisie, farmers against kulaks (Ķestere, 2014).

The idea of the inviolable friendship of the 'liberated' peoples in this discourse had thousands of expressions and was repeated in a variety of registers, organically embed-

ded in the project of building communism in the USSR and in future school and university programmes. By 1955, virtually every schoolchild of the Soviet Union, regardless of the republic in which they received their education, had a standardised set of knowledge and skills, a unified and locally regulated list of subjects to be studied, slight differences in the uniform of school clothes, uniform symbols (a pioneer tie, a bugle, a cap, and a list of ritual practices: from standing up in front of the teacher to giving the salute with a uniform speech form: "Be ready, always ready" (Platoff, 2022). This process contributed to the formation of the Soviet identity.

Within the scope of the researched topic, identity, democratic education, and multiculturalism are interconnected concepts. However, the Soviet identity, unlike the modern concept, possessed institutional features of civic identity and did not imply attachment to an ethnic group. At the same time, it layered over ethnic belonging and partially replaced it, possessing some ethno-characteristics (Barbashin, 2012). Throughout various eras, many nations have envisioned the creation of an ideal society, a kind of a perfect social order, and the project of a perfect human being has always been a central component of various social utopias. For example, in Nazi Germany, there was an attempt to implement a program of radical improvement of the most valuable part of humanity through manipulations aimed at enhancing the gene pool (Arendt, 1951). In the Soviet Union, it was assumed that controlled, planned, and directed changes in the social order would not only create a new, conflict-free society but also a new person – a fully and harmoniously developed individual (Ķestere, 2017).

Paternalistic relations, deeply rooted in Soviet society, viewed the individual within the context of the 'family-state', where the ruler took on the roles of father and mother figures: the Tsar, the Tsarina, or the 'Father of Nations'. The death of such 'relatives' induced a sense of insecurity and orphanhood in people. For instance, the death of Stalin in 1953 led to widespread grief, with some people even voluntarily ending their lives, and the farewell ceremony in Moscow resulted in numerous casualties (Rubenstein, 2016). To achieve this, the totalitarian-paternalistic state aimed to exert total control over all aspects of Soviet life, starting from childhood. Ideological control included preserving the ideological framework in its 'canonized' form, shielding it from foreign influences, and constantly updating Marxist teachings to maintain control over the entire 'spiritual' sphere of society. Ideological indoctrination was the core of educational processes in the USSR, which remained consistent, although the concept of the 'new human' evolved over time. In the 1920s, the ideal was the "revolutionary destroyer of the old world". By the mid-1930s, with the proclamation of 'socialist construction', this model was replaced by the "builder of the new world" (Molostova, 2014).

With Stalin's consolidation of power within the party, the ideal person became one who was disciplined, which was a trait enforced by the state through punishments and rewards. In propaganda and pedagogical practices, the focus shifted to instilling qualities such as responsibility to the country, frugality, and readiness for hardships and sacrifices. Soviet party leaders believed that such students, workers, and young specialists should possess an ideologically driven consciousness, fear numerous prohibitions, and simulta-

neously feel pride in their connection to a great future and the building of communism.

Each of the models of the 'Soviet person' progressively included a sense of belonging to the State, the feeling of being a part of the State machinery, and equal membership in a multinational collective. In the absence of familiar references and social ideals that could ensure the coherence of consciousness, especially favourable conditions were created during this period for the manipulation of mass consciousness by political forces seeking to mobilize broad segments of the population for their own interests. The book *Soviet People*, issued by the *Politizdat* publisher in 1974, declared that the Soviet Union was the first kingdom of freedom for the working man on earth and the homeland of the new, higher type of rational man *Homo Sovieticus*, as reported by the Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev at the 25th Congress in 1976 (Heller, 1988).

The most important qualities of the 'Soviet person' include ideological commitment (expressed from early childhood in understanding ideologically charged concepts like good versus bad, red versus white, or bourgeois versus proletarian), party loyalty (belonging to groups from early childhood: Octobrist, Pioneer, member of Komsomol), dedication to the ideals of the party (initiation processes: joining the Pioneers and Komsomol), work as the goal and meaning of life (participation in community labour days, metal scrap collection), collectivism (Pioneer assemblies, gatherings, Timurite movement), and unwavering devotion to the socialist, multinational Motherland (Platoff, 2022).

In this context, education was viewed as a public good intended to meet the social, moral, and economic needs of society and achieve the political goals of the ruling class. According to Nicholas De Witt (1961), the goal of Soviet education was to serve the collective, and not the individual. De Witt noted that only within the framework of State-determined choices could an individual develop his or her personal abilities (De Witt, 1961). This involved remodelling a person's character and inculcating a single set of prescribed beliefs, attitudes, feelings and values in accordance with the communist ideology.

The quality of education during the Soviet period was defined by practical skills, with professionalism and technical abilities highly valued. The Soviet school asserted that only labour for the common good could bring happiness. In 1974, a survey of high school students revealed that work, service to society, and contributing to the happiness of others were the most important social and moral values that defined the purpose and meaning of life (Zajda, 2014). Diligence, care for property, friendship with comrades, love for the Motherland, truthfulness, honesty, and self-discipline qualities shaped by communist morality were deemed fundamental in the Soviet school system (Bronfenbrenner, 1971; Higgins, 1995).

Summarizing the above, it can be stated that the 'Soviet identity' was constructed based on the formation of a new type of legal culture, which primarily relied on doctrinal sources of socialist democracy and the Soviet pedagogy. It was heterogeneous, contained internal differentiation, and it was largely dependent on the political course of the party, in which the interpretations of the concepts of 'socialism', 'communism', and 'socialist democracy' remained unchanged.

Soviet democracy: between rhetoric and totalitarian practice

The assertion of the authenticity and historical uniqueness of the 'Soviet democracy' was an important ideological thesis and a discursive attribute of the Soviet system throughout its existence. According to Claude Lefort's concept, the understanding of totalitarianism is only possible in its association with democracy, since totalitarianism arises precisely on the ground of democracy, even if it is asserted, as in the socialist variant, in countries where democratic transformations have only just begun. It rejects these transformations while, at the same time, utilising some of their features and elevating them to the level of fantasy (Lefort, 1986). Emerging as a paradox, totalitarianism, which is born from democracy, denies its fundamental practices, specifically, pluralism and separation, both within society and between society and the State. At the same time, it activates certain elements of the symbolic framework of democracy, such as the concept of the 'sovereign people', which postulates an extreme form of societal unity. The symbolic reference to the sovereign people is a key aspect of both democracy and totalitarianism.

Totalitarian democracy is characterized by the assertion of a single and exclusive truth in politics, with politics understood as the implementation of an all-encompassing philosophy or a concept of organizing society. Unlike the liberal understanding of freedom, the totalitarian approach considers only the freedom to achieve the highest collective goal. Totalitarian democracy is characterized by the idea of a homogeneous society where individuals live within a single plan of existence. The universal and sole standard of judgment becomes social utility, expressed in the idea of the common good, and the nation becomes the main framework (Talmon, 1961).

For the first time in the official documents of the Soviet state, the term 'democracy' appears in the Constitution of the RSFSR of 10 July 1918 (Yakovlev, 2014). However, it was used in relation to the supposed reorganisation of the world system through revolution. In 1921, Lenin identified it with the dictatorship of the proletariat while stating that the Soviet system is the maximum of democracy for workers and peasants, whereas, at the same time, it means a break with the bourgeois democracy and the emergence of a new, world-historical, type of democracy, namely, proletarian democracy or the dictatorship of the proletariat (Lenin, 1974). After that, democracy was consigned to oblivion in the Soviet official documents until 1977, and in almost no way did democracy correspond to the scheme declared in the Constitution of the USSR and described in scientific and practical works on socialist democracy. Much later, researchers would call this phenomenon 'imitational' democracy (Yakovlev, 2014).

The main cause and the key factor behind the radical divergence between the terms 'Soviet democracy' and 'democracy' was the Communist Party of the USSR. In the light of recognising the paramount importance of people's power for politics, the party tried to clothe its actions in democratic rhetoric or proclaim a course towards democracy through temporary authoritarianism/totalitarianism, thereby justifying its dominance to external and/or internal audiences. Samuel Huntington writes that authoritarian rulers have been forced to justify their regimes through democratic rhetoric, by claiming that they are

truly democratic or will become so in the future as soon as the pressing problems facing society have been addressed (Huntington, 1993).

With Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power, in 1985–1991, a new stage in the history of the USSR began, subsequently called the era of *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and democratisation. The result of this policy was the adoption by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in May 1990 of a series of laws that were related to the problems of interethnic relations. The most significant of these was the law "On the Delimitation of Powers between the Union of the USSR and the Subjects of the Federation". The draft of this law was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 26 April 1990 and signed by M. Gorbachev, but it was obvious that these laws did not meet the interests of the republics, and that the national policy was out of the control of the authorities (Kagarlitsky, 1994). The response to this was the decision to draft and sign a new union treaty in February 1990, which was insisted upon by the Baltic States, and, by the autumn of 1991, the USSR ceased to exist. With the collapse of the USSR, all previously existing instruments of interaction between the republics and the outside world disappeared. Latvia gained independence and the ability to interact with other countries and make decisions on its own. One of the first steps on this path was the reforms in the field of education.

Transformation of Latvian education: history of reforms and consequences of Soviet occupation

The education system in Latvia has undergone numerous transformations and reforms, while maintaining the tradition of linguistic and ethnic separation. Already before gaining independence in 1918, Latvia had different types of schools, which was the result of an initiative of the Baltic Germans in the 19th century (Björklund, 2004). This system not only reflected linguistic differences, but also served as a manifestation of the perceived ethnic division of society, demonstrating power relations between different groups. According to Björklund, ethnicity was a fundamental social category, and, in Latvia, it was historically associated with power and political status (Björklund, 2004).

In the early years of independence of the Republic of Latvia (1918–1923), this diverse system was supported by the young republic within the framework of the principle of cultural autonomy (Batelaan, 2002). This approach, in line with the inter-war principles of Wilson and the League of Nations regarding minorities, made the minority situation in Latvia one of the most liberal in Europe at the time. In the field of education, this meant that minorities were allowed not only to open their own schools, but also to administer the curriculum. Gradually, however, the minority policy became stricter, and, by 1923, a law was passed that required a school to be converted into a Latvian school if more than 40% of its students did not belong to the nationality to which the school belonged. In 1932, the 'nationality principle' was introduced, according to which only German children could enrol in German secondary schools. This decree was aimed at reducing the influence of German schools and the German language in the country. Thus, by the time of the government takeover by Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934, the autonomy of minorities had been significantly restricted.

During the Soviet period, the education system underwent further changes, retaining some schools, but on new grounds and with a different purpose. There were now Latvian-language schools alongside Russian-language schools. Nevertheless, the distribution of students between these systems did not always follow the ethnic logic. Latvian-language schools were considered 'ethnic' and were intended for children of the titular nation, while Russian-language schools were perceived as 'internationalist', and they accepted all children not belonging to the titular group (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007).

The transformations brought about by the occupation and the Second World War had a profound impact on the Latvian intellectual community. These changes radically altered the conditions of everyday life and imposed widespread, intense ideological demands. It is generally believed that the most repressive period was between 1946 and 1956, after which, there was a gradual easing of strict Stalinist controls. However, in the decades that followed, there was still no clear path to freedom of thought, which significantly influenced the selection of authors included in school and university curricula (Ekmanis, 1978). By the late 1950s, much of the Baltic population had come to the painful realisation that the existing conditions would persist far longer than originally expected. While society attempted to adapt to the situation, a deep undercurrent of disagreement with the Soviet authorities remained just beneath the surface (Grudule and Kalnačs, 2023).

Although the Russian language predominated in the public sphere, the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic became effectively bilingual in 1958 following the reform of education. In everyday life, children attending Latvian schools were obliged to learn Russian and to spend a year more in school than their Russian-speaking peers, ostensibly to better master the Russian language. At the same time, the children whose parents served in the armed forces of the USSR were exempted from learning Latvian, as many headquarters of the Baltic Military District were in Latvia. As a result, by the time when Latvia's independence was restored in 1991, a significant part of the ethnic Latvian population had become bilingual, fluent in both Latvian and Russian, while many Russians and Russian speakers remained monolingual (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007).

Unlike Western European countries, Latvia survived several occupations, terror, deportation and other crimes of the communist system (Zelče, 2009). Having become one of the most urbanised and industrialised republics of the USSR, it was for many years an outpost of the modernisation of the totalitarian regime, a republic with a high level of formal education, with an emphasis on the sciences, Communist Party ideology and military training, while social sciences, foreign languages (except Russian) and knowledge of the mother tongue remained in the shadow. Ķestere (2014) states, "Nothing was as it seemed in the Soviet era and situations could be so absurd that it is difficult for a person raised in a democratic society to truly believe them" (Ķestere, 2014, p. 845). The Soviet authorities withdrew from the open collections of Latvian libraries and from the book market more than 150 works by authors who had published their works in the interwar period and in exile. These works constituted a significant part of the national culture and presented an alternative view of history that differed from the official version

imposed by the Soviet authorities. In addition, the works of local scholars, which could be deemed of importance for understanding the Latvian history and culture, were also overlooked by the general public (Eglīte, 2009). As a consequence, history and Latvian literature curricula at all levels of education were significantly distorted and one-sided. This led to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the cultural and historical heritage, which made it difficult to form a full and objective perception of the national identity and history. Due to the Soviet occupation, many young people grew up with a limited understanding of the richness and diversity of the national culture. Their parents' fear of sharing knowledge on history, combined with the lack of preserved earlier editions, caused this distortion to persist into adulthood, undermining the nation's confidence and self-esteem during the revival period. This influence extended to their children as well, thus contributing to the shaping of the next generation (Eglīte, 2009).

With the beginning of institutional changes during the period of Latvia's regaining independence, the overtly ideological structures of the University of Latvia were first of all abolished: in October 1989, the Department of Scientific Communism was transformed into the Department of Political Science; in June 1991, the Department of Civil Defence was abolished, and military training was excluded from the curriculum. After the restoration of independence, the educators teaching in Latvia had to work on the creation of new pedagogical sciences. It was impossible to attract specialists from abroad due to both insufficient knowledge of foreign languages and lack of funding, and therefore pedagogical sciences suddenly received long-awaited and absolute freedom, where each educator could develop his or her own pedagogical programme, which was not yet regulated by higher authorities and was not subject to censorship. This period is characterised by nostalgia for the development of national pedagogy, disrupted by the Soviet occupation and a sincere belief in the superiority of everything Western (Ķestere, Rubene, and Ozola, 2021).

During this period, the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe faced a set of political and economic transformations in the transition to a new, Western European future. The term 'postsocialist' has its roots in the historical context of the Cold War and reflects an artificial ideologically constructed division of the world. It also signals the uncertainty of geopolitical boundaries and demonstrates the existence of multiple interconnected postsocialist spaces, each of which differs in political, geographical, economic and historical characteristics (Chankseliani and Silova, 2018).

Education in Latvia during this period became a driving force, a reflection of these transformations. It played a central role in the discussion of the political future associated with Europeanisation, democratisation and market-oriented globalisation. The transition to a capitalist market economy and the abandonment of the sole focus on the needs of the communist state led to a re-conceptualisation of the aims of education. Under the new realities, the goals of education, which in the past had been centred on the socialist ideal, began to be revised. The former emphasis on the 'socio-moral' aspects that were the basis of the Soviet totalitarian pedagogical system lost its relevance. Instead, the new governments of post-socialist countries began to focus predominantly on the political

and economic goals of education, which largely served the interests of state-building, including processes of national unification and the enhancement of international legitimacy. In some cases, these goals included the pursuit of European integration and international recognition.

Economic goals, in turn, were seen within the concept of human capital. This concept emphasised the acquisition of skills and knowledge needed to improve the productivity and competitiveness of both individuals and nations. The result was to be an overall improvement in the level of modernisation. In this new paradigm, the social and moral goals of education, previously at the centre of interest, were relegated to the periphery of interest (Mercer, Barker, and Bird, 2010). This led to a shift in the focus of education to more pragmatic objectives, such as improving the quality of education and adapting curricula to the demands of the modern labour market. The reforms in the education system, as well as the challenges of budgetary shortfalls and the need for capacity building to prepare for a modern approach to education, were the context in which specific issues, such as intercultural and minority education, were first raised.

By the early 2000s, Latvia faced an urgent need to reassess its approaches to the development of intercultural relations. This occurred against the backdrop of contradictory Western European forecasts and internal uncertainty within Latvian society regarding the direction of its educational strategies. There was a growing demand for a balanced model that could accommodate both global trends and local specificities. After the collapse of the USSR in 1990, Latvia faced a unique situation when a significant part of its population consisted of people from other republics of the former Soviet Union. These people remained in Latvia despite the change of the political paradigm.

At the same time, the key aspiration of Latvian society was to find its own subjectivity and to understand how to interact with the outside world. The presence of a significant number of immigrants who did not speak the State language and did not share the cultural attitudes of the majority caused tensions and created fear of loss of cultural identity. By the time Latvia joined the European Union in 2004, many issues related to pedagogy and integration still remained unresolved. Western educational initiatives often failed to resonate with the local context and required adaptation. An important condition for their successful implementation was the appeal to the historical memory, traditions and resources of Latvian society (Zelče, 2009).

Latvia saw its educational task first of all in preserving historical memory and national peculiarities, considering it as a contribution to the world cultural diversity. Therefore, in educational strategies for the implementation of multiculturalism, the search for a balance between the recognition of cultural pluralism and the strengthening of a stable national identity became the main focus.

The lack of conceptual clarity in the definition of ‘intercultural’, as well as in the relationship between ‘multicultural’ and ‘intercultural’, often reduced multicultural education to bilingual education and was interpreted as the teaching of Latvian in minority or Russian-language schools or as a process of inclusion of national minorities (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007).

As the conceptualisation of the integration policy developed in the second half of the 1990s, it became clear that the Latvian language in an intercultural context in the official view played a central role in the ethnic minority integration processes. In education, the focus was on the issues of minority language teaching and the problem of improving the Latvian language proficiency of minority students. The close link between language and identity arguably became even stronger as the public discourse around language in education evolved and polarised during the minority education reforms. Commitment to an independent Latvia became linked to a desire to learn Latvian and, as a consequence, any support for the retention of teaching in other languages, particularly Russian as the language of the former oppressor, came to be seen as a potential lack of support for Latvian independence *(*Anweiler, 1992). It is important to realise that, unlike many other situations, in Latvia, the strengthening of the Latvian language implied not only language proficiency and frequency of use, but also attitudes towards the language. Without understanding the recent history and the psychological and emotional context described above, it is difficult to understand why education in Latvia has had such a 'narrow' perception of intercultural issues and focused almost exclusively on the language issue.

The Latvian school system and minorities

In 1998, the Latvian legislation was amended, and the Ministry of Education developed a programme for the gradual expansion of Latvian language teaching. It included four models from which all State-run primary schools implementing a minority education programme (one of the legally defined specialised types of education) could choose, or propose their own model, which had to be certified. The aim of the models was to start with different levels of Latvian in the first grade, but, by the 9th grade, to reach a situation where approximately 50% of lessons would be taught in Latvian. Whilst the primary school reform was of some concern at the time, the main tension over minority education centred on the proposed secondary school reform. The Education Law included rules that stipulated that the transition to Latvian as the language of instruction should be implemented on 1 September 2004 for all tenth grades with a minority education programme. The Law on General Education was adopted in 1999 and provided for the possibility of implementing a minority secondary education programme that would include the mother tongue of an ethnic minority and educational content related to minority identity and integration in Latvia (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007).

Uncertainty about what the content of education could be and to what extent the minority language could be retained as the language of instruction persisted until May 2003, when, after much controversy and political debate, the ratio of a minimum of 60% of instruction in the state language in secondary schools was finally clarified in regulations. However, in January 2004, amendments to the Law on Education, passed on second reading in the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, did not include this norm, but reverted to the previous wording, providing for the teaching of only the minority language as a subject and subjects related to minority identity in the minority language.

Only after serious protests and the President's threat to return the amendments to the Parliament for reconsideration they were included in the third reading on 5 February 2004. This late date of adoption and mixed signals from the majority politicians to accept minority education with a significant share of teaching in a non-Latvian language created tensions and increased the distrust of minorities towards the majority politicians. The long road to the adoption of a language norm for minority education and the implementation of a secondary school reform in 2004 was accompanied by protests by ethnic minority representatives, as well as harsh rhetoric by the majority politicians about the allegedly destructive and potentially disloyal stance of minority activists, who were accused of opposing the State language and, consequently, Latvia itself (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007).

Although polls in the early 2000s consistently showed support among Russian-speaking minorities for learning Latvian as well as bilingual education, and although even the most radical opposition politicians consistently reiterated that they did not dispute the need to learn Latvian while objecting to the way it was imposed, opposition to the 2004 reform was growing, and a climate of growing ethnic tension was observed in the country during this period.

The president of the Republic of Latvia Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga (who served as President from 1999 to 2007) said in an interview with a Russian weekly that Latvia's Russian-speaking population must accept that Latvia has become independent and that they are Latvians — of Russian origin, but Latvians first and foremost (Brands-Kehris and Landes, 2007). She added that if they really want to be Russians, they have the option to return to Russia. The President of Latvia asked Russian speakers or ethnic Russians to feel Latvians with Russian roots. In reality, this would require major changes in the components of individual identity and was perceived by many as a threat to the minority culture and identity.

The sensitivity of language issues in Latvia, the perception of language as the main marker of identity and the State's concern primarily with Russian-language schools created a background situation in which the development of multicultural approaches in education (and other areas) was unlikely and could not be combined with openness to other languages and/or cultures in general.

Discussion

Analysing Latvia's path from the concept of the 'friendship of peoples' and socialist democracy to the initial signs of multiculturalism during the period from 1991 to 2004, several key issues emerge that reflect the country's difficulties in adapting to a new sociopolitical reality. These challenges are rooted in both historical and social factors that have shaped the perception and implementation of multiculturalism in Latvia. A crucial aspect is the continued impact of the Soviet period, which has shaped social and political attitudes in Latvia even after the restoration of independence. The Soviet ideology with its pseudo-democratic principles and the constructed notion of the 'friendship of peo-

ples' left a deep and negative imprint on the collective consciousness of Latvian society. This experience generated a widespread sense of distrust and scepticism toward the idea of multiculturalism, which was frequently perceived not as a genuine societal aspiration but as yet another top-down policy, externally imposed rather than internally driven.

Although the Soviet rhetoric promoted ideals of equality and cooperation, the actual implementation of this policy served as a mechanism of control and suppression of national identities. Consequently, after regaining independence, Latvia immediately (1991–2004) found itself in a situation where the revival of national self-consciousness and the desire for ethno-cultural identity came into tension with the emerging need to acknowledge and accommodate cultural diversity. This contradiction was especially pronounced in relation to a part of the Russian-speaking minority, which was unprepared to accept the new conditions and often saw themselves as part of the Soviet past. Latvia's aspiration to integrate into the European Union and adopt Western democratic standards included a commitment to the principles of multiculturalism. However, this transition proved to be complex and, in many ways, painful for Latvian society (Dzenovska, 2018b). The European standards of tolerance and respect for cultural differences clashed with the Latvian reality, where the national identity was only beginning to recover after decades of suppression. In these conditions, multiculturalism was perceived more as a threat to national integrity than as a means of strengthening society.

Educational reforms were aimed at restoring national values and strengthening the Latvian language, which was often perceived as an attempt to assimilate the Russian-speaking population. Lack of conceptual clarity and insufficient preparation for the implementation of intercultural education led to minority schools becoming the main arena for ethnic and cultural contradictions. As a result, it can be stated that Latvia, in its early years of independence, was not yet ready to fully implement the principles of multiculturalism. This process required considerable efforts from society to overcome historical traumas and adapt to new political and social realities. Today, looking back at that period, we can see that Latvia's path to multiculturalism was difficult and ambiguous, but it was through these difficulties that the country was able to gradually integrate into the European community while preserving its national identity.

Thus, this analysis has confirmed the importance of taking into account the historical context and specificity of national identity when considering the processes of integration and adaptation of multiculturalism in post-Soviet countries. Latvian experience shows that successful implementation of multiculturalism requires not only political will and legislative changes, but also a deep understanding of cultural and historical factors that shape public consciousness.

Conclusions

With the restoration of independence in 1991 and during the first decade thereafter, Latvian society was unprepared for the level of tolerance implied by the term 'multiculturalism' in the European context. In Latvia, multiculturalism in the social and educational environment was understood as a – perhaps – not very pleasant but enforced neighbour-

hood that had little to do with a true acceptance of cultural diversity as we now understand it. This was especially true of the large Russian-speaking community, which was unwilling to change and accept the new rules, which eventually led to its transformation into a 'parallel community'.

The existence of many false constructs in the past, such as 'friendship of peoples' and 'democratic values' in the USSR, which were not really what they were called, also did not favour consolidation. Many Latvians believed that the regained independence signified a moment when they could finally "choose with whom and how to inhabit the earth" (Dzenovska, 2018a). However, this only marked the beginning of a new and difficult process of Europeanisation, for which Latvia aspired, but for which Latvia was not yet ready. For the people who had recently liberated themselves from the totalitarian regime, multiculturalism seemed to be an unacceptable luxury, something that no one seriously considered. The Latvian nation longed for freedom, for the restoration of its integrity and confidence in the future, to make up for all that had been lost in the previous decades. Any 'other' who wanted to be part of this movement within the country had to first become part of the nation, join the majority, rather than retain their own cultural identity.

The lack of national unity and political consolidation in the state did not allow Latvian society at that time to successfully develop and overcome crisis phenomena. This led to many social and political challenges and divisions in society which began to emerge in the early years following the restoration of independence (Druviete, 1999). The unpreparedness of Latvian society for multiculturalism in the initial years after the restoration of independence was predetermined primarily by the tragedies of the Soviet past, rapid modernisation, and the associated endless flow of migrant workers who, even after the collapse of the USSR, continued to stay in the country and still considered themselves part of the Soviet project rather than potential citizens of Latvia. While multiculturalism as a concept implied recognition and respect for cultural diversity, Latvia primarily wanted recognition and respect for itself and was not ready for different ethnic and cultural groups to influence its public and political life.

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