



New Russia-baiting provocations from Latvia

A highly topical article that Gilbert Doctorow kindly allowed us to publish.

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In past articles going back to 2014 when I visited Riga for its celebrations as Cultural Capital of Europe, I spoke out against Latvia's defiance of the human rights provisions of the EU's *acquis* making it the Apartheid State of the European Continent. The issue centered on the stripping of Latvian citizenship of most of its Russian speakers when Latvia became a sovereign state in 1991.

The principle invoked in the citizenship law was to exclude all those who had not been Latvians before the outbreak of WWII. It was directed against the large numbers of Russian speakers who settled in Latvia after the war when the Latvian SSR attracted workers to its burgeoning industrial plants and port facilities, as well as many military families posted to naval installations there.

Over the course of decades, the Russian speakers were integrated into Latvian society and when the USSR was at the point of break-up, many stood by their ethnic Latvian co-citizens in the struggle for independence from Moscow, including in armed struggle. This much was openly admitted to me in 2014 in a conversation I had with the deputy mayor of Riga in charge of the Cultural Capital events, who said that the citizenship decisions of 1991 were a mistake, but a mistake that could not now be corrected since it would be seen as a concession to Putin.

The effect of the citizenship laws dating from the independence of Latvia meant, in practice, that more than 300,000 Russian speakers who were officially registered as Latvians in their Soviet passports now became stateless. The stateless numbered about 15% of the overall population, and a considerably higher percentage of the capital, Riga. The intent was clearly to force an ethnic cleansing.

As non-citizens, the Russian speakers were subjected to harsh economic and social restrictions. Their rights to own property were circumscribed. Their access to certain professions such as banking was barred. A ceiling was put in place on their ability to rise into positions of responsibility in business. This Apartheid situation was understood by members of the European Union committee who studied Latvia's candidacy for admission to the Union in 2004, but in the political horse-trading that made possible the invitation of 10 new Member States in that year, the flagrant violation of the *acquis* by Latvia was overlooked.

The ethnic cleansing measures of the Latvian lawmakers did not produce the results intended. The vast majority of Latvia's Russian speakers did not leave the country. The logical destination for emigration, the Russian Federation, was during the 1990s in the midst of economic, social and political disintegration and had no resources to allocate to facilitate inbound Latvians. Even Russia's own returning soldiers and officers from East Germany were given no proper lodgings or financial support. And so Latvia's stateless Russian speakers stayed put. And year after year, in the new millennium the authorities piled on new discriminatory legislation to make their situation more intolerable. New language laws progressively restricted and then banned the use of Russian in the schools and institutions of higher learning. Various organizations of the stateless demonstrated against these changes but to no avail.

That is the background for what I am about to describe: the forced expulsion from Latvia of some of the Russian speakers by the Latvian authorities that begins tomorrow, 1 September.

So far, the absolute numbers of those about to be expelled are only 5,000 – 6,000 because the latest measure is directed against residence card holders who also hold passports of the Russian Federation and who have not passed exams proving their mastery of the Latvian language. As a secondary condition to be spared deportation, the targeted group is obliged to submit in writing their condemnation of the policies of the Russian Federation with respect to the war in Ukraine. Under the terms of the relevant Latvian legislation, letters will go out tomorrow ordering the recipients to leave the country within three months.

As a practical matter, Russian authorities say that the expulsions are directed primarily at pensioners who have spent decades as citizens, then as officially documented residents of Latvia.

It is fair to say that this latest turning of the screws against the Russian speaking population in Latvia portends further Russophobic outrages in the country.

I bring the issue to your attention, because your voice of protest is solicited. An appeal to various international organizations charged with protecting human rights awaits further signatories. The appeal is directed to the High Commissioner of the United Nations for Human Rights F. Türk, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe D. Mijatović and the High Commissioner of the OSCE for national minorities, K. Abdrakhmanov. Anyone interested in joining this appeal should send me a message via the Contact function of this site and I will put them in touch with the Appeal's organizers.

Concluding remarks

Dear readers, so much for the article by Gilbert Doctorow first published at <https://gilbertdoctorow.com/2023/08/31/translations-of-new-russia-baiting-provocations/>. If you feel you would like to protest this renewed outbreak of Russophobia, please contact Gilbert Doctorow at <https://gilbertdoctorow.com/contact/>.

The small steps are what finally change the fortunes of the world.

Thank you.

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