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THREE SEAS: LESSONS FROM SOCIOLOGIST RESEARCH. COOPERATION BETWEEN LATVIAN AND CENTRAL EUROPEAN SCIENTISTS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ETHNICITY

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Abstract. Latvia has been a multicultural and multiethnic country throughout its long history. At the moment, the proportion of ethnic Latvians is approximately 62% of its population, and representatives of ethnic minorities - 38%. To a large extent, such ethnic diversity is the result of a long historical stay in other state formations, multi-ethnic empires and states. But during the periods of Latvian national statehood (1918–1940 and since 1991) there was an increase in the share of ethnic Latvians and a decrease in the share of ethnic minorities. For the Latvian state and society, this ethnic diversity has always been in the focus of public debate, political controversy and scientific interest. In this part of the monograph, the authors show the results of the interaction of scientists from Latvia and Central and Eastern Europe on the sociological analysis of the ethnic diversity of Latvia and its individual regions. The choice of this focus of analysis is due to the fact that Latvia, to one degree or another, has historically been included in the geopolitical space of Eastern Europe, which is now increasingly called the Three Seas region. Having a unique historical experience of integrating ethnic diversity, Latvia at the same time absorbs many political, cultural and intellectual practices that express the originality of the countries of the Three Seas region in the ethnic integration of their population. The authors provide data on joint scientific projects, organized scientific conferences. A brief analysis of scientific publications on multi-ethnicity in Latvia, prepared as a result of scientific interaction between Latvian sociologists and representatives of science from Central Europe, is given.

Key words: multicultural and multiethnic country, Central Europe, Latvian sociologists.

Introduction. Historical and geopolitical context for the importance of participatory ethnicity research in Central and Eastern Europe. The ethnic diversity of the region of Central and Eastern Europe has been the subject of analysis by many ethnologists of the region. For a long time, scientists have been analyzing the existence of large ethnic minorities in the countries of this region of Europe. Moreover, the presence of these groups is shown as a typological feature of these countries, without careful interest in which it is impossible to understand their dynamics, political, cultural and economic life, as well as a very complex and dramatic history (for example: Brubaker 2009; Csörgő, Vangelov, Vizi 2017; Kosinski 1969; Stroschein 2012; Szelényi 2007). It is difficult to understand the ethnic diversity of Central and Eastern Europe if one ignores the fact that in many nation-states of this region some ethnic minorities are objectively or subjectively associated with representatives of the former imperial ethnic groups that dominated politically, economically and culturally in these coun-

tries before restoration or acquisition by them. state independence after the First World War and after the collapse of the multinational USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s. Some of these ethnic minorities, for example, the Baltic Russians, are characterized by a developed collective ethnocultural identity, political consciousness and historical memory, which distinguishes them from the national majorities in these countries.

Interest in ethnic diversity has long been evident in sociological and historical-sociological research in Latvia after the restoration of its independence in 1991. The restoration of national independence of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s stimulated mutual interest among scientists in these countries in the multiple aspects of ethnic diversity that have historically characterized this region of Europe. Such a multidimensional analysis included reflections and scientific communication of sociologists on issues such as the formation of models of ethnic politics, policies of national identity and national integration, policies for protecting the ethnocultural identity of ethnic minorities, etc. The complexity of the situation and the need to exchange experience with colleagues from countries with a similar historical fate and a high proportion of ethnic minorities in the population structure dictated the need for long-term scientific dialogue between sociologists in Central and Eastern Europe. In general, if we talk about the main trends in the analysis of the ethnic diversity of this region of Europe, we can highlight its main structural elements. First, these are the structures created by the ethnic majority of these countries, first of all, national statehood and its basic institutions. Secondly, these are ethnic groups whose identity does not coincide with the ethnic majority, but which, thanks to international legislation, have acquired the guaranteed status of ethnic minorities, implying a set of rights to preserve their collective ethnocultural identity within the framework of established national states.

Cooperation of Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian sociologists in ethnicity research. In the 1990s, Latvia was characterized by the establishment of scientific cooperation between sociologists dealing with ethnic issues, primarily with colleagues from other Baltic countries – from Estonia and Lithuania. At this time, scientific conferences are held and collections of scientific papers specifically devoted to ethnopolitics are published under the auspices of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of Latvia (later the University of Latvia). The organizers of these conferences and the editors of these collections of scientific papers were Elmārs Vēbers, Ph.D., and Rasma Šilde-Kārkliņa, professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The collection “National Policy of the Baltic States” (1995), formed as a result of this dialogue that began, already had three sections, each of which included a series of articles on each country.

The articles in this collection state the peculiarity of the ethnic diversity of Latvia and Estonia, which is manifested in the existence of two ethno-linguistic communities: Latvians and Russian speakers in Latvia and Estonians and Russian speakers in Estonia. It is this understanding of the ethnic situation that leads sociologists in these countries to an active exchange of opinions regarding the search for theoretical paradigms that would explain the possibilities of nation-building in the presence of large ethnic communities in civil societies, which make up a significant share of the urban population of these countries, and in some cases the dominant one. share in the population of large cities (Daugavpils in Latvia and Narva in Estonia). In addition, the Russian-speaking population of Latvia and Estonia is characterized by developed forms of ethnocultural identification, historical memory, political consciousness, ethnodemographic behavior and similar stories of appearance in the Baltic states.

Articles by scientists about the ethnocultural situation in the Baltic states, which were published in joint collections in the 1990s, mainly introduced the scientific community to the situation in these countries. The main reflections were related to how to combine the need for nation-building with the values dominant in the liberal consciousness about protecting the right to preserve ethnic identity as one of the universal human rights. Particular attention began to be paid to the relationship between the ethnic majority in the Baltic countries and the Russians, taking into account the fact of their status as

ethnic minorities and the institutionalization of the geopolitical conflict between the Baltic countries and Russia, as well as the difference in the established sociolinguistic statuses of the state languages of the Baltic countries, on the one hand, and the Russian language on the other. At the same time, a significant part of the publications showed that the source of the presence of large communities of ethnic minorities and the peculiarities of their ethnocultural identity was the presence of the Baltic states in the USSR (see, for example: Kaplane, Breidijs 1995; Hallika 1995; Jakaitiene 1995; Druviete 1995). Latvian liberal researchers were characterized by an active search for the most adequate reality of the concept of a national or ethnic minority, the formulation of the idea of their democratic integration into national states and at the same time showing the risks of marginalization and segregation of these population groups. Researchers have shown sensitivity to internal differences between ethnic minorities, which has led to the need to complement sociological analyzes of Latvian multiethnicity with in-depth historical research (Apine 1995). In the mid-1990s, the first articles appeared devoted to the influence of ethnopolitics and, above all, language policy on the formation of ethnosocial stratification, which limited the access of ethnic minorities to socially prestigious areas of employment. But, as the researchers pointed out, the lack and inconsistency of the available data did not allow making reliable generalizations about the typified social statuses of the Russian-speaking population in the system of ethnosocial stratification of the Baltic countries (Muižnieks 1995).

Since the late 1990s and in the following decades, the emphasis in studies of ethnic diversity has shifted to building models of integration of ethnic minorities, primarily Russians, in the Baltic countries. This process was not easy, as two main positions of such integration were emphasized. The first insists that integration presupposes the formation of a common national identity, the dominance of state languages, the culture of the ethnic majority and the interpretation of history in society as a whole and in the lives of ethnic minorities, and the preservation of ethnocultural identity is assumed only in the private life of minorities (Kuzmickaite 1998; Hirša 1998; Kirch 1998; Ruutsoo 2000; Vēbers 2000). The second, which is not a serious competitor to the first integration model, emphasizes the need to take into account the long historical ties of ethnic minorities with the Baltic states, their valuable contribution to its social, economic and cultural life, and the modern demand for the active political and public participation of ethnic minorities. This model of integration is built on the value of liberal multiculturalism for the multi-ethnic societies of the Baltics. This research position is especially typical for sociologists who themselves belong to ethnic minorities in the Baltics (Dribins 1998; Apine 1998; Kasatkina 2000; Liguta 2000; Volkovs 2000; Isakov 2008; Nikiforov 2011; Poleshchuk 2013). This was expressed in the need to understand integration as a two-way process of mutual consideration of interests by ethnic majorities and minorities, which implied recognition of the value of the collective identities of ethnic minorities. In fact, from this time on, a broad interpretation of the liberal approach in the study of ethnicity has been established, which is expressed in varying degrees of recognition of the value of multiculturalism in the public life of the many ethnic Baltic countries.

Latvian-Polish ethnic studies. The closest and most diverse contacts have developed between scientists from Latvia and Poland. And this is not at all accidental. Latvia has been home to a large Polish community for a long historical period. In 2022, its population was 40.4 thousand people, which accounted for 2.0% of the country's population (Latvijas iedzīvotāju ... 2023). But in Latgale, where approximately half of Latvian Poles live, their share in the region's population is 6.8% (Arhivēta kopija... 2023). In the second most populous city of the country, Daugavpils, Poles are the third largest population group – 10.2 thousand people, or 12.9% of all citizens (Iedzīvotāju skaits ... 2023). Such a significant share of Poles in the population of modern Latvia is the result of a long history, when in the 16th century the territory of Latvia came under the control of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Poles in Latvia are distinguished by a high degree of organization and cultivation of their ethnocultural identity. This is expressed in the presence of publications in Polish and public organizations. There are several Polish schools in Latvia. The most famous of them: Daugavpils Polish Gymnasium named

after Józef Pilsudski (J. Pilsudska ... 2023), Rēzeknes valsts poļu ģimnāzija (Rēzeknes valsts ... 2023), Riga Polish Secondary School named after Ita Kozakiewicz (Rīgas Itas... 2023).

However, despite the growing value of ethnocultural identity among Latvian Poles, the most common spoken language in their families is Russian. (For Latvia, in relation to the majority of traditional ethnic minorities, except Russians and Gypsies, a similar picture of the discrepancy between the ethnic and linguistic components in ethnocultural identity is characteristic.) So, if Polish was recognized as a native language by 19% of Poles, Latvian by 20%, then Russian by 58% (Dati par valodu prasmi 2023; Meklēšanas rezultāti 2023). This indicates the complexity of the processes of strengthening Polish ethnocultural identity in modern Latvia. Therefore, the interest of sociologists of ethnicity from Poland in the life of the Polish diaspora in Latvia is natural. Cooperation with sociologists from Latvia in conducting joint research and scientific discussions is also very important for them. At the same time, it cannot be said that only scientists from Poland are interested in Latvian Poles. It is also extremely important for sociologists from Latvia to understand the nature of the reflections of Polish scientists on the ethnic mosaic of Latvia. This creates conditions for an interactive understanding of ethnic processes by sociologists from various countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The mutual interest of Latvian and Polish sociologists in ethnic processes in these countries became apparent already in the 1990s. Professor, dr. hab. Adam Bobryk in College of Agriculture and Pedagogy (*Wyższa Szkoła Rolniczo-Pedagogiczna*) in Siedlce on November 16, 1998 organized the International Scientific Conference “Poles in the process of systemic and political transformation of the countries of the former Soviet Union” (*Polacy w procesie transformacji systemowej i ustrojowej krajów byłego Związku Radzieckiego*). Two reports were devoted to Latvia. These are questions of ethnic politics and the situation of the Poles. They were published in the post-conference collection (“Polskie odrodzenie na Wschodzie. Materiały z Międzynarodowej Konferencji Naukowej nt. Polacy w procesie transformacji systemowej i ustrojowej krajów byłego Związku radzieckiego” zorganizowanej w Siedlcach 16 listopada 1998 roku, red. Adam Bobryk). Articles in this book about ethnic processes in Latvia: Agnieszka Grędzik «The revival and current state of Polish education in Latvia (*Odrodzenie i stan aktualny szkolnictwa polskiego na Łotwie*)», s. 123-128 and Zbigniew Lisowski «Latvian fate of Poles (facts and impressions) (*Łotewskie losy Polaków (fakty i wrażenia)*)», p. 129-151. At the International Scientific Conference “Social life of Poles in the East and their contacts with Poland (*Życie społeczne Polaków na Wschodzie i ich kontakty z Polską*)” (Akademia Podlaska, 2005, December 2) reports were read: Józef Szostakowski "The issue of the revival of Polishness in Latvia and Estonia in the Polish-language press in Vilnius in 1985-1990 (*Kwestia odrodzenia polskości na Łotwie i w Estonii na łamach wileńskiej prasy polskojęzycznej w latach 1985-1990*)", Vladislav Volkov (Latvia) “Perception of security threats by the Polish minority in Daugavpils” (Bobryk 2007, pp. 93-101, 247-255). Professor A. Bobryk in the article “Poland's policy towards the Baltic states (*Polityka Polski wobec państw nadbałtyckich*)” discusses bilateral agreements between Latvia and Poland on the rights of ethnic minorities. And it touches on a difficult problem for a large part of the Polish population of Latvia - the difficulty of obtaining citizenship of this country (Bobryk 2009, p. 263).

Interaction with Polish sociologists led to joint scientific projects on the sociology of ethnicity in Latvia. This applies, first of all, to the Latgale region. It is worth mentioning such projects as “Antagonism and Reconciliation in the Multi-Cultural Areas” (2010) and Project of the Polish Ministry of Science and Education “Patterns of Dispute and Dispute Resolution as Elements of Popular Legal Culture” (2014 – 2016). Head of both projects - Professor Jacek Kurczewski, Warsaw University, head of sociological research in Latgale, Doctor of Sociology Vladislav Volkov. Both of these projects resulted in many scientific publications, including joint ones, including a scientific monograph, holding joint international scientific conferences in Warsaw, Krakow, Riga (Volkov 2012; Volkov, Kurczewski 2012; Volkov, Kurczewski 2013; Волков, Курчевський 2017). Joint sociological stud-

ies of the ethnic groups of Latvia, conducted by scientists from Latvia and Poland, have already meant the creation of a common methodology for the study of ethnicity. This methodology was based on the notion that modern ethnic groups should be seen as subjects of democratic and pluralistic nation-states. At the same time, the identity of ethnic minorities is understood as an integral social phenomenon that cannot be reduced only to ethnocultural characteristics, which have the sphere of their reproduction and manifestation exclusively in private life. The identities of ethnic minorities in a democratic pluralistic society have the form of collective identity and act as one of the forms of manifestation of national identity.

Cooperation of Latvian, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian sociologists in the study of ethnicity. One of the authors of this article, Doctor of Sociology, leading researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia, with the financial support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Baltic States, organized two international scientific conferences “The integration models of ethnic minorities in the Eastern and Central European countries after 1991” (2012) and “The collective identities of ethnic minorities in the national states of Eastern and Central Europe after 1991” (2014). The result of these conferences was the publication in the scientific journal “Ethnicity” of articles by scientists from Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland on ethnic issues (for example: Ehala, Zabrodskaia 2013; Kretalov 2013; Papp 2014; Volkov 2013).

Latvian scientists have implemented many joint projects with Czech colleagues to study the ethnic mosaic of Central and Eastern Europe. In 2016 – 2018, a bilateral project “National minorities and ethnic groups: past and present experience in Czech Republic and Latvia“ was implemented (project managers - Dr. Nadežda Pazuhina, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia and Dr. Petr Bednaržik, Institute of Modern History of the Czech Academy of Sciences). The purpose of this project was to analyze the cultural and historical experience of ethnic minorities in the interwar period of Latvia and the Czech Republic. The participants of this project continued the previous cooperation of the students of these scientific institutes. On the part of the Czech Republic are Petr Bednaržik, PhD, Helena Noskova, Ph D, Oldřih Toma, PhD, Zdenko Maršalek, PhD and David Kovaržik PhD. On the part of Latvia – Vladislav Volkov, Dr. Sc.soc., Inese Runce, Dr. hist., Igors Šuvajevs, Dr.phil., Kaspars Zellis, Dr.hist., Solveiga Koņkova-Krūmiņa, Dr.phil., Māra Kiope, Dr. phil. un Nadežda Pazuhina, Dr.art. Other research and academic institutions were also involved in the implementation of the project, the international scientific seminar "Migration in Czechoslovakia in the 20th century" was organized. and their consequences" (in cooperation with the Slovak Institute, Prague, 21.09.2016), practical seminar "Research, methodology, situation of national minorities in the Czech Republic and Latvia" (in cooperation with the House of National Minorities in Prague, Prague, 3.10.2017) international scientific conference "The power of the powerless: Masarik, Patočka, Havel" (in cooperation with Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Philosophy and History, Riga, 25 - 26 October 2017). The result of the research part of the project can be considered the collective monograph “Bezvarīgo vara: Masarik, Patočka, Havel (*Power of the powerless: Masarik, Patočka, Havel*)”. Compilers: N. Pazuhina, P. Shtoll, I. Šuvajevs. Riga: LU FSI, 2018, 382 pages. The first chapter of this book is related to T.G.Masarik's ideas about the role of national minorities in the preservation of historical and political memory.

In 2016, from November 28 to December 4, Petr Bednaržik and Oldřih Toma visited Riga with the aim of strengthening scientific contacts, conducting individual research work and participating in the practical seminar. The Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia held a discussion on the research of national minorities and ethnic groups, during which Petr Bednaržik presented current events in the research of national minorities in the Czech Republic. P. Bednaržik also participated in the memorial events dedicated to the victims of the Riga ghetto and met with Marger Vestermanis at the conference organized by the "Jews in Latvia" museum. In 2017, from September 27 to October 4, 2 Latvian scientists (V. Volkov and K. Zellis) visited the Czech Republic with the aim

of participating in the practical seminar at the House of National Minorities in Prague - "Research, methodology, situation of national minorities in the Czech Republic and Latvia". The focus was on the research of the collective memory of national minority groups, as well as the reflection of controversial historical events in museum expositions. In 2018, from November 28 to December 2, Vladislav Volkov visited Prague with the aim of conducting individual research and presenting research results, as well as his monograph (Vladislavs Volkovs. "Identity values of Latvian ethnic minorities: between normativism and pluralism". Riga: LU FSI, 2018, 308 pages) and promote the latest publications of Latvian researchers.

Conclusion. Three Seas Initiative: the relationship between the study of regional ethnicities and geopolitics. Despite the fact that Latvian scientists are showing interest in joint research into the ethnic diversity of the Central and Eastern European region, in our opinion, a stable scientific narrative has not yet emerged that reflects standardized practices of important aspects of understanding ethnicity. Such elements of the necessary scientific search should include an understanding of the nation-building of states in this region of Europe, the interaction of the national majority and ethnic minorities, the dialectic of individual rights and collective identity of various ethnic groups and the nature of recognition of this identity. With a high degree of confidence, we can say that the development of this type of research will be stimulated not only by the academic interest of the scientific community, but also by the political processes of integration of the Three Seas region, in which ensuring humanitarian security and the rights of people with different ethnic origins plays an important role. Such political initiatives to consolidate this region of Europe are also manifested by Latvia.

Former President of the Republic of Latvia, Egils Levits, described The Three Seas Initiative (TSI) as a new region in Europe and 'the shield of democracy' on outer border of European Union. However, since establishment of the framework of TSI in 2015, there had been rather low political interest to be proactive from the side of Republic of Latvia. As member state of NATO and European Union, Latvia had been very cautious to be proactive in the Initiative. Taking into account involvement of the United States into the Initiative when the US President Donald Trump visited TSI Summit in Warsaw in 2017, Latvia has increased its activities within the framework of TSI. However, only in September of 2020, Ministry of Foreign Affairs established National Coordination Group for TSI. Since then, involvement of the Republic of Latvia into TSI framework rapidly increased and in June of 2022 TSI Summit was held in Riga, Latvia. Latvia has discovered that TSI platform would enhance its political and economic interests and provide possibility to use opportunities of the platform to counter current political and economic challenges. There are four main groups of political and economic objectives which Latvia pursues- geopolitics, economic growth/regional stability and investments, energy security, reliable, sustainable and inclusive connectivity. One would argue that the main reason for Latvia to be proactive in TSI project is to maintain trans- Atlantic link and further involvement of the United States into security issues of the Baltic Region. Latvia is also interested of proactive political and economic involvement of Germany; however, Latvian and German interests could be different at some point of development of TSI. Subsequently, Latvia has to use TSI platform in order to increase regional security and stability in the Baltics, including the humanitarian aspect of human rights with different ethnic origins, the rights of ethnic minorities to preserve their ethnocultural identity, as well as, to gain support for Latvian economic and energy supply projects. One has to conclude that Latvia has used all available political and economic resources in order to increase relevance of TSI (Sprūds, Vargulis 2022, p. 7, 96–108).

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