

The effect of fears of immigrants on the decision making in Latvia: a boost or an obstacle to development?*

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Abstract

Immigration has been a taboo for mainstream politicians due to the sensitivity of the topic based on Soviet legacy. In the last years the situation has changed only slightly with businesses pushing a debate on the urgent need for immigrants in several sectors that suffer from the shortage of labour due to emigration from Latvia. Nevertheless, the fears of immigration continue to have a negative impact on the decision-making in the country in many aspects. The government prepares migration policy documents in line with the public opinion that is hostile towards immigrants. In addition to the legacy of Soviet migration policy, public opinion about immigrants is influenced by the integration experience of the Russian-speaking population. This seems to have formed the allegation that immigrants can only cause problems. Thus, the possible slowdown of economic growth and continued high inflation is preferred over opening up to foreign workers to compensate for emigration from Latvia. The discussions on migration among politicians

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and the public mainly focus on the question whether Latvia wants or does not want immigrants, with a strong inclination to build a 'fortress Latvia'. The discourse of rights-based approach to immigration and clear criteria for the integration of immigrants is missing. Whereas the public largely prefers immigrants from neighbouring countries to immigrants from Africa and Asia (or anyone who could look and behave differently), a part of the society is blinded by nationalistic slogans worried about the increase of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia.

Introduction

Since Latvia joined the European Union (EU) in 2004, many Latvians have exercised one of the four freedoms of the EU – free movement of labour. According to the latest estimates, approximately 86 thousand people from Latvia are currently working or studying in other EU countries¹. That comprises approximately 9% of Latvia's labour force. Moreover, experts estimate that Latvia could lose at least as much human resources in the period until 2010, with some estimates suggesting that 200 thousand people would have left Latvia to live abroad in the period until 2015².

These numbers don't take into the account the return of emigrants. But the return rate will not compensate for the large outflow of labour as only 20-45 thousand are expected to come back to Latvia in the period until 2010.³

The resulting shortage of labour is already now particularly felt in the booming construction sector and manufacturing, with companies seriously considering and some of them already importing workers from abroad. Migration experts also agree that economic and demographic trends force Latvia to have an open immigration policy⁴ because enough labour force (in addition to capital and productivity) would allow the country to continue its impressive economic growth. Not only does every immigrant add

¹ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

² Estimates by the Bank of Latvia, April 2004. Source: Indāns I., Krūma K., (2006). *Immigration policy in Latvia: the problems and future perspectives*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

³ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

⁴ See, e.g. Indāns I., Krūma K., (2006). *Immigration policy in Latvia: the problems and future perspectives*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

his labour product to the growth of the host country's economy, but also as a rule the income earned by the immigrant is smaller than the additional value added that he creates in the economy. This is because every legal migrant not only works and pays taxes, but also consumes (rents an apartment, buys products and services) thus increasing the demand for products and services and consequently contributing to new jobs being created in the host country. But restrictions to legal migration encourage illegal migration – migrant workers not contributing to financing the welfare state via taxes. These revenues can be sizable because migrants are generally young and work most of the time.⁵

Public opinion

Despite the fact that so many Latvians are migrants in other EU countries, the majority of Latvians are hostile to the so-called new immigrants - people who have come to Latvia in the last couple of years, and those who are likely to come to Latvia in the future. In fact, in 2003 Latvians had the most negative attitudes towards immigrants in the EU, with two thirds of the population opposing civil rights to legal migrants and one third favouring repatriation policies towards legal migrants⁶.

According to a study conducted in 2004, Latvians fear that immigrants will create tensions between ethnic groups, cause unemployment and social dissatisfaction, and only one in five respondents would agree that immigrants would contribute to Latvia's economic development. As a result, approximately one half of the population favours a strict immigration policy in comparison to only one in ten Latvians supporting a liberal immigration policy. Immigrants from Asia, the Eastern countries as well as the CIS countries have been singled out as the least welcome.⁷

A more recent deliberation provides additional insights into public opinion. After 2-day discussions including the analysis of trade-offs between a restrictive and a liberal immigration policy, 43 randomly selected people from all regions, age groups and

⁵ Boeri, Tito (2004). *New citizens, old borders: why Europe has not put out the welcome mat for its new members*. Finance & Development

⁶ Eurobarometer data from 2003, Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2005). *Majorities' Attitudes towards Migrants and Minorities*.

⁷ Indāns, Ivars (2004). *Imigrācijas ietekme uz etniskajām attiecībām Latvijā ES paplašināšanās kontekstā* (The impact of immigration on the ethnic relations in Latvia in the context of EU enlargement), Latvian Institute for International Relations, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation.

different socio-economic backgrounds urged the government to control both immigration and emigration⁸. Those participants who favoured a more strict approach to immigration were concerned about Latvian identity and unemployment. They urged the government to analyse the needs of the labour market and permit only the entrance of highly skilled workers. They said that the number of immigrants should not exceed emigrants, and that the state should only help with the integration of those migrants who “truly wanted to integrate”.

On the other side, some participants of these debates favoured a more liberal approach. Some stressed that every migrant should be welcome in Latvia and treated equally. Others said that migrants should learn the Latvian language and culture.

But overall the discussions revealed that – although some liberal ideas were supported – the majority of the participants were mainly concerned about the impact of immigration on the proportion of ethnic Latvians in Latvia’s population, cultural values and national traditions.

This goes in line with earlier studies proving that the majority of Latvians are not tolerant to other nationalities and religions⁹ and that they resist multicultural society.¹⁰

Analysing these patterns researchers have found that in general ethnic Latvians feel and act like “the endangered majority” and think that, “each nation should live in their homeland”, which can be largely attributed to the consequences of Soviet migration policy.¹¹ This argument is further supported by the surveys showing that ethnic Latvians, in comparison to other nationalities living in Latvia, are more hostile towards the

⁸ Akule, Dace (2007). *Eiropas nākotne no Latvijas iedzīvotāju perspektīvas. Garais ziņojums* (Latvian Citizens’ Perspectives on the Future of Europe. Long Report), Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS.

⁹ 45% of Latvians and 41% of minority representatives don’t want to live next to Muslims, 52% of Latvians and 59% of non-Latvians supported the statement that Muslim opinions and traditions can be dangerous for Latvia’s population. Source: Šūpule I., Krastiņa L., Peņķe I., Krišāne J., Zepa B., (2004). *Etniskā tolerance un Latvijas sabiedrības integrācija* (Ethnic tolerance and integration of Latvian society), Baltic Institute of Social Sciences.

¹⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2005). *Majorities’ Attitudes towards Migrants and Minorities*.

¹¹ Šūpule I., Krastiņa L., Peņķe I., Krišāne J., Zepa B., (2004). *Etniskā tolerance un Latvijas sabiedrības integrācija* (Ethnic tolerance and integration of Latvian society), Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, pp.14

immigrants from the CIS countries.¹² This means that Latvians indeed worry about the possible increase of the Russian-speaking population in the country.

An additional explanation for the hostility towards immigrants might be the uncertainty of the losers of globalisation that drives immigration. According to this argument, general gains such as economic growth are perceived as less significant, in comparison to the possible losses for an individual, for example, losing a job to a migrant. In other words, the loss of one working place is a small cost in aggregate terms, but very large in individual terms, while the benefits of immigration (continued economic growth) are large in aggregate terms, but small in individual terms.¹³

Positions of political parties

The public opinion determined that immigration policy was a taboo for politicians and governments until 2004 European Parliament elections. In its campaign People's Party (Tautas Partija) then promised it would not permit uncontrolled immigration. For Fatherland and Freedom/ LNNK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/ LNNK) said that following the Soviet migration policies that had caused floods of immigrants, Latvia could not take the responsibility for hosting and integrating "new immigrants". The only party favouring a liberal approach was People's Harmony Party (Tautas Saskaņas partija) that stressed that restrictive immigration policy leads to illegal immigration. The party also spoke against "fortress Europe" and supported the freedom of individual to choose a place to live.¹⁴

In late 2005 the first estimates about the large number of Latvians having left the country for work in another EU state came out revealing that at least 50 thousand or 5% of Latvia's labour force had left¹⁵. As a result, politicians could not completely ignore the topic in the national election campaigns in 2006. However, the majority of parties

¹² Indāns, Ivars (2004). *Imigrācijas ietekme uz etniskajām attiecībām Latvijā ES paplašināšanās kontekstā* (The impact of immigration on the ethnic relations in Latvia in the context of EU enlargement), Latvian Institute for International Relations, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation.

¹³ Husz, Dora (2002). *Free Movement of Workers: Why so Sensitive? An analysis of factors standing behind the transitional period to be imposed on the movement of labour from the Central and Eastern European countries after their accession to the EU*. E-journal, ISSN 1505-1161.

¹⁴ Zankovska-Odiņa, Sigita, (2005). *Imigranti – etniskās spriedzes avots vai integrācijas veicinātāji* (Immigrants – a source for ethnic tension or enhancers of integration). Politika.lv

¹⁵ Data from the Ministry of Economy, Source: Indāns, I., Lulle A., Laizāne-Jurkāne M., Znotiņa L., (2006). *Latvija un brīva darba spēka kustība: Īrijas piemērs* (Latvija and the free movement of labor: The example of Ireland). Commission of Strategic Analysis.

focused on ways to bring home those Latvians who had emigrated in the period since 2004. All parties promised higher wages and reaching the average income level of the EU, ignoring the fact that increasing shortages of labour can have a negative effect on economic growth, especially as other suggested solutions like investment in technologies, science and education can bring results after a decade or more. Thus, the need to discuss compensating the shortages of labour with opening up to immigrants was avoided. This let experts believe that public policy on immigration would not change in the coming years.¹⁶

In government's declaration in 2006 the coalition parties promised to define migration and re-immigration policy including a set of measures that should motivate the return of Latvians working in other EU countries. The government also said it would not permit uncontrolled and illegal migration. But it would define a policy for the integration of legal immigrants and refugees based on risk analysis and ensuring that different social, ethnic, religious and other groups were well integrated while respecting Latvia's traditional values.¹⁷

For some parties the nationalistic slogans were more important than the increasing shortage of labour and the necessity to appreciate the human resources available in Latvia. Thus, the nationalistic TB/ LNNK – currently one of the coalition parties - in its program for 2006 elections promised to help people not loyal to Latvia to leave the country. At least one parliamentarian from the Greens' and the Farmers' Union (Zaļo Zemnieku Savienība) – another coalition party - supported this move, stressing the need for “repatriation of foreigners who were transported to Latvia by the occupying power”.

¹⁸

In 2006 (before elections) the majority of the parliamentarians in Saeima also played their nationalistic cards when they transcribed the EU directive about the status of the third-country nationals that are permanent inhabitants of the EU into Latvian law. The directive stipulates that after 5 years of legal residence a third-country national is entitled

¹⁶ Indāns I., (2006). *Laires Lāci gaidot jeb cilvēkresursu problēma partiju programmās* (Waiting for miracles or the problem of human resources in party programmes). Politika.lv

¹⁷ Declaration of the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers, 7 November 2007

¹⁸ Saeima scenogram. Source: Golubeva M., Rožukalne A., Kažoka I., (2007). *Izaicinājums pilsoniskajai līdzdalībai. Starpzīņojums par 2007.gada martu – jūnijū* (Challenges to civil participation. Midterm report for March-June 2007). Centre for Public Policy PROVIDUS.

to nearly the same free movement rights as a EU citizen, including equal treatment and the right to take up residence in any member state conditional on sufficient resources and sickness insurance in order not to become a burden on the social assistance system.¹⁹ But parliamentarians added a passed Latvian language test to the list of requirements despite the fact that Latvian president found it inappropriate. Having sent the law for a repeated reading, the president emphasized that the point of having a status of a permanent resident of the EU was to enjoy a certain package of rights in all EU member states, not only in Latvia²⁰. However, the parliament disregarded the president's criticism and adopted the law without amendments. Thus, non-citizens and foreigners need to know Latvian to be able to receive the status of the permanent resident of the EU.

Labour shortage

According to a study conducted in 2004, only 2-3% of Latvian companies reported that they felt an overall lack of workers, while 13-20% said they needed more qualified workers. But more recent data reveal that in some sectors labour shortage is much larger. According to employer's survey, 33.5%-39.8% companies working in construction, mining industry and some manufacturing fields felt a shortage of labour.²¹ Researchers have also estimated that in 2013 there would be a shortage of labour in 86-112 of the 120 professions²². But the level of unemployment is on constant decrease, reaching 5.7% in July 2007.²³

The result of the increasing labour shortage has been a steep increase in wages. In 2007 on average salaries increased by 30%²⁴, with some sectors having salary hikes several times a year. This is mostly felt by the professions from sectors linked to trade, services

¹⁹ According to the Directive 2003/109/EC, the permanent resident also has a right to equal treatment including access to employment, employment conditions, education (including study grants), tax benefits, social security, as well as access to public housing, public goods and services. These rights are extended to family members.

²⁰ Press release, The Chancery of the President of Latvia, 31 May 2006

²¹ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

²² Research commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare. Source: *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007

²³ Financenet, 20 August 2007

²⁴ In the first quarter of 2007, average gross monthly salary in Latvia was LVL 357, which, compared to the first quarter of 2006, is an increase of 32.8%, according to data by the Central Statistical Bureau. Source: LETA, 31 May 2007

and construction that see the biggest growth. At the same time, the income for professionals financed by the state budget – such as teachers and doctors – has not been increased in comparable amounts. Inevitably, this means that some human resources have moved away from less demanded professions (as demonstrated by the low wages) to sectors with higher income possibilities. The result is a shortage of teachers and approximately 20,000 vacancies available in the country²⁵.

But not in all sectors a salary hike has added to attractive work conditions ensuring that sufficient and qualified human resources work there. A survey has revealed that in 20% of the cases when new employees are hired in construction sector lower qualifications – education and experience - are accepted²⁶. This is because a large proportion of qualified construction workers have left to work in other EU countries. Experts warn that Western European companies that have entered the Latvian market are increasingly proving to be more reliable, offering a fixed price and fixed deadlines – something that many Latvian companies can't promise. This means that local companies are losing competitiveness.

Inevitable reality

Official data suggest that currently approximately 3% of companies employ foreign workers not only because of the labour shortage but also because they have higher qualification.²⁷

Leading countries of origin of the people who came to Latvia in the period from 2005 to 2006 to work here, were Russia (21%), Ukraine (13%), Lithuania (9%), and the United States (5%)²⁸. At the same time the number of foreigners detained at the state borders with false travel document almost doubled from 86 people in 2004 to 156 in 2005, and 112 in 2006²⁹. This is a result of Latvia's EU membership – a pull factor for immigrants, and Latvia's restrictive migration policy – causing illegal immigration.

²⁵ Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia

²⁶ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

²⁷ *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007

²⁸ Pribytkova I., Gromovs J. (2007). *Migration Trends 2004-2006 Soderkopig process countries*, European Commission, International Organization for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Swedish Migration Board.

²⁹ Ibid.

Nevertheless, more and more companies are inviting foreign workers to compensate for internal labour shortages. According to data from the State Employment Agency, 1370 requests to invite guest workers from non-EU countries were granted in the first six months of 2007. The biggest number (447) came from Ukraine, followed by Moldova (420 workers), Uzbekistan (109), Belarus (95), Russia (77), as well as Armenia (55) and Turkey (41). Two thirds or 936 of the total requests granted were for workers to be employed in construction sector. Approximately 15% or 203 of the work permits were granted to industry workers, mainly ship building. In comparison to the data for January-June 2006, the number of requests to invite guest workers in Latvia has gone up four times, with the biggest increase coming from the demand in construction sector and industry.³⁰ It is important to stress that prior to inviting guest workers approximately 80% of these companies had registered their vacancies in the State Employment agency. But for a period of at least one month (since the vacancy was registered) the agency could suggest qualified candidates only for a few of these positions.³¹ This gives doubt whether internal human resources in the short-term perspective can fill the labour shortage.

Suggested solutions

Until early 2007 inviting guest workers was too complicating and expensive. Companies needed to pay guest workers at least the average salary, in addition to having to go through cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. In 2007 the government seemed to have succumbed to the pressure of the employers and has eased the bureaucratic restraints to inviting migrant workers.³² In addition, several policy documents and a study about migration are being prepared not only because of the internal demand - pressure from employers, but also of the external demand - the EU. This chapter will mainly analyse the

³⁰ Press release, State Employment Agency, 2 August 2007

³¹ Ibid.

³² The government plans to decrease the fees for work permit procedures and introduce a one-stop agency to process applications for work permits and residency permits. Source: *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007

results of a most recent study on the mobility of Latvia's labour force³³ and a migration concept³⁴.

A study commissioned by the Ministry of Welfare³⁵ in 2007 includes four alternative solutions for the shortage of labour. Two of them focus on immigration while the other two concentrate on better use of internal human resources.

1. Promoting immigration: This means removing all obstacles in the labour market whilst maximally facilitating the immigration of guest workers.
2. Promoting immigration to specific sectors: This means that guest workers are brought in to work in professions where there is a shortage of local workers. Employers need to justify that they can't find a local worker for their vacancy.
3. Promoting local employment: This means increasing the overall level of employment, preventing undeclared work and improving the qualifications of employees.
4. Promoting local regional development: This means optimising internal migration flows, with more migration encouraged from Riga to the regions.

The study suggested that the best solution would be to combine alternatives 2, 3 and 4. But only the second alternative, importing workers in specific sectors, can bring immediate solutions, particularly in sectors where low-skilled workers are needed. Promoting local employment and regional development are long-term solutions that don't promise results in the coming years.

The concept on migration policy also suggests three solutions. The first includes no changes to the current restrictive migration policy. The second would only include easing the bureaucratic burden for inviting foreign workers while the labour market would still be protected. The third solution included easing the bureaucratic procedure for inviting foreign workers, in addition to setting clear criteria that would alleviate the invitation of guest workers in the case of substantial labour shortage. The definition for the term

³³ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare. The Latvian version of the study is used in this analysis, as the English translation differed.

³⁴ *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007. The policy document was supposed to be adopted in early 2007, and it has been discussed in the cabinet several times. However, until December 2007 it has not been adopted.

³⁵ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

“substantial labour shortage” was not included in the policy document. But, again, it includes statements that Latvia should attract highly qualified workers to become an economy based on high value added products and services, instead of the dominance of labour-intensive sectors for which low qualified workers are needed.³⁶

The papers mention some advantages from liberal immigration policy, for example, that immigrants would help Latvia to reach average EU life quality. Immigration could also reduce the rate at which inflation increases, because higher wages paid to immigrants will largely be based on enhanced productivity. This would reduce overall increases in labour costs and allow Latvian companies to be more competitive in foreign markets.³⁷ This is something that the Employers’ Confederation of Latvia has repeatedly emphasized.³⁸

But these economic arguments that promote liberal immigration policy were not prevailing.

Both papers include statements that opening up the local labour market to guest workers would not help in increasing the productivity of the local human resources. Some economists have also expressed their worries that wage increase is not backed by productivity increase. However, productivity is linked to competition. In other words, when nobody else is there to do the job, employees are forced to employ the workers that are available. As the example of lowering qualifications being requested for jobs in construction sector demonstrates, this may mean that the worker is less qualified and less productive but receives a higher salary than his predecessor. Should the employee have the choice to employ a better qualified and more productive worker, the local worker could feel the need to improve his qualifications and work harder to be able to ask the high salary he is currently enjoying. From this perspective, the lack of sufficient labour supply may in fact lead to distorted competition and the slowdown of productivity increase.

³⁶ *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007.

³⁷ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare.

³⁸ See, *Valdībā iesniegtā Migrācijas koncepcija būtiski neatvieglo darbspēka piesaisti no trešajām pasaules valstīm un nenodrošina tautsaimniecības ilgtspēju nākotnē* (Government’s migration concept does not substantially alleviate the invitation of third country nationals and does not provide the long-term sustainability of economy). Employers’ Confederation of Latvia (LDDK), 2007. ▲

Both the study and the policy document also include similar language on the risks of a more liberal immigration policy and stereotypes about immigrants. For example, immigrants may not have “long term loyalty to the firm”, they might be “really thinking about using Latvia as a platform for eventually getting to one of the older EU member states”, the “hopes for the high qualification [of immigrants] are not grounded”³⁹. This ignores studies showing that immigrants – depending on the country of origin - could be more qualified than the local population because people with higher education levels tend to migrate⁴⁰. In addition, the allegation that immigrants could be shopping around for the best living conditions implies ignorance to the rights-based approach to migration, according to which all individuals have the right to choose the place to live and enjoy the universal human rights.

These statements also seem to be ignorant of the findings of researchers suggesting that, rather than permanent one-way migration (the dominant pattern until quite recently), there has been a predominance of short term, circulatory movements backwards and forwards across borders.⁴¹ In other words, a person would make frequent short-duration trips to earn a living in one country while maintaining a home in the country of origin. This can depend on the character of work permits available, namely, if they are temporary, for example, for work in agriculture, tourism, construction and private household services. This can also depend on projects implemented with the help of such international organizations as the International Organization for Migration that can guarantee the return of immigrants after the end of the contract. Again, this is something that the government of the hosting country can determine.

³⁹ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare. 174-175.pp.

⁴⁰ For example, only 21% of EU-8 workers had secondary school education while the number was 31% for EU-15 and the labour force employed in EU-15 from other countries. Source: “Report on the Functioning of the Transitional Arrangements set out in the 2003 Accession Treaty (period 1 May 2004-30 April 2006)”, Brussels, COM(2006), Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, 12.pp.

⁴¹ Wallace, Claire (2002). *Opening and closing borders: migration and mobility in East-Central Europe.*, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, Vol 28, No.4: 603-635

The dilemma of integration

Both documents also include many hints on problems with the integration of immigrants. Immigration would “inevitably cause negative side effects” because of the integration of the immigrants in Latvia’s society, “transit-migrants are objectively not motivated to integrate in the local community which can create tensions in the country where there are unconquered difficulties with the integration of ethnic groups”.⁴² The liberal immigration policy also “creates a whole series of social and cultural problems caused by the integration of immigrants into society”⁴³, it would “endanger national identity if more guest workers are received than is possible to integrate”⁴⁴, there could be “segregation tendencies – the concentration of low skilled guest workers in particular districts” that could see the rise of unemployment and crime.⁴⁵

According to these papers, the country would need to spend “considerable expenditure” related to the integration of immigrants or to “solve the problems caused by unsuccessful integration policy” because social problems could occur, this would “particularly be true of guest workers from Asia”⁴⁶. Finally, there was a need to “prevent the emergence of communities of immigrants which are unfavourable to the interests of Latvia’s people”⁴⁷ in the sense that the ethnic structure of the nation would change.

Not only does this decisive language rule out the possibility that immigrants could integrate well, these statements also ignore the fact that immigrants contribute to the economic growth of the host country more than what they individually earn. This means that the expenditure related to the integration policy of immigrants is justified. Some of these statements are on the border of being racist and discriminating. They also ignore the fact that the problems with immigrants that some countries have faced might be a result of unsuccessful policy (determined by the government), not because the integration of immigrants was impossible a priori. The allegations that immigrants can only cause

⁴² Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare. 126.pp and 174.pp.

⁴³ Ibid, 187.pp.

⁴⁴ *Koncepcijas par migrācijas politiku nodarbinātības kontekstā* (Concept about migration policy in the context of employment), 2007.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Krišjāne, Zaiga (2007). *Darbspēka ģeogrāfiskā mobilitāte* (Geographic mobility of labour force). University of Latvia, Ministry of Welfare. 186.pp

⁴⁷ Ibid. 193.pp.

problems might also reveal attitudes towards the success of the integration policy targeting the Russian-speaking population of Latvia.

Here it is interesting to note that, according to the study, Latvia does not have relevant experience in the integration of immigrants, implying that the experience in the integration of the Russian-speaking population is not valued as relevant. Yet, it seems that it is exactly this experience that has had the largest impact on the attitudes towards immigrants. As a number of the non-Latvians – especially of the elder generation – don't speak Latvian, it seems that many think that the immigrants would adopt the same patterns of behaviour: not learning Latvian and trying to change the local cultural scene - Russifying the local population as was attempted by the Soviet migration policy.

Other studies suggest the immigrants could have very different effects on the social integration. For example, immigrant communities that feel motivated to learn Latvian and integrate in the local society could cause competition to the minorities already living in Latvia. Thus, the local minorities may also become more motivated to learn Latvian and participate in the political life of the country.⁴⁸

Starting debate

The paper has revealed that strong inclinations to build a 'fortress Latvia' – as demonstrated by the public opinion, statements of political parties and policy documents – has hijacked a real debate about immigration.

The discourse of rights-based approach to immigration with every individual having the right to choose where to live enjoying the universal human rights and freedoms is missing. Some statements about immigrants are discriminating and close to being racist.

The prevailing discourse until now has been, whether Latvia wants or does not want immigrants and what problems immigrants could cause.

The discussion needs to be filled with analysis about the trade-offs facing the country with increasing labour shortages. If the country does not want immigrants, is it ready to risk not reaching the average quality of living of the EU in the coming 20 years and encourage illegal immigration (because immigration as such is inevitable)?

⁴⁸ Indāns, Ivars (2004). *Imigrācijas ietekme uz etniskajām attiecībām Latvijā ES paplašināšanās kontekstā* (The impact of immigration on the ethnic relations in Latvia in the context of EU enlargement), Latvian Institute for International Relations, Friedrich-Ebert Foundation. 56.pp.

The reasons for the hostile public opinion towards immigrants also need to be analysed, with a focus on suggestions that could be implemented to change these attitudes⁴⁹. If the majority of the society is worried about the integration of immigrants, then clear criteria should be introduced, for example, that migrants should learn Latvian language and history. The state should also help with the organization of the courses that could be subsidized for some groups of immigrants.

The hostile attitudes towards immigrants seem to be influenced not only by the legacy of Soviet migration policy, but also by attitudes about the integration of the Russian-speaking population.

This may mean that a serious re-evaluation of the success of the integration policy targeting the Russian-speaking minority is needed, with lessons taken that could be valuable for the integration policy of immigrants. When government prepares these documents, it could also learn from the best practises of other EU countries and take EU's principles for the integration of immigrants as the baseline.⁵⁰

Finally, the term "new immigrant" implies the existence of "old immigrants" assumingly referring to people who were sent to Latvia in the Soviet era, including their offspring born here. But such references are discriminating and don't contribute to an environment of social integration, tending to exclude approximately 35% of Latvia's population.

Learning from the experience with the integration of the Russian-speaking minority, and with large amount of labour force having left the country, decision-makers should be less short sighted and promote the appreciation of all human resources available in Latvia, disregarding the ethnic origin or the historical reasons for their arrival to the country.

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