

Defensive Language Policies in Quebec and Latvia

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This paper will compare the language and education policies of a geographically Western based area, the province of Quebec in Canada, and Latvia, a formerly Soviet occupied republic, to explore the similarities and differences in policies by each to protect their respective “visage linguistique” [linguistic features].

Quebec and Latvia have many similarities and both of the respective politically dominant groups feel stressed by their minorities: English in Quebec and Russian in Latvia. On the other hand the defensive language policies initiated by both have created insecurities and a sense of vulnerability within the two linguistic minority groups.

The fact that French, English and Russian are world languages with over 100 million adherents does not seem to have provided these groups with a lesser need to defend their linguistic space than for Latvian speakers, whose language is practiced by fewer than 1.5 million people. A summation of the parallel historical pressures of both linguistic groups has been outlined in a comparative analysis of Quebec and Latvia published in 2004:

“Concern for the French language in Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s and the Latvian language in the then Soviet Union in the late 1990s were ignited by some of the same demographic and assimilative forces in the two societies. Both Quebec and Latvia had lost their independence to larger powers. The birth rate and population declined abruptly in the two subnations. Schools in English [in Quebec] and Russian [in Latvia] attracted most immigrants. The elites were disproportionately drawn from outside the majority ethnic groups.”¹

¹ Carol Schmid, Brigita Zwpa and Arta Snipe, “Language Policy and Ethnic Tensions in Quebec and Latvia, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, Vol 45[3-4]:231-252, p.231.

According to the head of Latvian Parliamentary Commission on language policy, Ina Druviete, the example of Quebec laid the foundations for Latvian language legislation:

Among the countries whose language policy was well known to Baltic specialists was Canada, Quebec in particular... The Canadian linguistic legislation became one of the cornerstones for the Latvian linguistic legislation.

She notes that the Quebec language focused Bill 22 and Bill 101 were translated into Latvian and “studied intensively” and that “the goal of language policy was similar to the one in Quebec.” She then enumerates these goals:

...to prevent language shift and to change language hierarchy in the public life. The idea of a bilingual state was completely rejected. The main sectors of intervention were language use in State government and administrative bodies, in meetings and office work in particular, language use in names and in information and language use in education. The principle of territorial language rights was implemented.²

The former President of Latvia, Vaira Vike Freiberga, has also noted that Latvia desired to achieve the success of Quebec’s language law, Bill 101. Her familiarity with this legislation is very personal. She was a professor of psychology at the French language Universite de Montreal for several decades, and lived through the various stages of the implementation of this law.

Quebec and Language Issues

The territory of what is now Quebec was first colonized by France in the 1600’s. “Nouvelle France”, however, was conquered by English forces in 1759 and the territory was signed over to the British in a treaty at the end of hostilities.

² Ina Druviete, “Language Policy and Protection of the State Language in Latvia”, Paper presented at the World Congress on Language Policies, Barcelona, April 16-20, 2002. pp. 1 and 2 of 5 .
http://www.linguapax.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CMPL2002_T3_Druviete.pdf

The initial inability of the English to swamp this new territory with Anglophone settlers forced them to accommodate the religious and linguistic demands of the majority of the population who were French speaking “colons”. For over two hundred years the French Canadian population was able to maintain its language because it had been allowed control over certain political and power positions, because of the strong French speaking Catholic religious infrastructure, and because of a phenomenal demographic boom based on large family sizes. After experiencing several political organizational mutations, (Canada East, Canada West, Upper Canada, Lower Canada), where French Canada had equal representation in legislative structures to English Canada, a new combination of British North American colonies was created in 1867. French Canada lost its equal political weight and became one of four and eventually one of ten provinces in a federation. Indeed, Quebec remained as the only officially French-speaking province in Canada. However, the province of Quebec was able to retain control over vital institutions such as education and health, which were essentially left in the hands of the Catholic clergy. At the same time, French Canadians were largely excluded from the leadership positions of the economic infrastructure of the province and consequently, most ambitious, upwardly mobile French Canadians had to adapt to the mostly unilingual English-speaking work environment. In addition to the control of economic levers of power, Anglophones were able to play on two political fulcrums. First, they were major donors to provincial political parties and were able to demand and receive anglophone control over the provincial Ministry of Finance, which in the course of time became an ironclad tradition. The Anglophones were thus able to solidify a vast institutional infrastructure catering to their linguistic needs in major areas of Anglo concentration such

as schools, hospitals, welfare and municipal governments. In other words, they enjoyed institutional completeness for their group, held the reins of economic power and were the pinnacle of Quebec's high society. Second, Anglophone Canadians saw themselves and were seen in Ottawa as part of the vast majority of the Canadian population which was more than 70% English speaking. From this perspective francophones were perceived and treated by Federal policy as a minority. Moreover this minority's share of the total population was diminishing while the population of the rest of Canada was booming with waves of new immigrants who preponderantly chose to ally themselves with the dominant English side.

Only with the start of the "Quiet revolution" in Quebec, after the 1960 provincial election and victory by a reform-minded "equipe de tonerre", did the linguistic ethnic relationship change. Quebec began to reassert its rights more forcefully within the federation, and together with modernization changes in almost all institutions, its confidence and sense of empowerment led to a heady "épanouissement". This new challenge resulted in the federal government attempts at accommodation including bilingualism policies (1968) and concessions in jurisdictional powers (e.g. pension plans). Nevertheless, conflicts with the federal government and with the old Anglophone power structures as well as the examples of newly formed states from old colonies in Africa and Asia, precipitated the creation of a new nationalist and secessionist political party, the Parti Québécois (PQ), led by one of the most popular ministers in previous Liberal governments, René Lévesque. The PQ won the election of 1976 and as one of its first acts, created in 1977 a strict and demanding language law, the Charter of the French Language, usually known as Bill 101. This Charter effectively transformed the

Anglophone society from one which saw itself as an extension of the majority Canadian society, into one which saw its powers, and privileges diminish considerably. It forced the Anglophone community to accommodate to a new reality of being a “minority” in a predominantly French-speaking province.

According to Gregory Baum, at that time Anglophone professor of Religious Studies at McGill University in Montreal, and a leading member of the Anglophone intelligentsia, Bill 101 managed to maintain a balance between personal rights or civil liberties and collective rights to self-determination. He noted that there were good and urgent reasons for the protection of the French language and that Bill 101 did “not threaten the continued existence of the historical institutions of the Anglophone community, the schools, universities, hospitals, social welfare centres and community organizations”.

Baum, argued that Bill 101 was a major achievement of the Quebec people::

Bill 101...was a major political achievement of the Quebec people, correcting a previous injustice inherited from Quebec’s colonial past. Bill 101 made French the official language of the Quebec society. Like every legislation of Affirmative Action that seeks to right historical wrongs, Bill 101 imposed certain limitations on the rights of previously advantaged groups, in this case the Anglophone community and immigrants settling in Quebec.³

Bill 101 limited access to English language schools, posited that all external signs and advertising had to be in French and required French language use in certain professions and in all private firms employing more than 50 people. The French language was also declared the official language of Quebec, thus undermining the policy

³ Gregory Baum, “Ethical Reflections on Bill 101” posted on the web site [https://english.republiquelibre.org/Ethical Reflections on Bill 101.>](https://english.republiquelibre.org/Ethical_Reflections_on_Bill_101.>) Baum died October 18,2017,at age 94.

of bilingualism so fervently defended by then Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau.

School Choice in Quebec

For many years English Canadian society in Quebec was able to attract the bulk of new immigrants into its linguistic fold. New immigrants quickly realized where economic power lay and also that North America was mostly English speaking. Thus English was the language of upward mobility and of geographical mobility. French Canadian discontent about this trend broke out in language demonstrations in the late 1960's. In 1974, the Liberal Government under Robert Bourassa, following the recommendations of the Gendron Commission report in 1972, and in order to lessen the growing appeal of separatists, decided to pass a language law (Bill 22) that in retrospect seems rather mild compared to Bill 101. Nevertheless, as a result of this law, many Anglo-Quebeckers were shocked and became politically vindictive. A large percent decided that they would no longer be taken for granted by the Liberal Party and in the next election in November 1976 chose to support a third party, the conservative and mostly rural based Union Nationale. This vote splitting helped the separatist PQ to garner a majority of seats in the "Assemblée Nationale". (Quebec legislature)

Initially Bill 101 allowed only those children to attend English language schools who could demonstrate that members of their immediate family had received the majority of their education in English in the province of Quebec or in Canada if the parents were residents of Quebec in 1977 when Bill 101 was passed. This particular limitation was successfully challenged in Canada's Supreme Court and thereafter (1993) proof of attendance in any English language educational institution in all of Canada [not just in

Quebec] became the new criterion determining permission to attend Anglophone schools in Quebec. As well, economic imperatives made allowances for the children of executives and specialists coming from abroad who did not intend to stay in Quebec for longer than three years. The three-year limit has been applied in a rather liberal fashion, however. All other immigrants, as well as almost all Francophone families have been forced to send their children to French language schools, or to private English or other language schools. As a result several changes ensued. French language schools evolved from institutions servicing almost entirely children of French Canadian or “pure laine” origins to accommodating myriad nationalities and races. This has helped broaden the educational and cultural horizons of Quebec’s French Canadian community, although it also created pockets of resistance against “foreigners”, a reality exploited by ambitious politicians. Demographically, it has laid the foundations for the assimilation of a large percentage of new immigrants into the Francophone fold. For the Anglophone community, the loss of new immigrant recruits for their schools together with significant out-migration by Anglo Quebec families to other provinces, has forced serious retrenchment and closing of many educational establishments. At the tertiary school level, students have the freedom to attend either French or English language community colleges (Cegeps) or universities. Indeed, Quebec has two successful Anglophone universities.

Sign Restrictions

Bill 101 also tried to cope with English language predominance with respect to commercial sector signs and advertising that made cities like Montreal, for example, appear to be duplicates of most other large North American urban centers. Bill 101

required that all commercial outdoor and indoor signs and firm names as well as road signs in the province be in French only, to emphasize the “visage linguistique” of the majority of the population, and provide evident proof of the priority position of French in all commercial establishments. These restrictions created a powerful backlash of discontent among many businessmen and several of them challenged this infringement on the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (enacted in 1982) and also in the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

On December 15, 1988, by a unanimous vote, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the sign limitations clauses of Bill 101 as being unconstitutional. Nevertheless, they pointed out in their written decision that the “aim” of the language policy underlying the Charter “was a serious and legitimate one”. The judges also noted that the sign sections of Bill 101 “indicate a rational connection between protecting the French language and assuring that the reality of Quebec society is communicated through the ‘visage linguistique’”. What they objected to was the requirement that signs be only in French because in their opinion this was neither necessary to achieve the legislative objective nor “proportionate to it”. Most importantly, the judges essentially provided a road map for the Quebec Government in dealing with the issue:

Thus, whereas requiring the predominant display of the French language, even its marked predominance, would be proportional to the goal of promoting and maintaining a French “visage linguistique” in Quebec, and therefore justified under S.9.1 of the Quebec Charter and S.1 of the Canadian Charter, requiring the exclusive use of French has not been so justified.⁴

⁴ Steven Wallace Lowe, “The Supreme Court of Canada: Friend of the French Language”, p.6 of 12. See <http://www.uni.ca/lowe.html> This article has an excellent bibliography on court cases and language politics.

Within a week of this Supreme Court decision, the Quebec Assemblée Nationale passed Bill 178, which allowed for bilingual signs indoors, but still maintained the need for exclusively French signs outdoors. In order to shore up the legality of their new law, in the face of the Court's decision, the Bourassa Government used a legal loophole or "opting out" clause attached to the Canadian Charter (section 33) better known as the "notwithstanding clause" which allowed a provincial law to exist for the next five years in spite of its conflict with the Canadian Charter. The uproar and resentment over such a legal manipulation by Quebec was so large in the rest of Canada that many claim that it was "the main factor that led to the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990".⁵ (This Accord was meant to provide Quebec with new and express guarantees of provincial rights within the Canadian federal system). Ironically, in October 1993, just before the "notwithstanding clause" on Bill 178 had elapsed, the Quebec National Assembly proceeded to implement the suggestions of the Supreme Court by allowing outdoor signs with another language as long as French was "markedly predominant". Indeed, the new changes also left much flexibility in the hands of the government to determine:

...where public signs and posters and commercial advertising must be in French only, where French need to be predominant or where such signs, posters and advertising may be in another language only.⁶

French language predominance was defined in great detail, requiring that the French text should occupy twice the space and have its lettering twice as large as that of the other language.

Gregory Baum claimed that the sign law had created "the French face of Quebec" and that it communicated an important message for those living in Quebec and for new

⁵ Ibid, p.7.

⁶ ibid, p.8.

immigrants. As he saw it, the new sign law did not substantially violate freedom of expression and “Anglophones in Quebec continue to do business in English”.

The restrictive sign legislation does not prevent Anglophone merchants from advertising in English on radio and television and in newspapers, weeklies, neighbourhood publications and mailings.⁷

Language of Business

Bill 101 required that all commercial ventures with over 50 employees had to receive a “francization” certificate. In order to achieve this, the language of work, both written and oral, at all levels had to be French. Some exceptions for multinational firms were, however, allowed.

These new requirements forced the employment of many more people of French origin, especially in management and director positions because at that time they were proportionately much more bilingual than the Anglophones. Thus the share of Francophones among the board directors of firms with 100 or more employees rose from 13% in 1976 to 43% in 1991.⁸ Many French Canadian nationalists, however, have not been fully satisfied with the extent of English used in business in Quebec and have demanded that all firms regardless of size be subject to the demands of Francization.

All professions requiring licensing by the state or by guild-like associations had to have a fluent knowledge of the French language. Doctors, engineers, architects, psychologists, for example, were forced to pass French language exams in order to practice their specialty in Quebec.

⁷ Baum, pp. 5-6.

⁸ “Language and Language Laws in Quebec”, p.5 of 10. See http://www.neuvel.net/Quebec_ling.htm

Success of Policies

The success of Quebec's language policies can be measured in various ways. For one, the previously self-contained mostly unilingual Anglophone minority has adapted successfully to the new rules of the game. In 2000, the bilingualism rate within the English-speaking community rose from 37% to 63% in the quarter century since Bill 101.⁹ It progressed further to 68% in 2011 and 71% in 2016.¹⁰ Indeed, the rate among young Anglophones is much higher, given the fact that they take French language lessons beginning with grade one in elementary schools. Over 90% of newly arriving children of immigrants are enrolling in French language schools (others are choosing private schools) and about 75% of those eligible to attend English schools also do so. Close to 95% of residents in the province use French in their daily activities. The Commission claimed that the French language had become the language "of everyone" rather than the "property of the majority" and that old antagonisms had faded:

The situation has changed significantly in Quebec since the adoption of the Charter of the French Language. The old antagonism between French and English engendered by the interpretations of language policies has largely faded and the acceptance of the status quo seems to prevail. Everyone now acknowledges that French has become the language of participation in Quebec society and the language of citizenship.¹¹

To be sure, the Commission pointed out many areas for improvement and suggested a need for reorientation of strategies to meet new and growing threats that could upset the existing "socio-linguistic balance":

The new social and economic conditions that are appearing against a backdrop of globalization can upset this balance and raise fears that the

⁹ Commission des Etats generaux sur la situation et l'avenir de la langue francaise au Quebec, Summary of the Final Report: French a Language for Everyone, Quebec: 2000, p.10. A brief overview presented by Filippo Salvatore. "Vive a Trilingual Quebec!" in UNESCO Courier, July/August 2001.

¹⁰ Marian Scott, "Census 2016: English is making gains in Quebec", Montreal Gazette, August 2, 2017.

¹¹ Commission, p.28.

accomplishments of recent years will be lost. Quebec society is able to face these new challenges. However, to maintain the same objective, i.e. to ensure that French is the language of everyday life, bearing in mind the new rules of the game, it must review its strategies.¹²

Regardless of the seeming success of the French language policies in the province, many of the more fervid nationalists are upset that the proportion of native French speakers in Quebec had gone down from 79.7% to 78.4% between 2011 and 2016. No doubt many factors are involved including higher rates of immigration, increased advent of Canadian Anglophones [in contrast to their massive exit after Bill 101] and low birthrates. Nevertheless the refrain of a “dying nation” has surged somewhat. Eric Bouchard of the Mouvement Quebec Francais claims that “census numbers show Quebec’s language laws aren’t working” and that “the decline of the French language needs to be taken as seriously as climate change” A note of fear concludes his remarks: “If nothing is done, French will be over; the francophone elites need to take their head out of the sand”.¹³ The leader of the Parti Quebecois at that time [now replaced], Jean-Francois Lisee, also reacted to the new 2016 census figures. His suggestion was to only allow immigrants into Quebec who speak French, to demand French in businesses with over 25 employees instead of the existing barrier of 50, and to require all those attending English universities and junior colleges to obtain “a degree in French proficiency before being allowed to graduate, even if they intend on moving outside the province”¹⁴ By contrast, one of the key authors of Bill 101, economics professor Francois Vaillancourt claims that “the law and other measures have done their job”. In his view “knowledge of French has

¹² Commission, p.17.

¹³ Sudha Krishnan, “Rising bilingualism in Quebec welcomed by some, but feared by nationalists-CBC News”, www.cbc.ca, August 2, 2017.

¹⁴ Canadian Press, “PQ leader calls for new Quebec language law in reaction to 2016 census data”, National Post, August 10, 2017.

increased...Francophone employers dominate the Quebec economy, and speaking French is no longer a brake on earning power". He offers a new view of the role of the English language that may seem to argue against some nationalist concepts: "we must set aside language policies that regard English as the language of conquest and not the language of international openness".¹⁵

Latvian Language Issues

Latvia's population of 1.9 million is far smaller than that of Quebec and the present 63% share of the population by the Latvian majority is far smaller than the 81% represented by French Canadians in Quebec. History has also differed. Latvia emerged from the Tsarist empire after 1918, and was independent until June 1940, when it was occupied by the Red Army and illegally incorporated into the USSR. As a result of the influx of over a million people of mostly Slavic origin from neighbouring Soviet republics, after 1945, the representation of Latvians in their own country dwindled from over 77% in 1935 to 52% in 1989. It is noteworthy that in absolute terms the number of Latvians decreased during this 54-year period from 1,467,000 to 1,387,000, whereas the Russians increased by 737,000, the Belorussians by 92,900 and Ukrainians by 90,300.¹⁶ Almost all non-Latvian ethnic groups with the exception of other Balts and Gypsies integrated with the power-dominant Russian group, and most used the Russian language in their homes. Russophones were more trusted by Moscow authorities than local Latvians, and Latvians formed only about 39% of the Communist Party membership. As a result, a high percentage of the leadership positions in the State and Party apparatus and

¹⁵ Phil Carpenter, "Ignore the alarmists, there is no language crisis in Quebec, economists say" ,National Post, June 24,2018. A most curious revelation by Statistics Canada in 2019 was that over 60 thousand had been counted with the Anglophones rather than the francophones. They claimed that a computer glitch was responsible.

¹⁶ Juris Dreifelds, Latvia in Transition, Cambridge U.P., 1996, p.147.

industry were filled by Slavs or Russified Latvians imported from Russia who had few ties to the local indigenous population and spoke only Russian.

In August 1991 after the failed hard-line putsch in the USSR, Latvia declared its independence once again, and proceeded to reverse some of the changes that had been effected during the Soviet period. One of the principal changes was in the realm of languages. During the half century of occupation, the Latvian language had been marginalized. Almost all communications with state institutions were required to be in Russian. The work environment was also predominantly Russian except in some of the cultural institutions and in rural areas. As well, Soviet educational policy could best be described as “creeping russification”. It was an obligatory subject in Latvian schools, [4 hours a week starting in elementary school], but Latvian language studies in Russian schools were ignored in practice. Russophones had no need to learn Latvian because all their needs could be satisfied in Russian. Consequently, in 1989 two thirds of Latvians knew Russian, whereas only 21.1% of Russians in Latvia knew Latvian. Most of the Russians who knew Latvian were people who had lived in independent Latvia prior to WW2. Many of the ancestors of the Old Believers fled persecution in Russia in the 1650’s, while others did the same after the Russian revolution of 1917. Among Belorussians, the rate of Latvian knowledge was 15.5% and among Ukrainians 8.9%. These latter groups came to Latvia after the war as “Soviet citizens”. In sum, as a result of the high level of Russian knowledge by Latvians in 1989, only 62% of the total population knew Latvian, but 81% knew Russian.¹⁷

The initial thrust to strengthen the position of the Latvian language began even before independence, during the period of glasnost and Latvian “re-awakening”. Thus in

¹⁷ Dreifelds, p.157.

October 1988, Latvian was made the state language of the republic, effectively co-equal with Russian and in May 1989 a new law on language regulation was introduced providing for a three year transition period. This law was heavily criticized by Russophones. By 1992, however, the balance of power had changed dramatically and wide ranging restrictive amendments to the 1989 law were introduced which essentially eliminated many of the concessions to the Russian language found in the original law. Indeed, all explicit references to Russian were deleted. Implicitly, however, while state employees were enjoined to use Latvian whenever possible, they were allowed to use other languages “to the extent necessary to perform professional responsibilities”.¹⁸ This phraseology appeared to dictate the need for bilingualism, or in effect for Russian-Latvian fluency among state employees. Given the realities of language knowledge, most fluently bilingual people were of Latvian ethnicity, hence, the gates were opened for the weeding out of those non-Latvians in state organs not fully fluent in Latvian.

In spite of the concerted efforts of many Latvians to teach the language to their Russophone neighbours and the efforts of state language agencies, the results were disappointing. A Latvian language agency organizer, Aija Priedite, claims that “the main reason for the failure was unrealistic ideas about language learning and language teaching, based on different myths, stereotypes and prejudices developed and practiced during Soviet times and intensified by the mental isolation of Latvia over the period”.¹⁹

¹⁸ For details of the various Latvian language laws see Jekaterina Dorodnova, Challenging Ethnic Democracy: Implementation of the Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to Latvia, 1993-2001, Centre for OSCE Research, Hamburg, 2003, Chapter 6. (Working Paper 10); and Priit Jarve, “Language Battles in the Baltic States: 1989 to 2002”, in Farimah Daftary and Francois Grin, eds, Nation-Building, Ethnicity and Language Politics in Transition Countries, Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2003, pp. 73 to 105. (Available on the internet under general rubric of Minelres).

¹⁹ Aija Priedite, “Latvian Language Acquisition – a fight with myths, stereotypes and prejudices”, Noves Sociolinguistica International (SL), Winter 2002. Available on the net http://cultura.gencat.net/lengcat/noves/hm02hivern/internacional/letonial_3.htm .

After many attempts by the Latvian Parliament (Saeima) to draft a new more vigorous language law in 1988 and 1999 and following a Presidential veto of one such attempt, the new language law was adopted in December 1999, with many of the detailed regulations and procedures for implementation left in the hands of cabinet. The law and regulations came into force on September 1, 2000.

Most importantly, many of the restrictive language clauses which originally envisaged limiting regulations for language work and communications in private economic entities in all public advertising and signs, were excised as a result of pressures from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and EU countries such as Finland. Latvia's desire to enter the European Union became the deciding factor in these compromises.

Pressures from more dedicated Latvian nationalists continued unabated after access of Latvia to the EU and NATO in 2004. The major issue of contention was the language of schools. A draft law was passed to force all minority secondary schools to switch to 100% teaching in Latvian. The heretofore quiescent Russophone minority became alarmed and started to mobilize against this law. About 60 thousand people assembled in protest. As well, 107 thousand signatures were collected to maintain Russian language in schools. Perhaps because of this local pressure and outside international pressures, the final law was modified so that only 60% of all secondary school classes had to be in Latvian. The choice of subjects was left in the hands of each educational institution. At the same time grades 1 to 9 were allowed to continue teaching in minority languages [mostly in Russian]

While Latvian language knowledge among young people improved, there were many schools with poor performance in teaching Latvian. In part this evolved from the dearth of good Latvian language teachers, the reluctance or refusal of Russian teachers to achieve adequate levels of language proficiency, and poor follow-up inspections to judge progress in this realm. As a result of perceived slow progress in Russian schools, a section of Latvian nationalists, under the leadership of the National Association party [Nacionala Apvieniba], initiated a referendum in 2010 to force all minority schools to teach only in Latvian.²⁰ The initiative failed because it did not achieve the required proportion of signatures. In other words, most Latvians overwhelmingly rejected support for this initiative. Ironically, in response to the Latvian initiative, there was a surprise counter proposal by Russophone organizers to make Russian a second official language in Latvia. These organizers were successful in surpassing the first two pre-requirements for a referendum, but failed in the final vote in February 18, 2012, which recorded 74.8% against and only 24.9% for this proposition. To be sure, only citizens could participate in this vote.

Latvian nationalists were not thwarted by previous failures in pushing for full education in all minority schools in the Latvian language. Several months after the Russian occupation of Crimea, [given the general mood of distrust and fear of hybrid wars], they managed to introduce a new school language law in May 2014, which, avoided any requirements for referenda, but relied on the support of the other partner parties in the

²⁰ Latvia has a three tier process to initiate a referendum. At that time the first requirement was to collect 10 thousand notarized signatures from Latvian citizens. Then the state continues the process by setting up signature collection points across the entire country lasting almost one month, where all citizens can participate. In order to organize a full referendum the initiative requires more than 10% of the number of votes in the previous national election. The nationalist initiative on language fell far short of the 10%, hence no referendum was required by the state.

ruling coalition to assert “parliamentary sovereignty”. The Russophone response and first level collection of signatures aimed at a renewed referendum opposing this move was dismissed by the ruling coalition because it purportedly contravened the constitution. The new language aimed not only to fully Latvianize teaching in secondary schools, but also set limits for native language teaching for all school levels including pre-school institutions. The gestation period of the law, [first and second readings, committee conclusions], ended when the Saeima passed its third reading in March 22,2018. It was then promptly signed into law by President Raimonds Vejonis. President Vejonis himself was born in Russia and has a Russian mother.

The new Language requirements for Minority Schools.

For a better overview of the issue, education data might be useful for analysis. According to the Ministry of Education and Sciences, all minority day schools [from grades 1-12] in 2017/2018, held 58,081 students out of a total of 205,113. Most of these, 27.7% or 55,797 were in Russian language schools. Latvian schools held 147,032 or 71.6% of the total. ²¹ Enrolment in evening or correspondence programs indicated a total of 9940 students, of which 81.9% were in Latvian institutions.²²

The proposed changes include the teaching of all basic secondary school curriculum subjects in Latvian by 2020/2021, but it does allow minority pupils to access “modules” focusing on minority languages, literature, culture and historical subjects. Centralized testing of secondary school students will be allowed only in Latvian from 2019. In grades

²¹ The Latvian Ministry of Education and Sciences, “Oficiala statistika par visparigo izglitibu,2017-2018”.h< www.izm.gov.lv/lv/publikacijas-un-statistika>

²² Ibid. It should be pointed out that in 1995/1996 school year the number of students studying in Russian language schools was 39%.Schmid,e al,p.247.

7-9, school programs will require that 80% teaching of subjects be in Latvian, but for grades 1 to 6, one half of the curriculum will be taught in Latvian. Latvian oriented programs will be instituted for pre-schoolers to provide “sufficient language skill to successfully complete their primary school education in Latvian”.

The aim of the legislation is to more fully integrate minorities, improve their Latvian language fluency, and in the process create a unified political nation. An additional, rather short-sighted new language law, was promulgated July 4, 2018. It limits the language of instruction in private universities and colleges to only the formal languages of the European Union. In effect this law vetoed the right of higher educational institutions to teach in Russian. Besides ending a significant source of revenue for Latvia as a result of limiting several thousand Russian speaking students coming to earn degrees from many former Soviet states, it will no doubt encourage an exodus of Russian students to leave Latvia and unfortunately increase the level of ill will between the basic two language groups. Both laws are being contested and remain to be adjudicated by the Latvian Constitutional Court²³.

In the eyes of many, these language laws may appear extreme and intolerant. However, by standards found in many parts of the world, they may appear relatively moderate. Russia has no Ukrainian schools in spite of several million Ukrainians living there, and it is cutting back on the use of minority languages in its own “national republics” such as Tatarstan. Americans have been known to become very agitated anytime there are initiatives to increase Spanish language instructions in lower schools, no matter the percentage of Spanish speaking students. France is also in a dispute with

²³ Gunars Laganovskis, “Eksperti:Macibas valsts valoda atbilst Satversmei un skolenu interesem”, LV portals, March 19,2019.

Corsica regarding language of instruction demanding that only French should be used on that island. The UK government has not financed Polish or other language schools on its territory in spite of large contingents of people who arrived from Poland. Canadian provinces have also been reluctant to finance minority language schools except those required by the constitution [French and English].

It should be noted that Latvia has catered to many minorities and children are able to enrol in publicly financed schools which focus on Polish, Lithuanian, Estonian Ukrainian, Gypsy, and Hebrew languages. At least enrolled students can receive one half of their education from grades 1 to 6, followed by 20% from grades 7 to 9. Indeed, historically Latvia has been very generous in funding minority schools. Only when the Soviet “internationalists” occupied Latvia were all minority schools abolished [besides Russian and Latvian]. The last Polish school in Latvia was closed in 1949 in spite of the fact that Poland at that time was embraced by the USSR. With the advent of Latvian independence movement, Latvia became the first location financing a Jewish secondary school in the entire USSR in 1989.

Sign and Advertising Laws

The Latvian law stipulated that all names of institutions and organizations use letters of the Latvian or Latin alphabet, essentially vetoing the use of Russian Cyrillic. The original desire was to require that all signs, billboards, posters, placards, announcements or other notices “meant to inform the public, and in places accessible to the public” be written solely in the state language. However, as a result of criticism by the OSCE High Commissioner, the Latvian language for such purposes was required only from state and municipal institutions and enterprises or ones that had a significant state

and municipal share component. At the same time, private entities were affected if the public information they disseminated related to a “legitimate public interest”. This vague wording was further detailed by regulations to indicate exceptions. According to Jekaterina Dorodnova, the regulation now allows for the following:

The additional use of a foreign language in public information in the cases when the information relates to international tourism, international events, security considerations, extraordinary situations, epidemics and dangerous infectious diseases. A foreign language may also be used in brochures, bulletins, catalogues and other informative materials. However, most private institutions, organizations, enterprises, as well as self-employed persons must provide the part their public information that relates to legitimate public interests in the state language or in the state language alongside a foreign language (emphasis added).²⁴

In addition to the above, it should be noted that place names are allowed only in the Latvian language and that individual names, including those in passports have to be Latvianized with Latvian endings.

Language of Work

The language of “formal meetings” in state or municipal institutions and enterprises or in companies with majority state ownership, was to be Latvian. In other cases, however, that is in private enterprises, Latvian translation of the proceedings of such meetings had to be provided if at least one participant requested it. In real life this was a rare occurrence.

In dealing with non-Latvian citizens, state employees have been allowed to respond in a foreign language but are not obliged to do so.²⁵ Until 2003, the language of broadcasting on private radio and television channels was restricted, limiting non-Latvian

²⁴ Dorodnova, pp. 122-123.

²⁵ Jarve, p.89.

programs to 25% or less of total broadcasting hours. This restriction was found to be unconstitutional by the Latvian Constitutional Court in 2003.

State Institutions

As mentioned earlier, all state and municipal employees require fluency in Latvian. Candidates for Parliamentary and municipal elections who have not attended Latvian schools were required to provide certificates attesting their proficiency in the state language at the highest level. This requirement for certification, however, was lifted in May 2002.

In April 2002, the Saeima adopted four language amendments in the Latvian constitution. According to Priit Jarve the changes included the following:

Article 18 was supplemented with the provision that every MP is obliged to swear or to give a promise “to be loyal to Latvia, strengthen its sovereignty and the Latvian language as the sole state language, defend Latvia as an independent and democratic state, fulfil his/her duties in good faith, observe the constitution and the laws”. Article 21 provides that the sole working language in parliament is Latvian. Article 101 states that “full-fledged citizens of Latvia elect local governments” and that “the working language of local governments is Latvian”. Article 104 was supplemented with the provision that “everybody has the right to receive an answer in Latvian” from state or local government institutions.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid, p.100.

Similarities and Differences in Language Laws of Quebec and Latvia

In view of the fact that Quebec was used as a model for Latvian language legislation, one could expect a great degree of overlap. In effect, Latvian legislation would have shown greater fidelity to Bill 101 if its initial drafts had not been heavily criticized by European governments and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and considered barriers to entry into the European Union. As a result, the greatest difference lies in the language requirements for the private sphere. In Quebec all firms with over 50 workers require a “francization certificate” which is renewed after every three years. This is provided only if firms can prove that their meetings, correspondence and labour interactions are carried out solely in French. In Latvia, firm owners or chief managers can determine the language of their institution with the proviso that in “formal meetings” translation into Latvian should be provided if requested by at least one of the participants.

With respect to public signs and advertising, Quebec began with much stricter requirements of exclusive language application, but eventually after decisions of the Canadian Supreme Court, relented and allowed for bilingual signs as long as French was “significantly” more prominent. In certain circumstances foreign languages were also deemed appropriate by language inspectors (e.g. Chinese restaurants). There is currently a debate and deliberations about the stand alone international brand names such as Best Buy, Costco, Gap, Navy, Wal-Mart, Toys “R” Us . In 2014 the Court Superieure found that these did not contravene Bill 101. However, the court left it up to the Legislative

Assembly to proceed if they so desired and that indeed the French language was still threatened in spite of the arguments by the litigants. Some such as the Second Cup have added an explanation under their sign: "café". Others are also moving in that direction out of public relations considerations..

With respect to schooling, the two jurisdictions differ considerably. The new Latvian language law requires all secondary students to be taught in Latvian, 80% of subjects from grades 7 to 9 in minority schools will eventually require to be in Latvian, and 50% of lower grades will transition to Latvian. At the tertiary level [private universities and colleges], instructions are allowed in any of the official EU languages which in reality excludes Russian. In Quebec, only those who can prove that immediate members of their family or those who received their education in English schools in Canada can join English primary and secondary schools. Those staying in Quebec for less than 3 years or others tied to management duties in international firms are given special dispensations and allowed to go to English schools. Local French Canadians must attend French schools unless they go across the border to Ontario. At the tertiary level, however, all can choose either French or English language institutions if they can pass academic entrance requirements. French is taught as a subject in English language schools from grade 1 onwards, but as yet, there are no requirements that other subjects be given in French.

The language of the bureaucracy in both cases is the majority language. In Quebec, Bill 101 originally required French in the legislature and the courts, but this section was declared unconstitutional and now both English and French can be used in these institutions. In Latvia, the language of all public organizations, including

Parliament and local assemblies must be in Latvian. In courts as well, Latvian is the language of litigation, but in criminal cases free translations are provided.

Both Quebec and Latvia require a high degree of language proficiency by state registered professionals such as doctors, nurses, engineers and architects. In Latvia, an added screening mechanism involves citizenship. For example, only citizens can work as private detectives or in state and municipal agencies and given the fact that 12% of the population is formed by non-citizens [mostly Russophones], their options of work are to a degree limited. In reality the new linguistic rules of the game have forced Russians to learn Latvian while young Latvians have shied away from learning Russian. Most businesses desire to hire bilingual candidates to serve a widely bilingual clientele. As a result Latvians who do not speak Russian are disadvantaged and are now raising their voices in protest. No new law has yet been passed to regulate this issue but there are increasing pressures to do so from many Latvians.

Evaluation of Outcomes

One can judge language knowledge as an indicator of the success of language legislation. As pointed out earlier, the proportion of Anglophones fluent in French has risen from 37% in 1975 to 71% in 2016. In Latvia, one can observe a parallel growth in Latvian language knowledge by the minority with demonstrable improvement among Russians between the 1989 and 2000 censuses, that is from 21.2% to 59%. Among Belorussians, the change was from 15.5% to 55%, and among Ukrainians, from 8.9% to 54%.²⁷ More recently, in 2017, a self-defined ability by non-Latvians to speak Latvian

²⁷ Druviete, p.3. One should note, however, that some knowledge of the language does not equal proficiency in that language. According to a 1998 polling study, 15% of Russians claimed fluency in the Latvian language and another 25% could discuss issues with some difficulties. Among Latvians, Russian language fluency in this study was indicated by 97%. See Inesa Ozolina, "Language Use and Intercultural

found that, 17% felt their knowledge was “very good”, 27%-good,25%-moderate, 23% basic and 8% had no knowledge. Among the age categories 15-24 and 25-39, the level of “very good” and “good” combined was 64% for both age groups.²⁸ It should be pointed out that the South-East province of Latgale, bordering Russia and Belarus, and most Russified over the centuries, still indicated a Russian language pre-eminence. Whereas 45.9% of Latgallians claimed Latvian ethnic origin, only 38.9% had a Latvian mother tongue.²⁹

The language laws in Quebec and Latvia have also changed the hierarchy of languages in public life with French and Latvian becoming the only official languages respectively in dealing with all state related institutions (with the exception of federal institutions in Quebec).

What about the linguistic landscape or “visage linguistique” in these two jurisdictions? Quebec has succeeded somewhat better than Latvia in this respect, but both are under assault from multi-national corporations and their world wide untranslatable “brands”.

Both societies have also succeeded in changing psychological standing of their respective linguistic groups. From defensive, timid and constantly accommodating positions associated with minorities, they have upgraded themselves into majority status. This has brought with it increased prestige, pride, assertiveness and élan that together are creating a new image of attractiveness both for the respective new majority members and

Communication in Latvia”, *Intercultural Communication*, November 1999, Issue no.2. Available on the net. <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr2/ozolina.htm> .

²⁸ Latvian University Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, *Mazakumtautibu lidzdaliba demokratiskajos procesos*, p.50.

²⁹ *Latviesu Valodas Agentura, Valodas Situacija Latvija 2010-2015*, Riga, 2015, p.50.

also for the new minority members. Indeed, the flow of assimilation from the majority to the minority has essentially stopped and has to some extent been reversed with formerly assimilated individuals reintegrating back into their original language communities.

Until now there has not been a large shift by the Anglophone or Russophone minorities into the French or Latvian communities, but such a trend could develop in time. It would be interesting to know the current choice of ethnicity of youths from mixed marriages.

This could be an important index of ethnic prestige and status.

Tied to this new reorientation from minority to majority status is the reassertion of power by the French and Latvian linguistic communities. From positions of relative stagnation and powerlessness prior to the “Quiet Revolution” in Quebec in 1960 and during the Soviet period in Latvia before 1991, the new majorities have seized and utilized the powers of the State at their disposal to protect the boundaries of their communities and to prevent any equalization of linguistic status for the new minorities. In this respect, the idea of two state or official languages has been vigorously opposed in both jurisdictions, seeing in such an initiative dangers of destabilization of their present linguistic gains. This opposition to a bilingual state was articulated in forcible terms by Latvia’s President Vaira Vike Freiberga in an interview in July 2000:

After the recovery of independence, Latvia recovered its sovereignty, it recovered its Constitution, it recovered its democratic traditions. And over the protests of Russia, it has recovered the right of Latvian as the state language. For, at some point, there was the argument that because of this large influx of Russians, we should switch over to a bilingual country. This is completely out of the question. Latvia is the only place in the world where Latvian is spoken. The survival of this language is threatened.

And we cannot allow for, if you like, the enshrining of the occupation, by granting Russian the status of an official language. That is also totally out of the question, and Mr. van der Stoel and all international experts have

acknowledged this right. The European Commission has acknowledged this right. And I think Russia has to come around to its senses and acknowledge the fact that Latvian is the official language of this land and will remain so. As we join the European Union, this will still remain our official language.³⁰³¹

In effect, the appeal of English and Russian is still considered a threat unless strong official measures are maintained to reinforce the “weaker” or more vulnerable language. Many French Canadians view their position as still being precarious claiming that the Quebecois population in North America represents only 2% of the total that is overwhelmingly Anglophone. Similarly for Latvians, the threat to the Latvian language spoken by only 1.5 million in the world is self- evident.

The language laws together with the quasi revolutionary political and power changes these linguistic transformations reflected, brought about a significant exodus of the most discontented and nervous elements among both the Anglophone and the Russophone minorities. In some cases this exodus was tied to loss of employment because of unilingualism and for other reasons. In many cases it signalled a general discontent with the rapid shifts in the established order and in what formerly seemed immutable conditions of life. In many respects, this process helped to deflate potential confrontations given the departure of the most disgruntled and dissatisfied potential new minority group leadership cadres.

³⁰ Latvian University Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, Mazakumtautību līdzdalība demokrātiskos procesos. 2017. Rīga.

³¹ Mel Huang, “Setting a Good Example: Interview with Latvian President Vaira Vīķe Freiberga”, Central Europe Review, vol.2, no.27, July 10 2000, pp. 6-7 of 9 on internet.
http://www.ce-review.org/00/27/interview27_vike.html

Garth Stevenson in his book *Community Besieged, the Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec*, points out that Bill 101 “made English-speaking Quebecers feel uncomfortable and unwelcome”. He continues with a description of one such reaction:

Whether they were justified in feeling uncomfortable and unwelcome, or whether they over-reacted to the situation, are certainly questions that can be debated. Nonetheless, the feelings were genuine and many Anglophones reacted, as Lenin said to the soldiers who deserted from the Imperial Russian Army in 1917, by voting with their feet.³²

According to Stevenson, the “exit” route was chosen particularly by young, educated persons and “a good portion of the economic elite”.³³

For Quebec Anglophones, the barriers for out-migration were minimal, if they desired to relocate elsewhere in Canada where the English language was overwhelmingly dominant, where life style and culture were broadly similar and where economic conditions were as positive if not more than in Quebec. For Russophones the barriers were more formidable. The entire Soviet Union had collapsed and a period of chaotic conditions in economics, politics and social relations ensued with greater intensity outside the Baltic State area. Under such conditions the arrival of millions of “volks-Russians” from fourteen Soviet republics back to Russia was resented by local Russian inhabitants. That is why the bulk of out-migration to Russia from Latvia ended by 1995. However, a new surge of out-migration by both Latvians and Russians to other countries of the EU depleted Latvia of many young and enterprising individuals,[about 200 thousand] especially after the 2008 economic crash which saw probably the largest decline in GDP of any country at that time [about 26% decline]. For those remaining, the

³² Garth Stevenson, *Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec*, Montreal.Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999, p.151.

³³ Ibid, p.155.

psychological aspects of their choice, of remaining rather than moving, created powerful motivations to adapt to the new conditions. As President V. Vike Freiberga pointed out, Latvia did not have an Iron Curtain or a Berlin Wall:

They can accept the sovereignty of this land and they can accept the fact that this is going to be a country where Latvian is the official language and Latvian culture as an inheritance from the past, will keep an important role and a dominant role in the future. If this is not acceptable to them [Russophones], well, we do not have an Iron Curtain, we do not have the Berlin wall. People are free to leave if they really find it totally unacceptable.³⁴

In spite of the relative calmness of the Anglophone and Russophone groups, deep resentments persist, often inflamed by the rhetoric and actions of those majority nationalists still dissatisfied with the extent of changes and desiring total “Francization” or “Latvianization”. As pointed out earlier, the new school Latvian language laws will be enforced beginning in the Fall of 2019. It remains to be seen whether the implementation of the actual program will proceed without major confrontations. Among Quebeckers and all Canadians the greatest animus is reserved for the actions of what are called “language police” who appear to harass small businesses about the linguistic dimensions of their signs. With the aging of the Anglophone community and departure of many young people, health care and long-term care facilities for many who only speak English have also created much stress as a result of retrenchment of English language services, especially in areas beyond Montreal.

Perceived Future Threats

Thousands of languages have disappeared and are no longer spoken by anyone. Thousands more are on the critical list given their narrow demographic support base. In Latvia, the ancient branch of the Finno Ugric Livonian (Libiesi) language is all but

³⁴ Huang, p.7.

extinct with only a few dozen people still able to speak it. Latvian currently appears to have regained its vibrancy and viability. The French language in Quebec also seems to have become consolidated and new immigrants are overwhelmingly joining the French linguistic community. Yet, in both communities the advent of economic and media globalization is creating new tensions and a renewed sense of defensiveness. The threat of globalization has been often raised by Latvia's President V. Vike Freiberga and by the Quebec Larose Commission. As pointed out earlier the results of the 2016 census showing a minor decrease of French origin individuals in Quebec, encouraged almost apocalyptic responses from more extreme nationalists. Indeed even the Quebec courts have seen the need for language protection³⁵

Gregory Baum has summarized what he perceives to be threats to the French language in Quebec:

The French language remains threatened in Quebec, and this for several reasons: i) because of the overwhelming presence of American culture and technology, ii) because English has become the lingua franca of the globe, due partly to international American influence and partly to the heritage of the British Empire in Asia and Africa, iii) because of Quebec's minority position in Canada, which thanks to recent massive immigration no longer sees itself as the union of two peoples.³⁶

The question, of course, is whether the wave of globalization can be commanded to roll back by mere governmental edicts. Globalization is not language-neutral. It comes with the new "lingua franca" of international communication, that is English. A most thoughtful analysis by four Finnish language and economics specialists is entitled "Finnish elite speaks English". Their article provides the following assessment:

³⁵ "Bill 101: French language still needs protection, Court of Appeal rules", Montreal Gazette, December 21, 2017.

³⁶ Baum, pp. 4-5.

Finland has shifted from being a Finnish-speaking industrial economy to an English language financial economy in which corporate representatives speak the language of investors in London and New York. That language is rarely Finnish. English has also strengthened its position as the predominant language of the European Union, gradually taking over from French... The triumph of English as the language of science has continued for some time. Researchers publish their studies in English in order to increase their readership, and also the number of listeners.³⁷

The authors also point to the worst-case scenario when “the elite uses English and the ordinary people use Finnish”. In their view “this kind of linguistic division can lead to the total disappearance of a language”.

To be sure, neither history, evolution nor languages are unidirectional. As Barber has so vividly pointed out in “Jihad vs McWorld”, the current of homogenization has inspired a counter current of non-conformity or rebellion against the mainstream. This is why the world has been surprised by the recent burgeoning of such seemingly defunct languages as for example, Welsh, Gaelic, Hawaiian, and a variety of languages of native North Americans.

For many people languages are far more than vibrations of sounds in air. Their emotional attachment to their own language springs from the depths of their being and determines who they are. Indeed, language in many cases is seen as the linkage of past generations to the present and the future - that is, a major ingredient of perceived immortality. It can bring joy, fear and despair, and can become the single most effective instrument for binding communities or on the contrary, can become the blunt tool of conflict, of boundaries and of exclusion.

³⁷ Pirjo Hiiderumaa, Sirke Lohtaja, Sabah Samaletdin, and Rislo Tainio, “Finnish Elite Speaks English”, Helsingin Sanomat International Edition, September 9, 2003. On internet <http://www.helsinki-hs.net/news.asp?id=20030909IE16>

The “saga” of language policies in Quebec and Latvia has not ended but continues to develop as it engages in a continuous dialectic whose long-term future dimensions cannot be outlined with any degree of certainty. In the short and medium terms, however, it appears that French in Quebec and Latvian in Latvia will retain their “leading positions” within their respective political boundaries, and at the same time, the Anglophone and Russophone minorities will persist as viable language communities. The impact of the European Union, and of the spread of English together with increased globalization and digitalization in economics, media and migration has as yet to be determined on the durability of all four linguistic entities.