Efforts to Foster Integration of Society in Latvia

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Abstract
Over the past 11 years Latvia has embarked on various integration processes – integration into the European Union, integration into the market economy, integration into the NATO. The main challenge and concern still remains the process of integration of the ethnically divided society at home.

The subject matter of this analysis is the evaluation of efforts to foster integration of society in Latvia and the factors that have inhibited development and implementation of rational, pragmatic and professional policy for integration of society in Latvia.

The paper gives a brief overview of the historical background, touches upon the issue of identity formation and its implications, provides demographic context and explains the different legal status of residents of Latvia. It then proceeds to discuss the policy for integration of society, institutional arrangements, and funding. The paper concludes with a general evaluation of the efforts to foster integration of society and the factors that have inhibited development of a pragmatic approach and effective implementation. The author argues that the mono-ethnic political realm has been, and still is, unable to provide a satisfactory response to these challenges. In addition to the lack of political will and commitment to systemically address the issue, there are unclear institutional roles, critical lack of funding from national budget and absence of structured and regular dialogue with all parts of society. The activities that have been undertaken are mostly as a result of the initiatives and pressures of different international organizations. This irresponsibility on the part of political forces and
voters can produce an array of unintended consequences, which may prove to be far more detrimental to the independence and development of the country than the perceived threat of inclusion of the Russian speaking population.