

Evolution of Political Parties in Latvia, 1991-2001

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**Evolution of Political Parties in Latvia, 1991-2001**” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.



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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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Dr. K.B. Usha

Supervisor

Dedicated

To

My Beloved Parents & Brother

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List of Abbreviations

CPSU	Communist Party of Soviet Union
DPS	Democratic Party “Saimnieks”
DPS	Democratic Party 'Master'
JP	New Party
KDS	Christian Democratic Union
LTF	Latvian Popular Front
LNNK	Latvian National Independence Movement / Latvian National Conservative Party
LDP	Latvian Democratic Party
LUP	Latvian Unity Party
LZP	Latvia's Green Party
LFP	Latvia's First Party
LNRP:	Latvian National Reform Party
 LSDSP	The Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party
PCTVL	For Human Rights in United Latvia
TP	The People's Party
TSP	People's Harmony Party
LSDA	Latvian Social-Democratic Alliance
TKL	Peoples Movement for Latvia

**Systemic Transition, Emergence of Multiparty
System and Party Institutionalization in
Latvia: A Conceptual Framework**

CHAPTER I

Systemic Transition, Emergence of Multiparty System and Party Institutionalization in Latvia: A Conceptual Framework

Systemic transition and political independence of Latvia in 1991 provided opportunity for its citizens of the politico-legal basis for building a multiparty and democratic system of governance. In order to establish a democratic system, it requires developing a political culture compatible to accommodate the new democratic values, norms and views by the society. Latvians adopted democratization as the process to inculcate such political culture and develop public trust in the system. That means, the systemic transition was not only about transition from one system to another, i.e., transition from communism to liberal democracy by demolishing the structures and institutions of old system, but also about change in the mindset and attitude of citizenry towards the new system, its values, structures and institutions. Political parties play a very important role in the task of democratization. Thus, in order to safeguard the interest of various sections of people several political parties emerged in Latvia during transition which can be traced back to Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* period of liberal reforms. Democratization helped to develop national awakening in Latvia that mobilized people to work for separation and independence. For this purpose during the days of singing revolution popular front was formed. Latvia achieved independence in 1991. Independent Latvia experienced a two way transition in the 1990s: transition to democracy and transition to independent statehood. During this

period Latvia started building new state structures and democratic political institutionalization. It can be assumed that an institutionalized party system is a necessary prerequisite for successful democratic transition and consolidation. In order to achieve political institutionalization of party system and parties, Latvia has to solve the challenges of social integration,¹ financing of parties and filling the gap in the interaction between political parties and society. This chapter tries to build a conceptual framework on Latvia's transition from authoritarian communist system to liberal democracy, evolution of multiparty system and party institutionalization.

There is no consensual universal theory that could help explain the various aspects of party politics in Latvia and other post-Soviet states. Parties are explored on the basis of various theoretical frameworks in the context of different times developed by many scholars (S.M. Lipset and S. Rokkan, 1967; G. Sartori, 1976; A. Panebianco, 1988; K. Lawson 1980; Harmell and Janda, 1994; R. Katz and P. Mair, 1995; Mule, 1995). The theoretical framework starts from the defining of political party. What exactly is a political party and how precisely can it be defined is a source of wide disagreement. Therefore, political party is defined in various ways. One of the simplest views is that parties are best defined by their common aims and they are organizations that seek political power either single or in cooperation with the other parties. Nevertheless, some scholars are inclined to see parties as more complex entities and define them in such a way as to convey some impression of their various aspects and diverse functions.

¹ Social integration was one of the important issues emerged in Latvia after independence as a prerequisite for building democratic political system. Ethnicity issues have greatly impacted on the political change and development in Latvia.

According to Epstein, party is “any group, however, loosely organized, seeking to elect governmental officeholders under a given label. Having a label (which may or may not be on the ballot) rather than an organization is the crucial defining element” (Epstein, 1980: 9). According to Neumann the idea of party connotes the existences of different competing entities, with their characteristic features of partnership, separation and participation, as well as the inclusion of each separate group as a part of greater whole. He defines party as the “articulate organization of the society’s active political agents those who are concerned with the control of the governmental power and who compete for popular support with another or group holding divergent views. The party is great intermediary that links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political action with the larger political community” (Neumann 1963: 352).

One similar definition holds that a party is an organization “locally articulated, that interacts with and seeks to attract the electoral support of the general public, that play a direct and substantive role in political recruitment and that is committed to the capture or maintenance of power, either alone or in coalition with others” (Pridham, 1996: 187). The participation in elections and formation of government makes the political parties different from other political institutions and social groups.

The role of political parties in a multiparty democratic political system is very important. Political parties stand in an intimate relationship with modern democracy. The formation of free and competitive political parties is an integral part of the process of democratization. Emergence of effectively operating political parties and the role they play in the overall

process of government in modern society may be understood as a major feature of the consolidation and operation of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Through the electoral process the party system determines the possibility and level of citizen participation; parties in electoral and legislative arenas exercise a major influence on the nature and stability of political leadership, and dynamics of the party system can have important impact on the prospect for subsequent control of social turmoil and political violence (Lewis, 1996: 15-16).

Political parties perform various functions in a democratic system. Diverse views exist on the broader function of political parties in a democratic system. According to Alan Bell, one of the most important functions of parties is that of “uniting, simplifying, and stabilizing the political process. Political parties ...provide the highest common denominator. They bring together sectional interests, overcome geographical interests, and provide coherence to sometimes diverse government structures” (Bell, 1997; 365). A more comprehensive list of functions of political parties is available in King’s analysis. According to this, political parties have six functions:

1. Structure the vote in the modern democracy and often carry out the process of broader opinion structuring;
2. Integrate citizens into the broader community and mobilize the masses for participation in the political process – from the simple activity of voting to more complex and dedicated form of behaviour;
3. Facilitate the recruitment of political leaders;
4. Organize government;
5. Form public policy, primarily by influencing the content of public thought and discussion, by formulating programs which party

leaders then feel constrained to implement once elected to office, or by bringing pressure on the incumbent government; and

6. Aggregate interests – a somewhat uncertain process – that may range from activity which simply takes note of social interests to that of restructuring behaviour designed to achieve the objectives they give rise to (King, 1974: 303).

On the other hand, a somewhat active role to political parties has been attributed by S. Neumann. In his opinion less developed countries and particularly in fluid conditions of the post-communist societies, the parties play an important role in managing the “chaotic public will”, transforming the private citizen into a “a political animal”, developing links between government and public opinion, and electing political leaders (Neumann 1963). According to Meleshevich (2007: 19),

Political parties and party systems play a number of vital roles in a democracy. Parties share some of these functions with other social institutions. For example, parties besides serving as agents of political socialization also serve as a linkage between individuals and the political system. However, in democracy with a healthy civil society, many other groups fulfill similar tasks. In addition to the shared functions, parties also have a number of social niches unique to this type of political organization. Among the most important functions of a party in a democratic setting are the participation in elections and recruitment of political leaders into the legislative arena. These features differentiate a political party from the interest pressure group, which is not supposed to nominate candidates to compete elections for public office. Another distinctive function of the party system is the recruitment of politicians into the executive branch of government.

For a better understanding of the evolution of multiparty system and political parties in a new democracy like independent Latvia the concept of institutionalization could be useful. Several studies attempted to

conceptualize institutionalization with regard to study of political institutions and political parties² (Huntington, 1968; Panebianco, 1988; Maor, 1995; Meleshevich, 2007). Political institutionalization is defined as “the process by which organizations and procedures acquire values and stability” and proposes *adaptability/rigidity*, *complexity/simplicity*, *autonomy/subordination* and *coherence/disunity* as its four dimensions (Huntington, 1968: 12 cited in Meleshevich, 2007: 11). Autonomy is an important dimension of political institutionalization as it is necessary that the institutionalized organization should have an autonomous status and its own value vis-à-vis its external environment (Meleshevich, 2007: 19). Stability refers to the patterns of interaction between individual parties as elements of the party system (Ibid). The transitional countries might demonstrate different patterns of interaction within their political systems. Their highly fragmented party systems might lack autonomy and either manifest some regularity of party competition patterns or become unstable. Party systems in other transitional countries may move toward greater autonomy, but, at the same time, demonstrate higher levels of instability due to the changing configuration of political forces – emergence or disappearance from the political arena of some groups, merger or enlargement of others, etc (Meleshevich, 2007: 21).

Giovanni Sartori examines the question how party systems maintain themselves. Sartori sees that parties and party systems change only to the extent that they loose control over their agenda setting. Parties share this

² Political (party) institutionalization is contested concept. It was in discussion during the 1960s. This discussion once again came up after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the context of democratic transition thereafter in the newly independent republics and regions.

control with other organizations such as interest groups, and party system changes when there is weakening this linkage and interest groups develop autonomy in operation (Maor, 1995: 31). Given the political parties are important link between society and the political system, Sartori analyses the systems of interaction and proposes a typology combining fragmentation (a number of parties) and polarization (with the extent of ideological distance between the parties in a party system). Sartori divides party systems as 1) two party systems which are characterized by two parties; each is sufficiently strong to govern alone, and 2) fragmented (more than five parties) highly polarized parties. In the first type each side moderates its political position in an attempt to win a majority of parliamentary seats in general elections and therefore will result in stable and effective forms of parliamentary government. In polarized system Sartori points out two conditions that determine the polarized pluralist system: the presence of anti-system parties and existence of a bilateral opposition which are mutually exclusive. According to Sartori, the anti-system party “undermines the legitimacy of the regime it opposes” (Sartori, 1976: 133 quoted in Maor, 1995: 32). These factors shape political processes in both the electoral and parliamentary arenas. Sartori’s framework is helpful to analyze how a party system functions.

Though different approaches are available to examine the development of party system and political parties, the conceptual problem that emerges is whether these frameworks could be applied in the context of post Soviet party politics. This issue has been addressed by Anatoly Kulik and Susanna Pshizova (2005: 4-9). According to them, “the multidimensionality of the context that shapes emerging political parties and impacts the development

of party politics in post-communist transitions is widely recognized. However, a set of meaningful internal and external contextual variables that should be taken into consideration – its values, weights, and inter-reliance in affecting the development of party politics – varies from country to country even in the same region. Moreover, if at all in the initial phase of transformation such variables as the political will of elites, the personalities of politicians, and the procedural characteristics usually play a leading role, overtime structural factors become more significant. Besides, the qualitative nature of most variables, like the Soviet legacy that has dominated informal institutions at the level of both government and mass behaviour in most republics, makes it hard to identify and almost impossible to measure their impact” (Kulik and Pshizova, 2005: 8). In order to address this difficulty Kulik and Pshizova suggest looking into what dimensions are salient in a particular national context, and how they shape electoral and mobilization activities of parties, their relation with civil society, their transactions in the party system and efficiency in the legislature, and in the government as well (ibid). Apart from these, Kulik and Pshizova’s framework focused on the following issues as well.

- 1) The impact of the cultural and socio-economic legacy of procommunist development and that of communist rule on the renaissance and the institutionalization of political parties.
- 2) The way the new regime came to power after the collapse of communist rule and the effect of the constituting elections.
- 3) The constitutional design and legal terms, including the electoral system, in which parties emerge and operate.
- 4) Voter’s attitudes toward state institutions, parties and politics, as well as their voting behaviour.

- 5) Socio-economic dynamics, cleavages in the society, and parties' response to them.
- 6) The base of party competition, campaign techniques and strategies, dynamics of electoral support, and output of parties.
- 7) The institutionalization, internal organization, and sources of financing of political parties.
- 8) Personalities of top politicians, informal rules of doing politics (Kulik and Pshizova, 2005: 8).

Generally studies on political parties have been done mainly based on the context of established western democratic regimes. The study of parties in transition countries which gained independence from Soviet Union and do not have the experience of liberal democracy and competitive party politics, but having high levels of ethnic complexity can provide different understanding of democratic development and party activity outside the idealized west European and American experience. In the period of transition from communism, the absence of political parties raises issue of enquiry on the subsequent role of parties in democratization and development of democratic political culture. The enquiry will be on the two phases of party development: the ethnic and nationalist phase (1990-1998) and socio-economic issue based politics (since 1998). The scope of the study will cover the period from 1990 to 2001.

In this study the context of Latvia's party politics will be analyzed by using parameters suggested by Kulik and Pshizova. In order to understand the political context of Latvia an overview of democratic transition after Soviet disintegration is helpful. The independence of Baltic States after the

disintegration of Soviet Union and end of one-party authoritarian regime in 1991 heralded an era of democracy building. This involved, among others, the promulgation of a democratic constitution and, based on that, the creation of the institutions of governance – the presidency, parliament and assemblies, etc., independent judiciary, regular elections, codifications of individual and group rights and liberties and finally a conducive atmosphere for the political parties and other agencies of civil society to grow as well as to participate in the political process. Among the countries of the Baltic region Latvia has demonstrated an encouraging degree of potentialities for democratic transformation and consolidation.

The emergence and growth of political parties was a very significant indicator of the healthy process of democratic transformation and what has been called the ‘rebirth’ of politics in Latvia. The authoritarian one-party regime, since the end of World War II, had not allowed any space to competitive political parties and ideologies. Hence the politics, as in the context of a democratic system, was completely absent. The first major maker of the democratizing efforts of the post-communist Latvia was the emergence of political pluralism with free, open and competitive elections for parliaments and assemblies. It was followed by the promulgation of constitution with distinctly enhanced possibility of each constitution playing its intended role as supreme law of the land. The constitution guaranteed to the people freedom of press, of assembly, of thought, of expression and of religious belief and practice. The constitution also tried to model institutions of parliamentary governments on western lines with their essential features.

The democratic transition in Latvia also witnessed a massive proliferation of political parties. As soon as the outgoing communist regimes legalized political pluralism there was virtual explosion of new political parties, associations and pressure groups to vie for a share in political power. Initially, there emerged anti-communist opposition groups. Beginning as mass protest movements against communist rule these fronts provided a focus for mobilization of broad based and spontaneous popular pressure against communist power. These fronts were, however, programmatically vague, ideologically unclear and organizationally fragile and therefore, lacked stability and cohesion from the very beginning. Hence, they were soon to suffer fragmentation due to their inner contradictions.

In post communist Latvia the political system was highly fragmented and decentralized. The coalition governments formed in independent Latvia were short lived and on an average remained in power for a limited period of sixteen months. In the initial stage i.e., during 1990-1998, the political system was nationalist in character and the main political cleavages and issues were centred on institutionalizing national autonomy, de-occupation, issues of citizenship, ethnicity, state language, education in minority language, etc. Market reforms, privatization and international relations are defined just as instruments of consolidation of national independence.

During the nationalist period the political priorities of important parties such as *For Fatherland and Freedom*, *People's Harmony Party*, *For Human Rights in United Latvia*, were centred on national and ethnic issues, citizenship and state language and the like. Parties like *Latvian Way (Latvia's Way)*, *Master*, etc favoured free market autonomy and political

priorities were economic development, security, and social stability of a regulated market. Some parties like Master and New Party ceased to exist because of loss of support base. Then emerged anti-market parties like *Social Democrats, Formers Association*, etc. Thus, during this phase of Latvian political system, the main influence can be basically classified as Latvian nationalist, Russian oriented parties, liberal centric and populists. During this period Latvia has been trying to integrate in European economic and security structures. This led to massive reforms in various state institutions and implementation of European community directives. Thus politically and legally Latvia has been deeply influenced by the process of entry into European Union. The European integration led to changes in Latvia's social landscape. The service sector oriented economic development and foreign investment caused structural transformations in the former industrial labour force. The share of service sector in the economy increased and agriculture and industry has been decreasing. There is considerable increase in private sector workforce. This led to the rise of a new social environment. The foreign organizations and business groups not only hire the locals, but also disperse new values, aspirations and attitudes. As a result Latvia has been experiencing the growth of new social groups with different ideas and a new political identity. For example, the rise and success of People's Party is the result of Latvia's "internationalization" and support of a new "international" middle class and its culture in Latvia. Thus the ethnicity and nationalist oriented political preference has been replaced by class based politics now.

While broadly keeping in tune with the regional pattern, the Latvian experience with the evolution of multi-party system has been somewhat

different. The fragmentation of political space in Latvia has so much affected the evolution of organizationally strong, disciplined and ideologically committed political parties. They have effectively participated in six post-communist parliamentary elections as well as a series of other local and provincial elections till now. Political stability in Latvia has not been undermined by the problems generally associated with coalition governments. The parties in Latvia have mostly the middle class social base. They maintain strong organizational discipline. With experiences of much lower percentage of defection, disintegration etc. they have played a major role in the consolidation of the post-communist Latvian polity.

It has been argued that political parties in Baltic States, for a variety of reasons, have not had a robust beginning. The analysts have seen them as weak, fragmented and barely capable of sustaining viable governments. They have also been described as cliquish, divorced from the mass of the society, generally underdeveloped, unrepresentative of public interests, divisive, self-seeking, antithetical to the hopes of national recovery and harmful to state interests. The idea of the emergence and development of political parties, as an integral part of the post-communist democratic process, has received only slow and reluctant recognition in the region. This is largely because diverse forms of social movement were instrumental in overthrowing communist regimes and they, along with the institutions supposed to be representatives of the civil society rather than political parties, were initially identified as the major vehicles of subsequent democratic development. Hence the parties were seen by many as outmoded and largely irrelevant in the process of democratization in Baltic States.

The Period of transition has not been continuous but has had different phases marked by certain dominant features and development. The first or awakening phase occurred between the Fall of 1986 and the election of the Latvian Supreme Soviet in May 1990. The second phase was between May 4, 1990 and the full declaration of Independence on August 21, 1991 (in the dying days of the Moscow coup). The newly elected legislature, controlled by the People 15 front Latvia was able to achieve of economic self-determination and began to control the movement of goods across its borders. Legislation was passed moving Latvia closer to rule of law and economic marketization (Geoffry Hosking 1991: 7).

The advent of Independence Period from August 1991 to the election of the Fifth Saeima in June 1993, without question, involved the greatest rate of progress towards westernization goals (Dreifelds 1996: 17). The Period of constitutional legitimacy began after the Saeima accepted the 1922 constitution in its entirety. In practical terms, the June 1993 was focused on reconstruction and normalization. The electoral rules of the Interwar republic were applied and binding rules of Procedure were accepted for the Cabinet and the Saeima. The political parties elected to the Saeima began to engage in politics in a more disciplined and predictable way, although more than a half dozen deputies had revolted or were expelled from their parties within a year of the election (Lieven 1993: xxiv). The process of change continues. For some scholars it is too slow but for others too rapid. Nevertheless, the goals of westernization have not been abandoned and none of its elements jettisoned.

Against the backdrop of the above conceptual framework the study intends to explore the following questions on the evolution of party system and political parties in Latvia.

1. How important are political parties for the success of democratization process and emergence of democratic political culture in Latvia?
2. What factors and conditions helped the formation of political parties in Latvia?
3. Why do fragmentation of parties and frequent change occur in Latvia?
4. How stable is the representation of different political parties in state structure and how do they influence state policies?
5. How legitimate are the political parties in Latvian society?
6. Why Latvian parties are mostly ethnically divided? Is this due to the legacy of fifty years of occupation or is it because they are elitist and oligarchic?
7. How do the social cleavages influence party organization, electoral politics and party recruitment?

The study intends to test the following hypotheses to arrive at the conclusion and spell out the validity of parameters used in the study.

1. Political parties are the key components in liberal democracy and therefore, in the democratic process of Latvia, political parties are significant for the development of political pluralism and emergence of democratic political culture.
2. Latvia after independence had weakly organized parties and highly fragmented party system and fluid social cleavages.

3. The fragmentation of political parties that form around personalities or specific themes, and crisis of legitimacy create difficulty for governments to form and remain in power.
4. The political parties in Latvia take up issues and interests of people through electoral process and through representation in Latvian state institutions.

The study will be using the following parameters:

- Ideological basis of parties
- Cleavage structure
- Political recruitment to legislature
- Political recruitment to executive
- Mass base of the party
- Voting behaviour
- Party financing
- Number of parties
- Interest and political agenda

The study is structured in five chapters. The first chapter formulates, as we have already seen, a conceptual framework to analytically look into the various aspects of the theme of the study, explaining the links among systemic transition, political institutionalization and emergence of multiparty system and the role of political parties in Latvian society and government. The second (next) chapter discusses the origin and development of political parties in Latvia and the ethno-political and socio-economic challenges faced in formative phase of development of political

parties in Latvia. It also discusses about the opportunities during transition that helped form political parties. Third chapter discusses about the organization, fragmentation and different social cleavages influencing parties and their functions. Fourth chapter discusses about the participation political parties in the electoral process, agendas, financing and their contribution to the performance of the government which they represent. The final chapter states the validity of hypotheses and the conclusions arrived at in the study.

**Origin and Development of Political Parties in
Latvia: Formative Stage, 1985-1992**

CHAPTER II

Origin and Development of Political Parties in Latvia: Formative Stage, 1985-1992

The origin and development of political parties in Latvia is related to the process of democratization and consolidation of democratic transition that started during Gorbachev's Presidency and continued in the initial years of Latvian independence till 1992. Gorbachev's policies of perestroika and glasnost in April 1985 changed the character of political system. The partial liberalization reforms started by Gorbachev provided political opportunities for organizing, group mobilization and dissent to a certain extent. His reforms gave the opportunity for Latvians to refresh their national awakening and mobilize on lines of separation and independence. In order to achieve these goals, they formed independent political organizations and led mass movements, rallies and singing revolution. The Latvians formed popular front as a pioneering institution for various other groups. The important goals of these organizations were more democracy and autonomy. The popular front became the foundation for the birth of political parties in Latvia. This chapter discusses in detail about the origin and development of political parties since the mid-1980s when political opportunities were created through Gorbachev's reform policies and later in the initial years of Latvia's independence.

In the words of Linz and Stepan political parties and party systems are part of political society and "a full democratic transition, and especially democratic consolidation must evolve, a political society" (Linz and

Stepan, 1996). The formative phase of political parties and party system in Latvia is related to the period of transition and the initial years of independence. During this period, some important developments took place such as mass-elite political differentiation, emergence of ideological groups, formation of organizational structures of political parties, etc. This was the result of the deep, social, political, economic and cultural transformation that Latvia had undergone those days. During this period various political movements, organizations and parties with a distinct programme emerged. This led to political pluralism. Several social identity groups also merged with these political structures. Party system in Latvia emerged in terms of characteristic features of fragmentation and left-right polarization.

In order to build more liberal and democratic society, the Latvian process of democratization and systemic transition started during Gorbachev's period. "Independence, democracy and market economy" (Kivirahk, 1999: 30) were the slogans during democratic transition in Latvia for establishing "the good society" or "the good life" (Ibid). The transition and independence was meant for materializing and consolidating these slogans into practice, which is apparently a long drawn and time consuming process. Before discussing democratic transition in Latvia it is necessary to define the concept of transition. According to Pridham and Vanhanen the interval between an authoritarian political regime and a democratic one is commonly referred to as the transition (Pridham and Vanhanen, 1994: 16-17). Welsh points out that the successful transition process toward democratic political rule involves three stages: 1) liberalization of the authoritarian regime is accompanied by decline in the use of command and

imposition as the prevailing modes of conflict resolution. 2) As the transition proceeds to extrication from the old regime and institutionalization of a new political system, bargaining and compromise emerge as the key lectures in decision making. 3) Consolidation of the transition is distinguished by the increasing dominance of competition and cooperation as the prevailing means of conflict resolution (Welsh 1994: 380). Building new democratic state institutions, private enterprise based economy and a vibrant civil society, especially grass-root level work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were the important prerequisites for Latvian democratic transition after independence. The western inspired goals of democracy, rule of law, civil society, market economy and independent and viable state institutions have become the most popular aims for Latvia also, like most of the other European Post-Communist states. However, for a majority of Latvians, such goals are not accepted as priority ideals, there are other goals held in higher esteem within Latvia, by certain groups of both the left and the right (Motyl 1992: 309).

The origin and development of political parties in Latvia took place under various political influences such as autonomy and democratic experience of interwar period, nationalism, Soviet legacy, constitutional and electoral legislations during 1985-1992, Gorbachev's liberalization policies, independence and political pluralism. The Latvia generally considers its incorporation with the Soviet Union was coercive and illegal. Latvia considers itself as an independent democratic state as it was during the interwar period, 1918-1940. Latvia also considers that it was part of Europe and wished to be identified with Europe. The national reawakening and ethnic composition and problems such as hatred towards ethnic minority

became an issue in state building and development of party system because of the historical experience of Latvia.

Historical Background: Ethnic Issue and Political Parties in the Interwar Period

One of the reasons for reawakening of the Latvian nationalist sentiments is the experience of independence and strong national movements existed during the 1920s and 1930s. On 18 November 1918, the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed. Moscow recognized Latvian independence in the August 1920 Soviet-Latvian treaty, and the new republic joined the League of Nations in 1922. During its 20 years of independence, Latvia built an independent state and achieved a degree of economic success. Although Latvia began as a democratic parliamentary republic, it became an authoritarian state in 1934, when President Karlis Ulmanis, leader of the Agrarian union, peacefully dismantled the parliament and seized full control of the state. Although Ulmanis resorted to repression, he appeared as a “guarantor of stability” in the public eye in the years leading up to World War II. The Ulmanis period remains a symbol of economic and cultural prosperity for many Latvians. Living standards in Latvia were one of the highest in Europe at that time (O’Connor, 2003: 94).

Latvia was multiethnic society and therefore, ethnic issue was important during interwar period. Three large groups of parties existed during the interwar period in Latvia: Latvian citizen, Latvian socialist and ethnic minority. This reflected the ideological diversity and political will of society. During this period the main cleavage structure was based on socio-

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economic, left-right and urban-rural. These cleavages are represented by Social Democrats and the Farmers' Union. The Social democrats represented by the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party was organized on socialist ideological lines and the social base of the party was the workers employed in the wealthy land owning classes. It was the biggest party in Latvia at that time. The other important party was Latvian Farmers' Union. The social basis of this party was farmers and their agenda was to achieve national prosperity in agriculture. The non-Latvian ethnic groups also played an important role in the state building process during the interwar period and in the process of creating political organizations (Kulik and Pshizova, 2005: 164). This situation changed when Soviet Union incorporated Latvia into it during 1940-41. Two events in particular are tied to Latvia's loss of independence during the interwar period. (1) The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 23, 1939 and its secret protocols, and its role in the mythology concerning Latvia freely joining the Soviet Union. (2) The deportation of thousands of civilians on June 14, 1941 (ibid).

Sovietization and Latvian Discontent

Sovietization of Latvia began with invasion of Soviet forces on Latvia on 17 June 1940, and subsequent incorporation of Latvia into the USSR. Thousands of Latvia's military and law enforcement officials were executed; political and social leaders were imprisoned. Following World War II, forced collectivization of agriculture began another round of deportations in 1949, bringing the total number of post-war deportees to more than 200,000. The Soviet policy of Russification sought to replace Latvian language and culture with those of Russia. Freedom of speech,

press, and religion was denied. For most of the 50 years of Soviet rule, political dissent was strictly forbidden.

The first year of communist occupation was traumatic for the local population, most of who had been totally isolated from events in the giant country next door, had read only isolated bits and pieces about the horrors of Stalinist Russia, but were all of a sudden thrust under its direct power. It had been clear to opponents of the Soviet occupation that the elaborate edifice of mythology about the supposed revolution of the working class of Latvia would be seriously shaken if it could be shown that Stalin and Hitler had made a deal about the Baltic republics in August 1939. Much energy was expended to that end in all there Baltic republics. The issue was certainly the Achilles' heel of the soviet version of revolution in the Baltic. The first people publicly to draw attention to the Pact were Latvian youths who undertook, at great risk, organizing demonstrations from August 23, 1987 (Bilmanis, 1988: 402).

After the war was over, a decade of Sovietization policies in 1940-49 continued in Latvia. Latvians suffered another mass deportation to Siberia. Small groups of partisans called "forest brothers and sisters" continued to fight for a free Latvian republic until 1956. From the 1960s until the 1980s, Latvia developed as a member of the USSR, and became a model Soviet country. Thanks to their outstanding services in building socialism, many Soviet Latvian party leaders were promoted to work in Moscow during the Soviet period; many people from other Soviet republics were brought to work in Latvia (Alfred, 1951: 357).

Following World War II, the Sovietization of Latvia entered a new, more aggressive phase. From 1945, the Soviet regime, using the army and the secret police, employed brute force to establish obedience and transform Latvian society. The Soviet regime embarked on a plan of socialist reconstruction in Latvia that called for accelerated industrialization and collectivization of agriculture. The first secretary of the Latvian communist party, Janis Kalnberzins, hoped that Latvia would quickly be converted into an industrial soviet republic. By 1947, much of the pre-war industrial infrastructure had been repaired and new industrial enterprises, particularly heavy industry, were planned. Rapid Industrialization just after the depopulation of war meant that industrial manpower had to come from outside Latvia. In 1946, 41,000 people had already arrived in Latvia, with over 30,000 settling near the industrial concerns in Riga. Between 1945 and 1955, approximately 535,000 labourers were shipped to Latvia from the Soviet Union. By 1948, almost 45 percent of all industrial workers were not ethnically Latvian. Rapid industrialization had altered the ethnic composition of Latvian society (Drefields, 1980: 34-51).

Post-war Sovietization meant war against the Latvian countryside. After rural support for the partisans became clear, collectivization became state policy. In 1947, soviet authorities introduced excessive, progressive taxation on small farms. The new tax rates reached 75 percent of estimated income, and as peasants were unable to pay, the state seized their livestock, equipment and property. Despite the considerable pressure and the concomitant propaganda in favour of collectivization, few farmers joined the Kolkhozes. The Soviet regime claimed that the lack of enthusiasm for collectivization was due to kulak (so-called wealthy peasants) agitation

against the Kolkhozes. From March 25 to 28, 1949, the Soviet regime struck viciously against these kulaks, deporting 43,200 of them (including more than 10,000 children) to Siberia. By 1952, 98 percent of Latvian farmers lived and worked on collective farms (Kangeris, 1992: 752-58).

The Sovietization of Latvian society also included a comprehensive, planned assault on independent Latvian cultural life. The first blow was the loss of the majority of the pre-war intelligentsia through emigration. Fearful of Soviet repression (a justified fear), 120,000 Latvians fled the country in the final stages of World War II. Within the refugee population were 2,062 teachers, 197 university lecturers, more than half of Latvia's doctors, engineers, architects and Lutheran clergymen. Those that remained were targeted by the Soviet regime for arrest and deportation. All literature, newspapers and journals became closely supervised by Communist Party mouthpieces. History was rewritten to stress the Baltic region's "organic" connection to Russia, and streets and squares were renamed after Soviet heroes. The soviet authorities banned traditional Latvian festivals such as Midsummer's Eve. Increasingly, the Russian language was stressed over Latvian (Taagepera and Romuald, 1993: 62).

The general population of Latvia was suspect in Soviet eyes. There was, however, a tiny minority that supported the sovietisation of Latvia: the surviving Latvian Bolsheviks, cadres from the USSR, and young, true believers in communism. At least 9,000 communists were transferred to Latvia from 1945 to 1951. The young true believers were Latvian communists baptized during World War II and indoctrinated with Soviet methods of dealing with dissent and ordering society. They were grateful to

the Soviet system for unprecedented upward mobility – the sons of poor peasants and factory workers were placed into universities and technical institutes to raise the percentage of proletarians and lower classes in higher education. In effect, they benefited from a sort of affirmative action for the lowest classes both in educational opportunities and, with loyal service to the Communist Party, in governmental employment. These Latvian communists, just reaching senior positions within the Party and government, pushed for “national communism” during the era of Khrushchev’s thaw (Simon, 1991: 121).

In March 1953, Stalin died and the grip of mass terror and repression on the entire Soviet Union relaxed. The Khrushchev thaw took time to take effect, but with the death of Stalin there was a noticeably sharp slowdown in the scale of political terror. In Latvia, political arrests dropped from 616 in the last year of Stalin’s life to ninety-two the following year. The Soviet occupation under Khrushchev could not be described as beneficial to Latvians, but terror slowed and space for manoeuvring politically, economically and culturally emerged for a nation that it had lived a nightmare for nearly a decade and a half. At first, Khrushchev followed a political strategy of finding some rapprochement with the Soviet Union’s many nationalities. The change was more than a loosening of political terror and symbolic rapprochement with Latvian nationalities (Taagepera, and Romuald, 1993; 112).

In the 1980s, the Soviet ideologists argued that the Soviet rule brought to Latvia a flourishing economy and technological revolution. According to official Soviet data, production in Latvia increased by 4,600 percent

compared to 1940. GNP increased by 1,150 percent and social labour productivity increased by 1,009 percent (Viksnins, 1986: 123). It is also argued that the Latvians were well integrated into Soviet society and that they lost their ethnic difference during the last three decades of soviet rule; ethnic Latvians speaking Russian as their second language also increased substantially.

Latvian leadership and people kept a deep hatred towards the policies of Sovietization which they identified with imperialist Russification. The one party dominance and dictatorship did not allow political pluralism to grow during Soviet period. However, Gorbachev's reforms and policies of limited liberalization extended political opportunity for party formation.

Gorbachev's reforms are, in theory, three-dimensional: *perestroika* (restructuring), *glasnost* (openness) and democratization. Gorbachev wanted to restructure the Soviet economy through liberal economic reforms and he believed that a partial deregulation of cultural affairs would enhance his personal popularity, giving him the grassroots political support he needs to sustain the restructuring process then underway. In the eyes of many Soviet workers, the economic reforms posed the twin threat of unemployment and inflation. *Glasnost* is a form of social compensation for any inconvenience or hardship that economic restructuring may entail. Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* allowed Latvians to voice their long-suppressed desire for national self-determination.

In his book *Perestroika*, Gorbachev agreed that the Multinational character of the Soviet Union was, in strength rather than weakness and that the nationality question was, in principle solved. Gorbachev continued prodding the economy with his package of reforms (Gorbachev, 1987: 103). His relaxation of political control meant the return of demands for national principles in the governance of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. The dilemma solved with force in the 1950s returned with a vengeance; reform of empire presented the possibility of the empire's dissolution. Latvians moved from calling for the introduction of popular content in the formation of government policy to rearranging the foundation of the Latvian socialist republic. The first move threw out the soviets and the second dismissed socialist principles leaving the republic of Latvia, after a fifty year hiatus. (Pabriks and Rurs, 2001:41).

Glasnost has demonstrated the continuing power of the world in Russia. 'Glasnost' was a principal fulcrum in a massive effort at reconstructing soviet political culture as reforming structures of power. Glasnost was intended to revise of the soviet system, even break down with painful, frequently radical self-examination intended to build popular movement. In Latvia, Glasnost entails both a losing and a reprogramming. Gorbachev compared the Soviet Union to the United States of America, stating that in the USSR people cannot avoid learning Russian just as English cannot be avoided in the USA. His reforms depended upon popular support for the success. Gorbachev urgently had to deal with the Soviet socio-economic crisis. Growth rates in the economy had declined steadily and dramatically since the 1960s. In the 1980s the USSR felt increasingly incapable of maintaining military establishments and of developing high technology,

competitive with that of the United States and the west (Gorbachev, 1987: 29).

The period from October 1986 to March 1988 was the first phase of the popular movement for independence, marked by ecological protests and the calendar demonstration. During this phase, the mass activities were mainly of a near-spontaneous nature organized by former dissidents, political prisoners and people outside the established elite circles. While being trailblazers in the fight for human rights and national independence, these individuals frequently lacked the skills needed for detailed public work. Therefore in the following years, members of the communist nomenclatura took the leadership of the movement for independence and democracy in Latvia (Punriks purs: 2001: 53).

The second phase of pro-independence activities began in March 1988 when the creative unions' organization that united the majority of Latvian intellectuals, called for a discussion of the "tragic Consequences" of Stalinism and how intellectuals should deal with them (Trepans, 1991: 31). On 1 and 2 June 1988, Latvia's intellectuals met to discuss contemporary social and economic problems and demanded the public unveiling of the so-called "white spots" of history. In the 1980s, this term referred to everything that official soviet propaganda avoided or pretended did not exist. Among these issues were the soviet occupation of the Baltic States, the Soviet-Finnish war and soviet repression. During the conference, Maviks Valfsons, a journalist, political analyst and an old communist, stated openly that in 1940 Latvia was violently considered the first official challenge of the legitimacy of soviet power (Eglitis: 1988:14). Suddenly

popular opposition to the soviet regime became a just cause in the eyes of the Latvian majority. Increasing numbers of individuals took part in the “calendar demonstrations” which became a predictable popular activity through the Baltic republic over the next three years. The public, after a nearly fifty year hiatus, celebrated 11 November (hero’s day) and 18 November (Latvia’s Independence Day). The participation of the Latvian intellectual elite, starting from 1988, gave these commemorative events additional legitimacy in the eyes of the broad public as well as helping to protect the participation from violent mass repression (Plakans, 1997: 170).

National Reawakening

The national awakening came about in large measure as a result of Gorbachev’s loosening of the reins of repression and his public stress on truth and freedom of expression. When open demonstrations started in 1987, Latvians were no longer lacking in social cohesion. The purpose of these “calendar” demonstrations was to publicly commemorate the events of June 13-14, 1941 (the mass deportations of Latvians to the Soviet Union); August 23, 1939 (the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact); and November 18, 1918 (the proclamation of Latvian independence). Mass demonstrations rocked the Baltic States in the summer of 1988. In mid-June, thousands of Latvians demonstrated in Riga, the capital, to mark the anniversary of mass deportations from Latvia under Stalin. The Soviet press agency, Tass, reported the march and noted that a monument would be built to the deportees. In the past, Soviet authorities had always forbidden exhibits of Latvian nationalism (*New York Times*, 15 June 1988: 3).

The fact that these protests have been permitted, that there has been no reported police repression, and that the Soviet press has been allowed to publish stories about the mass rallies is a clear departure from the way the Soviet government formerly dealt with such problems. Nonetheless, foreign journalists are still banned from troubled areas and the Soviet media often distort the meaning of the events they report. For example, the media told Soviet audiences that mass rallies in the Baltic States on the anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact were in honour of Stalin's victims; they omitted any mention of the secret protocol under which Stalin annexed the Baltic region in 1940 (Taagepera, Misiunas, 1993: 27).

National mobilization and solidarity was the factor that provided Latvians with the ability of organizing themselves around their ethnic values and overthrowing Soviet regime. At first glance, one might argue that Latvians were well integrated into soviet society and their ethnic differences diminished during the last three decades of soviet rule. Thus from 1970 to 1979, the percentage of ethnic Latvians speaking Russian as their second language increased from 45.4 to 58.3 percent. Latvians were the second most bilingual nation in the USSR after Belorussia (52.3 and 62.9% respectively) (Simon 1991; 399). The percentage of Latvians speaking Russian as their native language increased as well, from 19,000 to 28,900 (1.46 to 2.15%) (Rafevska, 1982: 50). Similarly, ethnic Latvians were considerably underrepresented in administration in Latvia – only 28% of those in the soviet administrative network (Steen, 1994: 4). Latvians were under-represented at party level also. From the 1950s Latvia's communist party had the lowest percentage of titular ethnic members in the entire Soviet Union.

Table
Communist Party (Latvia): size and ethnicity, 1960-1990
(In thousands of members and candidates)

	Size	% of Latvian
1960	66	35
1965	95.7	39
1970	122.4	----
1975	140.0	----
1980	158.0	----
1985	170.0	----
1989	----	----
	177.4	39

Note: Owing to the low percentage of ethnic Latvians in communist party, data on the ethnicity of the members in Latvia was never published.

Source: S. Hoyer, E. Lauk and Vi Halem, 'Towards a civic society, the Baltic media's long road to freedom,' *Perspectives on History, Ethnicity and Journalism* (Tartu: Mata Baltica Ltd, 1993).

The question of political rights for ethnic minority became a potential source of political instability during democratic transition. Latvian nationalism has been one of the issues most often raised in the Western media as a negative variable undermining Latvia's democracy. For many decades nationalism commonly had a negative connotation. Lately, however, the concept of nationalism has been undergoing rehabilitation. There are still those who claim that the politics of nationalism are contrary to the essence of the liberal democratic process and that democracy and nationalism are "a bad fit." Others have accepted the view that "nationalism is inherently neither good nor bad, but a fact of life that shows a capacity for both good and evil" (Burg, 1994: 267).

The American specialist on ethnicity in post-communist Europe, Rasma Karklins, finds the concept of nationalism to be complex, ambiguous and bearing opposing connotations in different societies. The core of nationalism in her view is the self-assertion of ethnic groups or nations. This self-assertion, however, can be benign if it strengthens a group's identity but harmful if it becomes aggressive or engenders superiority. To avoid some of the methodological, definitional and value problems associated with the concept of nationalism and also in order to expand the ambit or scope of the study of politicized ethnicity, she prefers using the concept of ethno politics. Nationalism in her definition is a subtype of ethno politics. In her analysis of Latvia's transition to democracy, Karklins found that ethno politics was a constructive rather than a destructive force (Karklins, 1994: 11). Motyl also stresses the value of heightened national identity and "non-exclusionary" nationalism. Its role, as he sees it, can be enormous in the deflection and mitigation of the impact of post-totalitarianism and in the construction of civil society. Indeed, he sees benefits of a large-scale commitment to national identity in helping state building, in strengthening democracy and in helping to overcome the negative side effects of mercenarization.

In Latvia, nationalism has been an extremely important ingredient of change. This nationalism, however, has been mostly confined to the Latvian ethnic group, not because it has been exclusionary, but because many non-Latvians now embraced the changes it sought, especially by those who settled in the republic when it was part of the USSR. The low

levels of Latvian language knowledge within these groups have also been obstacles to participation (Duncan and Holman, 1994: 1).

Latvian nationalism, much like nationalism in other groups and countries of the world, has not remained at a constant level but has surged and ebbed with time. It was most powerful during the period of awakening. Since that period, however, there has been a systematic decline in the intensity of this nationalism except during the armed confrontation in 1991 with the “Black Berets” in Riga. National commitment, to be sure, has not died and is still a prime consideration in the orientation of many people, especially in the right-of-centre parties. Nevertheless, it is surprising to note that the cup of nationalism rather than overflowing could be best designated as “half empty”. The sense of dedication, solidarity, selflessness and willingness to sacrifice for the common cause has been significantly eroded. There is a strong tone of cynicism permeating the orientation of many Latvians and a sense that self-serving individuals under the guise of nationalism have exploited them. The bitterness and even overt mockery of the “singing revolution” (the period of awakening) and all of its claims to dedication and sacrifice are a powerful current, especially among those most buffeted by the forces of change (Lieven, 1993: 27).

In sum, nationalism has been a powerful ingredient among Latvians providing the energy for Latvia to leave the Soviet Union peacefully and initiate radical change. In the post independence space, the wave of nationalism receded to a certain extent and lost some of its driving forces. To be sure, the attachment to Latvia and to Latvian culture has not dissipated but the emotional intensity of this attachment has become

diluted. Even the regrouping of national forces lacks the energy of previous years and in large measure appears guided by pragmatic considerations and strategies. Battle fatigue has overcome the feelings of many, but perceived dangers to the survival of the nation could once again energize people for collective sacrifice and selfless devotion. Perhaps, a serious and perceived threat from Russia could be the catalyst for such resurgence (Motyl, 1992: 72).

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Pact, August 23, 1989, the Baltic republics organized one of the most effective publicity campaigns ever held. Up to two million people, holding hands created a human chain, from Vilnius through Riga to Tallinn. This emotionally captivating scene was widely described not just by the Baltic media but also abroad. Hardliners in Kremlin felt that the Baltic had strayed beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour and several weeks of tense rhetoric ensued (Literatura un Maksla, 2 September 1989). As a result of Baltic pressure Gorbachev had a commission to investigate the Pact on June 1, 1989. Its chairman and Gorbachev's closest advisor, Alexander Yakovlev, presented the report on the Pact before the Second congress of the USSR People's Deputies on December 23 and 24, 1989.

The "singing revolution" and "third reawakening of Latvia" of the late 1980s and early 1990s was fomented by the Latvian intellectuals, writers, journalists, physicians and teachers (Balabkins, 1999: 437). Apart from nationalist awakening constitutional legislations also contributed to the origin of multiparty system in Latvia.

Legal Framework on Political Party and Elections

During the Soviet era, communist party's monopoly did not allow any legislation for independent and diverse political activism. However, this situation changed after independence. Latvia adopted the 1922 *Satversme* (constitution), which included the basic components of Latvia's election system. With regard to parliament (Saeima) election, Article 6 of the constitution states: "The Saeima is elected in general, equal, direct, closed, and proportional elections". Other important legislations with regard to the functioning of political system include "Law on the Saeima elections", and "On the Elections Commissions in the Cities, Districts and Parishes and Commissions at Voting Precincts." With regard to participation of political parties the law "On Public Organizations and Their Associations" merits particular significance. It includes a detailed definition of political party, the minimum strength to form a party, and provides information regarding the process for political parties when registering with Ministry of Justice. (Runcis, 2005: 166-167). These laws formed the basis for development of political parties in Latvia.

Origin and Development of Latvia's Multi Party System and Parties

Since Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* had allowed engaging in the informal social and political activities, people who were dissatisfied with the existing communist government started revolts and protests against the Soviet rule in Latvia. Democratic transition happened through the process of several reformist movements till disintegration of Soviet Union. During the five year Period from 1987 to 1991 many groups of popular political activists worked for independence of the country and

this gained popular support also (Pabriks and Purs, 2001: 45). This led to political pluralism that later transformed into shaping political parties.

The following sections discuss about the important groups that worked for political mobilization and electoral politics during democratic transition. Ethnicity was seen as a political issue and mobilization took place as a result of ethnic discontent. Latvian and non-Latvian ethnic nationalist awakening emerged among population and many groups representing both ethnicities emerged. From 1985 to 1987, there was mounting pressure from the indigenous Latvians for more reform, for independence of Latvia and for the change of Latvian as the official language. Parallel to this pressures outcry emerged from non-Latvian Russian communities also (Rudenshiold, 1992: 614). In order to fulfil the respective interests mass organizations began to sprout. Thus, Green Party (Vides Aizsardz bas Klubs – VAK), Latvian Popular Front, Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK), Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (LSDSP), Communist Party of Latvia (LKP), International Front (IF, Interfronte) and Latvian Independent Labour Party or Independent Communist Party of Latvia (IKP) formed the major participants in the party system in Latvia.

The Green Party

Gorbachev's leadership encouraged the environmental issues and mobilization to solve these issues. Therefore during Gorbachev's period environmental movements emerged. However, these platforms were utilized to mobilize nationality and ethno political issues and anti-government movements. The movement against the Daugava hydroelectric dam in 1986 can be seen as the first success story of collective action

against Soviet authorities by Latvians. Another important movement is the demonstration at Riga's Statue of Liberty in June 1987. Popular mobilization provided the nascent experience of democracy. Thus the first foundations of democracy were laid in the road to a mass independence movement (Maksla, October 14, 1986).

One of the first groups that were mobilized for responding to environment issues was the Green Party, environmental protection movement (Vides Aizsardz bas Klubs – VAK). Environmental degradation, pollution and public health issue as a result of industrial and agricultural activity were important concerns during Gorbachev's period. Green Party was formed toward the end of the 1980s. Though well educated ethnic Latvians were the majority of members of Green Party, the membership offered all Latvian citizens irrespective their ethnic identity. This is clear in the words of Igors Meija, the Chairman of Greens Information Centre, "Ethnically we must appeal to all voters. The only solution to the environmental problems in Latvia is through the cooperation of all. Without the cooperation of non-ethnic Latvians, it is impossible to save Latvia. So we don't want to exclude non-Latvians ... or play the ethnic card" (cited in Rudenshiold, 1992: 618). They coordinated their activities at three levels: membership, parliamentary and municipal. They contested elections and their candidates were elected to parliament.

Popular Front and Movement (LTF) for Latvia's National Independence

In 1988, political activists founded the Latvian Popular Front (LTF). LTF was formed as a pro-perestroika party to support reforms in Latvia. The

Popular Front then became the main moving force of Latvian political development. The movement gravitated many of the best thinkers, organizers, planners and tacticians from the communist establishment as well as from the “in formals” who had not been co-opted into the Party ranks, to be part of it. This assembly of unusually talented but politically dissimilar activists set aside their differences and pooled their resources to concentrate on gaining state autonomy and control over the levers of national survival (Fitzmaurice, John, 1992: 101). Though the programme of the LTF was relatively moderate, anti-immigrant and anti-Russian sentiments were quite widespread among the members of the movement. Many Russian speakers have strong qualms about the movement, whose programme was frequently presented in nationalist and anti-soviet vocabulary. The Russian-speaking masses were not willing to yield their privileged status on language issues. As a result, ethnic polarization obtained a structural frame, with most ethnic Latvians joining the Popular Front (Muiznieks, 1993: 197).

A number of non-Latvians, however, supported the Popular Front, especially ethnic minorities whose families lived in Latvia before the occupation and who understood the growing Latvian aspirations for independence owing to their own pre-war experience in independent Latvia. At the same time, the leadership of the Popular Front moved quickly to support minority cultural autonomy. In 1988, the Popular Front helped to initiate eighteen National Cultural Associations (for Jews, Ukrainians, Belorussians, gypsies and others). Then, in co-operation with the communist party leadership, the Popular Front helped organize a Nationalities Forum. The forum provided an opportunity for all groups to

air their grievances. The participants passed three resolutions expressing support for Latvia's sovereignty, concern about the ecological situation, and support for the efforts of minority groups to preserve their cultures. Along with these developments in September 1989 the first Jewish school in the Soviet Union was opened in Latvia, symbolizing the tendencies of multicultural politics within the Latvian Popular Front (Bleiere. D Latvijas notikumu bronika, Riga; N.I.M.S, 1996: 17).

Minorities saw the chance to promote their own interests while cooperating with Latvians and the Poplar Front. The Russian immigrant population was divided in their attitude towards the suddenly (at least for them) resurgent Latvians. The local conservative communist leadership frequently did not receive direct orders from Moscow on how to deal with mass movements demanding independence. At the same time they lacked the courage and imagination to deal with such large popular masses unified in common political action. Their indecision and inactivity worked in favour of Latvia's popular Front, which gained increasing public support with each passing day (Clemens, 1991: 208).

The LTF won a majority in the 1989 elections for the USSR Congress of People's Deputies and again in the 1990 elections to the Latvian Supreme Soviet, while the Independence Movement boycotted the elections. In May 1990, the Latvian parliament voted to restore Latvia's national independence (Taagepera, Misiunas; (1993: 37).

Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK)

On June 17, 1988 the Latvian national independence movement (LNNK) was founded as the first national mass movement demanding the restoration of an independent Latvia. Latvian National Independence Movement, a dynamic group of young theologians within Latvia's moribund Evangelical Lutheran Church also began a campaign to reactivate their congregations and the structure of the church itself. Indeed, several individuals from this group served as catalysts for the creation of the Popular Front of Latvia (Latvijas Tautas Fronte – LTF). The mobilization of a larger constituency of Latvians occurred as a result of the successful campaign to stop the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Daugava River in 1987. The initiator of this campaign, journalist Dainis Ivans, was later elected the first president of the LTF (Pabriks and Rurs, 2001:51).

Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (LSDSP)

This party had its historical existence before the First World War. Membership is basically from social democratic youth organizations of the old ties. Though in many issues it supports LTF, it prefers to work with other parties to support democratization, ecological concerns, privatization efforts, etc (Rudenshiold, 1992: 622).

Communist Party of Latvia (LKP)

With the intellectual's involvement in the mass movement, the Latvian communist party, Latvia's territorial branch of the communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), faced their own political dilemmas. The first dilemma was the question of a willingness to reform the party organization along democratic principles. The second dilemma concerned the push for

Latvia's independence. This included a number of questions in general. The Latvian communist party (LKP) could not avoid these issues (Latvijas Tautas gads Pirmais, Riga, 1989: 65). Also, the LKP had to establish a stand on what was happening in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic for its own survival. Using Latin terminology, the "old elites" in order to survive, had to choose either to support the newly growing political forces or to continue to collaborate with their former "lords" in the imperial centre. Latvia's communists were divided over this choice. Some opted in favour of the Popular Front while other remained faithful to Moscow. From 1988, the Latvian Communist Party consisted of a reform wing and a conservative wing, yet the structural split of the party came only in 1990. With little chance of compromise between the two wings, the reform communists at a meeting on February 24, 1990, called for a founding congress for an independent Latvian Communist Party. A few days earlier, the reformists, who composed about one-third of the Communist Party, had been expelled from the original LKP by the Moscow Loyalists (Laitin, 1992: 146).

It must be noted that the majority of the reform communists opting for co-operation with the popular movements were ethnic Latvians while the remaining loyalists were mainly of Slavic origin. The active participation of the national communists in the popular movements was a matter of self-identification as well as a question of rational choice. The portion to go "in step with the nation" means receiving a "pardon" for the "mistakes" these individuals had committed when joining the Communist Party. Formerly, they had been rejected or simply avoided by their compatriots because of their political decision to bolster the Soviet regime in Latvia. The rational

part of the choice, on the other hand, was connected with the calculation that with every year of Perestroika the Soviet system was becoming more democratic (Pabriks, 1996: 194).

This meant that the popular voice would increasingly get more power, and by poisoning the popular movement the ruling position of former elite members would be undermined. The reform communists also appeared useful to the Popular Front. They were personally familiar to Gorbachev and his circle, and they know the language of power used in Moscow. The reform communists, like Anatolijs Gorbunovs, were the Latvians with whom Moscow could negotiate. Therefore, the marriage between the Popular Front and reform communists appeared mutually acceptable, at least for the first years. The relationship also seemed profitable for the central authorities since, with the help of the reform communists, they had a feeling to control over the mass movements in the Baltic Republics. The triangle was beneficial for all those involved (Muiznieks, 1993; 197). While the reform communists made common cause with the Popular Front, the conservative wing of Latvia's communist Party did not lose complete public support.

International Front (IF, Interfronte)

Latvia's International Working People's Front (Interfronte), was established in 1988. Interfronte was strongly supported by the conservative communist leadership in Moscow and Riga as well as by the KGB. Interfronte mainly united aged Russian speakers and former Soviet army officers. Interfronte's aim was to avoid the erosion of Communist Party rule and oppose any changes that threatened the privileged status of Russian-speaking

immigrants. Interfronte, however, with its old-style rhetoric, was more an object of ridicule than real political concern for most Latvians (Clemens, (1991: 208). Interfronte gained support from Russian speakers.

Latvian Independent Labour Party or Independent Communist Party of Latvia (IKP)

The party, formed mainly with urban membership, changed its name in 1990. Independence was the main agenda of the party. But it believed that independence would be achieved only when the issues of privatization and citizenship are resolved satisfactorily. IKP also was similar to LTF and majority of its members also belonged to the Popular Front (Rudenshiold, 1992: 624).

Other Groups

A small human rights group, formed in the summer of 1986 by three workers from the city of Liepāja, calling itself *Helsinki '86*, organized the demonstrations (Fitzmaurice, John, 1992: 121). The group declared that their objective was to “monitor how the economic, cultural and individual rights of our people are respected” (Eglitis, 1986: 9). The group was placed under permanent surveillance. Repression and threats almost disrupted Helsinki '86's call for a popular demonstration to commemorate the soviet deportations of Latvian citizens in June 1941. On June 14, 1987, the first of the “calendar demonstrations” with about 5,000 participants took place at the Movement of freedom in Riga (Bruvers, 1987: 1-10). During the several years leading up to the first demonstration by Helsinki '86 on June 14, 1987, several groups had laboured with missionary zeal to inspire Latvians to work for a number of social and political causes. The

“calendar” demonstrations, led by Helsinki '86 during 1987, electrified the Latvian population. Most people expected the authorities to mete out swift and ruthless retribution. Nationalist revival by more legitimate, experienced and broader-based organization of the Latvian intelligentsia – the Latvian Writer' and Artists' Union helped strengthen and focus the newly resurgent national emotions and perceptions and guided this leaderless movement into the organizational confines of the Latvian People's Front (LTF) (Fitzmaurice, John, 1992: 101).

In 1988 the Latvian intelligentsia, whose demands for decentralization and democratization were forcefully articulated at the June 1-2 plenum of the *Latvian Writers Union*, joined this grassroots protest. Several months later, the idea of a popular front was brought to fruition, with a formal first congress organized on October 8-9, 1988 (Bruvers, 1987: 1-10). The *Rebirth and Renewal* (Atdzimsana un Atjaunosana) group did not have many members, but its activism and confrontation with communist party officials and policies energized people within the growing religious communities as well as in the wider society.

On common issues such as ethno political questions there were interactions and alignments also among the various political parties and organizations. After the attainment of independence the organizations like LTF underwent splits. And a number of parties emerged out of the organizations with the purpose of contesting the Saeima elections. The parties organized around issues such as citizenship, nationality and language. The party system produced a large number of parties. Parties also exhibit a cleavage structure

to which it belonged. The next chapter will discuss the aspects of organization, fragmentation and cleavage structure of these parties.

**Political Parties in Latvia: Organization,
Fragmentation and Political/Social Cleavages**

CHAPTER III

Political Parties in Latvia: Organization, Fragmentation and Political/Social Cleavages

Latvia got the opportunity for establishing democracy in 1991 when it became independent. Development of political parties was an important sign of democratic consolidation in Latvia. Most of the Latvian political parties emerged from the umbrella organization called Popular Front (LTF), which was formed for the purpose of leading a political movement for gaining independence. In the Popular Front different kinds of political identities such as reformists, nationalists, communists, greens, opposition groups and other political groupings were included. When Latvia gained independence, the Popular Front began to split and out of the splinter groups many political groupings began to take shape into organized parties. The Popular Front was not the only political movement during the period of Latvia's national independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There were former members of the Soviet elites, who were not part of the LTF. There was another group, conservative-nationalist wing of the opposition called Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK). This was a constituent part of LTF. Another one was the environmental protection group, the green Party. These three groups made up the main sources that fed Latvian parties with personalities and political values. Since independence a number of political parties appeared and disappeared. The parties could be identified mainly belonging to four types of social cleavages: ethnic, socio-economic, urban-rural and left-right. This chapter discusses about the organization, fragmentation and social cleavages with regard to political parties in Latvia.

In a democracy political parties are important mechanisms for integrating diverse interests and social forces in the governing institutions. Parties also act as mechanism for regulating social conflict, formulating policy alternatives and holding officials accountable to public (Tavits, 2008: 537). Fragmentation is an important aspect related to political parties. As Coleman (1995) points out fragmentation relates to the political parties competing in an election and the willingness of voters to vote for them. Fragmentation affects the stability of the government and their ability to govern. Duverger's analysis says that countries with proportional representation systems tend to have more number of parties than countries with plural voting. The number of parties is also an indicator of social cleavages in a country (Coleman, 1995: 141). Rohrschneider (2008) views that party cleavages – the nature of the issues over which parties compete – are rightly at the centre of analysis of the party systems. “They affect the ways voters are mobilized. They shape the stability of party-voter relationships. They provide the content of political competition for parties and voters alike, at least potentially therefore, affect the formulation of public policies” (Rohrschneider, 2008: 2). Party choice is never alone determined by ideological or social interests, but factors such as personality, competence, and perceptions of party stances on important questions also shape political competition (Whitefield, 2002: 191).

During the second stage of democratic transition that began in 1992, a fully competitive electoral politics took shape in Latvia. Several political parties emerged in the political system. How parties organize themselves, their

ideologies, legal basis, support base, recruitment and institutionalization are important aspects to look into with regard to Latvian party system.

Political Parties in Latvia during 1993-2001

As of 2002, more than sixty registered parties emerged in Latvia. However, at least three coalitions of parties have importance in terms of ideology, membership and electoral participation. Basically these coalitions formed the right or left wings. Some of the parties emerged had their existence during the interwar period. One such party is social democratic worker's party. There are liberal-conservative and centre-right parties which formed government. Farmer's Union was a member of many government coalitions (Skuland, 2005: 8).

Party Organization: Ideology and Political Agenda

According to Katz and Mair (1993) three "faces" of party can be identified for assessing the various types of party organizations for countries which gained independence from Soviet Union. These are: the party in public office, the party central office and party on the ground. According to western research findings, the party in public office is understood as the representative of the party in parliament or government, and the party central office is "the national leadership of party organization, ... which is organizationally distinct from the party in public office, and which at the same time, organizes and is usually the representative of the party on the ground" (Katz and Mair, 1993: 94 quoted in Ishiyama, 2001: 849). The membership plays an important role in party organization.

Parties are generally formed on the basis of ideologies and issues that they are interested to take up. Latvian parties have developed political identities based on established political ideologies. Parties proclaiming a social-democratic or conservative ideology have been elected to every parliament. All the major democratic political ideologies have been represented in the parliament (Diana, 1993: 1). Political ideology is a set of constantly evolving political ideas that make general assumptions about the way in which human beings act. Traditionally ideology is used for three main reasons. First to provide a comprehensible framework for programmes of political action, second as a vote-catching device, particularly when a particular ideology has wide support at a specific period of time, and third it provides both internal and external sources of identity by locating a party in the political spectrum – occasionally even as a façade of respectability. For instance, the ‘Liberal Democratic party’ in present day Russia; or the National Socialist German workers party in Inter-War Germany (Daunis Auers, 2001). Political ideology was largely discredited in post-1991 Latvia. The term ideology in Latvia has a very dark meaning, because in the previous regime political parties were actually very repressive (Huang, Mel 1999: 203). Nevertheless, by the 1993 parliamentary election, political parties were identifying themselves with concrete political ideologies in their pre-electoral programmes.

For some parties this ideological identification came automatically, as the leading parties of the Inter war era were ‘restored’ – the Latvian social Democrat workers party, the Latvian farmers union, the Democratic centre and so on. In contrast, LC was one of the ‘new’ parties. That had no

previous ideological baggage, yet still chose to identify itself on the ideological scale as a liberal party (Jubulis, Mark (200: 110).

At the same time it should be recognized that those ideologies operate in a party system where the overarching cleavage is ethnicity. Ethnic Latvians overwhelmingly vote for Latvian parties, while Russian speakers overwhelmingly vote for 'Russian' parties. Parties with similar programmes and ideologies do not openly cooperate in the Latvian parliament, if they represent different communities. The Latvian system contains a full spectrum of ideologically left to right parties (Cigame. Lothic). In the Latvian civil society it lacks many of the requisites for party organization. Candidate selection among Latvian parties remains weakly institutionalised and wide open to entrepreneurial newcomers (Pettai and Kreuzer, 1999, 162).

Liberalism, as one of the oldest political ideologies, has been constantly evolving for almost four hundred years, meaning different things at different times, in different parts of the world, the only constant being that it is traditionally associated with moderate reform of progress and politically centrist. In order to avoid a diversion into a lengthy debate on liberalism, perhaps the most appropriate definition can be taken from the 'liberal manifesto' of the Liberal International, the organization uniting global liberal parties, where LC has been a member since 1993 (Otto, 1966: 196). This defines liberalism as 'freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice and equality of opportunity'; these principles require a careful balance of strong civil societies, democratic government, free markets, and

international cooperation (Otto, 1966: 198). This also identifies three policy areas with a distinct liberal agenda.

- i) Minority policy (the most challenging aspect of developing ‘civil society’ and ‘democratic government’ in modern Latvia.
- ii) Economic policy (free market).
- iii) Foreign policy (international cooperation).

Table
LC’s performance in parliamentary Elections, 1993-2002

Year of Election	1993	1995	1998	2003
% of votes	32.41	14.65	18.05	4.9
No. of seats	36	17	21	0

Source: Latvian central election commission

‘Latvia’s way’ was the dominant party of Latvian politics from 1993 to 2002. It was the only party represented in each of the eight government coalitions in this period and it also provided four of the eight Prime Ministers and significantly more ministerial portfolios.

Ethnic and Language challenges in Latvian Politics

One of the greatest challenges for Latvian language policy since independence in 1991 is to overcome the demographic legacy of the soviet occupation (Galbreath 2006). We will discuss the changing demographic situation in Latvia from 1940 to 2001. The soviet era left a strong Russian imprint in Latvian society. The proportion of Russians in Latvia increased from 10 percent in 1940 to 33.8 percent in 1989 (Muiznieks and Kehris,

2003). This ethno-demographic metamorphosis contributed to the decline in the Latvian share of its population from 75.50 percent in 1935 (Aasland and Flatten, 2001) to 52 percent at beginning of 2001. At the beginning of 2001, over one third of the resident population was Russian speakers. Russian speakers include people from the former soviet republic other than Russia, stemming from soviet migration policy (Bjoklund, 2006: 45).

Citizenship is unevenly distributed in Latvia among its resident ethnic groups. In order to vote and hold any public office, one must be a citizen. Ethnic Russians are concentrated in the major urban centres. They encompass a disproportionate percentage of residents in the seven largest cities (Integration policy in Latvia 2001). Russians make up around 43 percent of the population in Riga, approximately 55 percent in Daugavpils, about 32 percent in Jelgava, around 37 percent in Jurmala, approximately 35 percent in Liepaja, 50 percent in Rezenkne and about 32 percent in ventspils (Euromosaic study 2006). The countryside is largely inhabited by Latvians. The present minority problem is however due to more than 50 year of soviet occupation and policies of linguistic Russification, and the precarious demographic situation have exacerbated the debate over citizenship, language policy, education policy, and national identity (Carol Schmid, 2007: 97)

Latvian speakers were certainly a language minority during the half century of soviet domination. They continuously lost status through growing migration and official language policy. Thought nominally, theirs was a majority language in Latvia (Schmid, 2004: 252). Language friction is related to the asymmetrical bilingualism that existed in Latvia under Soviet

domination. According to the 1989 soviet census, 68 percent of all Latvians claimed a command of Russian, while only 22 percent of all Russians had knowledge of Latvian (Jubulis, 2001: 231). Language was high on the pro-independence programme of the popular front, an anti-communist and pro-independence coalition in 1989. The soviet Latvian parliament adopted a language law making Latvian the state official language. The law envisaged a 3-year transition period during which the non-Latvian population working in the state sector had to learn some Latvian language (Veisbergs, 1993).

The Latvian language law that was eventually passed in December 1999 followed the same pressure as the citizenship law from the European Union (EU) organization for security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and Council of Europe (COE) before a reasonable compromise was reached. European commission recommendations, which were based on the Europe Agreement, were designed to make certain that Latvia employed a balanced approach to language proficiency requirements (Van Elsuwege, 2004: 20). Latvian legislation on citizenship and language and implementation went through three major transitions between 1990 and 2003. The first dealt with citizenship, specifically with who would be included or excluded in the renewed state (Brubaker, 1992).

In a referendum on 3 October 1998, a majority of the Latvian electorate approved liberalization of the citizenship law. The 1998 “Amendments to the law on citizenship” granted recognition of children, who were born in Latvia after August 21, 1991 if their permanent place of residence was Latvia; if they had not been sentenced for more than 5 years for a crime and they were state-less persons (Citizenship Law 199: 1-3).

The second transition related to the passage and implementation of the language law. Like the citizenship law it was contested and changed only under pressure from EU and European Organization. Many of the problems of the language revolved around the distinction between public and private spheres of life and freedom of expression. The main areas of language intervention concerned language use in state government and administrative bodies, meeting and publications, etc (Coral schmid, 2007: 10).

The third transition is related to major minority institution, primarily the change to majority Latvian language in Russian secondary schools. The schools are one of the last major institutions dominated by Russian speakers. The ongoing controversy in Latvia was not only about language, but also about power relation in Latvian society. Debates over language policy are often grounded in identity and control issues rather than pedagogy (Schmid, 2001: 245).

Legal framework and party system

The legal framework also influences party system. Latvia had very liberal legislations with regard to various aspects of the party system. The law on public organizations and their associations of 1992 provides the conditions for establishing and dissolving a political organization. This law defines a political party as an organization established by at least 200 citizens of the Republic of Latvia in order to carry out political activities, participate in election campaigns, put forth candidates to publicly elected offices, guide the elected officials in the Saeima and municipalities, implement its programme as well as participate in establishing institutions in public

administration. During registration the documents clearly stating the purpose, programme and statutes that contain aims, goals, and methods of the party (party name and its abbreviation; the structure of governance; admitting and expelling of party members and acquiring and dispersing of resources) should be submitted (Law on Public Organizations and their Associations, 1992, Article 43 cited in Ikstens, 2006: 1-2). The law on party financing that came into force in 1995 regulates the raising and spending of party funds. In 1995 the law on election agitation before Saeima elections spelled out basic rules regulating the use of advertising in public media in parliamentary election campaign.

Other factors that potentially influences party organization includes the structure of the electoral system, decline in the standard of living of the population and a nostalgic reaction in favouring parties. The electoral rules, prevalence of issues that the parties can exploit and the competitive environment that the parties are in, such as left-wing competition, influences party performance (Ishiyama, 2001: 853-854). During 1991-2001 it could be seen that parties and party system were just evolving. It was a regular phenomenon that parties were developing, changing, splitting, merging and disappearing. So the party system turned into a fragmented one.

Fragmentation

The Political Party organizations uniting nationalists, reform communists, dissidents, greens and numerous other political groups in the battle for Independence, began to fragment and new political parties were formed in preparation for the first free post-communist elections. Since then around a

hundred parties and electoral coalitions have competed in four parliamentary elections (Daunis, 2001: 1).

Fragmentation occurred on the issues of party leadership's interests. The fragmentation of parties and their representatives in the Saeima made it very difficult for government to form and remain in power. In a parliament where parties tended to form around personalities or specific topics, a party could not always rely on its member's votes (Deputy head of OSCE Mission to Latvia, 1998). For example, the for fatherland and freedom / Latvian National Independence party at one extreme and Janis Jurkans at the other were defined by their polarized views on the citizenship issue, whereas the centrist Latvia's way had a somewhat broader programme. Since Independence in 1991 Latvia has had eight governments to understand the role of political parties in nationality (Morris, 2004: 544).

The ideas and policy objectives of the Latvian political leaders who participated in these parties and governments changed over time but the underlying direction remained the same. In the early days of Independence nationality issues were high on political agenda (The Republic of Latvia: Human Rights issues 1993). At the time of Independence the political parties in Latvia were divided roughly into those seeking exclusive restitutions, models of citizenship and those who wanted to adopt the zero option. That allowed all persons resident in Latvia at the time of independence to gain Latvian citizenship. The Latvian popular front was divided on the question of citizenship (RFE/RL, 7 April 1992).

The anti-Independence Interfronte denounced the new language policy, the restrictions on citizenship and suggestions of immigration quotas as discriminatory and infringing minority rights. The pro-soviet stance of Interfronte alienated a number of Russian supporters, especially their support of parliamentary walk-outs by the Ravnopravies (Equal Right) deputies (Morris, 2004: 551). The former communists, who gave themselves a new Identity as Independent Communists to try to gain credibility in Latvia, supported citizenship for all as long as the applicant showed loyalty to Latvia. After the Moscow coup attempt in 1991, the soviet sympathizers in Latvia lost support (Rudenshiold, 1992: 624).

A number of soviet loyalists reconstructed themselves as the Democratic Initiative loyal to the new Latvian regime. The equal right group of deputies, who had supported Latvia remaining in the USSR, condemned the supreme council legislation for bringing citizenship legislation to Latvia and violating human rights. At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the citizens committee of Latvia declared that the supreme council elected by soviet citizen, when Latvia was not independent, did not have the legitimacy to pass citizenship legislation (Lieven, 1993: 201).

The Latvian citizens committee and its congress claimed that they were the only legitimate representatives of the Latvian people and that the supreme council had no right to determine the status of Latvian citizenship. The committee favoured repatriation of the Russian population and adopted the slogan, "Latvia for Latvians" (Rudenshiokd, 1992: 625).

The Latvian supreme council in 15 October 1991 outline of citizenship policy drew opposition from both ends of the political spectrum. This resolution would have granted citizenship to pre-1940 citizens and legal residents and their descendants. Those residents not in the above category could register for citizenship before July 1992 if they showed a sufficient command of the Latvian language, had lived in Latvia for 16 years, were familiar with the constitution and swore an oath of allegiance (Trapans, 1991: 111).

They saw restrictive citizenship legislation as being in Latvia's national interest. The linkage of the leaders of the parties in favour of a liberal citizenship law with the old soviet regime enabled the centre-right to discredit parties such as Harmony and Equal Right faction. Nationalists argued that a citizenship law could not be enacted until the Saeima had been re-elected by the descendant of Latvian citizens from the first period of independence. The For Fatherland and Freedom party wanted to revoke all laws passed by the supreme council and immediately review all pre-war laws (Riga Latvijas Jaunatne, 1993).

The parliamentary commission on Human Rights and National Question, in April 1992, declared citizenship and language issues to be the most difficult problem facing Latvia. Since those who wished to include all 1991 residents in the citizenry and those who wanted to restrict citizenship to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants had diametrically opposing views, and those supporting a restrictive policy were attempting to remove the demographic after-effects of soviet rule. During this period government and its bureaucracy created an impression that the restored Latvian nation was

unwilling to accommodate the needs of the non-citizens and minorities (Liege, 1993).

Juris Vidins, a member of the For Fatherland and Freedom Party stated that the non-citizens were not minorities as they had been used to Russify Latvia and eliminate the Latvian nation. The solution, as he saw it, was to make them leave Latvia. The Russian government would not fund this so it was up to international government to help these unhappy people go home. Then there would be no problem (Human Rights and Public Affairs committee, Riga, Latvia, 1996).

The Latvian National Independence Movement founded in July 1988 as a radical nationalist anti-communist force was divided over the issue of citizenship. Some sought to limit citizenship to those who could prove direct lineage from pre-war Latvia, while others simply wished for a residency requirement and successful completion of language and loyalty tests. One faction insisted that the ethnic Latvian proportion of the citizenship body should never fall below 75 percent. It was therefore necessary for naturalization process to take place over many years (Diena, 1996). The ruling coalition of Latvia's way suggested that everyone could apply for citizenship and only those explicitly excluded by a court ruling would be disqualified (Panorama Latvia, 1993).

In July 1994, following the 1993 Saemia election the citizenship law was finally passed, having been adopted without amendment on 22 June 1994 by 66 votes to 11. The legislation was a domestic and international compromise. At the end of 1995, the new prime minister Maris Grinblats

represented the radical nationalist party fatherland and freedom and opposed any relaxation of the citizenship legislation (Apvienibas LNNK Programme introduction, Riga 21 junijs, 1997).

Grinblats had been a founder of the popular front but went on to chair the more nationalist congress of citizens. He termed unacceptable the suggestion of the granting of equal rights to citizens and non-citizens or allowing non-citizens to vote in Municipal election in Latvia (Daily Report, 8 November 1995). During 1995-1996 For Fatherland and Freedom party was still trying to establish a quota system for citizenship. The party failed to gain enough signatures to force a referendum (RFE/RL, Newline, 23 June 1997).

In October 1997 the Saeima rejected the Harmony party amendments to the citizenship law. The proposals were to remove the age restrictions on naturalization, and grant citizenship automatically to children born in Latvia (Morris, 2004: 556). This period showed very little change in the citizenship policy, and the unstable government coalitions charted a conservative course of little change, refusing either to liberalize the citizenship legislation or to make it more restrictive.

The emergence of new parties and coalitions and disappearance or merger of some others shows that the Latvian party system was not stable. The number of politically influential parties having representation in parliament changed with every new election. On the eve of the election of 1995 three new parties appeared: the left wing Democratic Party "Saimnieks" (Master), the populist People's Movement for Latvia and the Latvian Unity

party. All these parties were partly dissolved during 1995-1998 and lost political influence in future elections. Before 1998 election to Saeima People's Party and the New Party were formed. Thus, according to Kalnins, "the ongoing popular disillusionment with regard to existing political forces gives permanent ground for new parties. This phenomenon is partly connected with unrealistic popular expectations that no political party can meet. Another reason is widespread political corruption that undermines the political legitimacy of the existing political elite. Also people's tendency to associate their political preferences with particular personalities rather than political organizations may be of some importance. Namely, a strong and popular leader may be virtually all it takes to create a new political party capable of winning elections. Latvian political parties have generally small membership. This is a feature that limits the linkage between political parties and the broader public" (Kalnins, 2003). It is clear that the ideological positions and issues the parties have taken up and the social base of the parties became factors contributing to stability of the parties and the government they represent. Based on ideologies and social base the cleavage structure also was visible in Latvia as influencing the party system and parties.

Political/Social Cleavages

A cleavage is defined as a cluster of conflicts, dividing the population; "it designates a division between groups within the society based on some more or less fixed attribute: one can have cleavages along lines of class, religion, language, race or even, conceivable gender. The patterns of social cleavages, their interrelationships, salience, number and nature, used to determine the battle lines of competitive politics and generally influence the

stability and functioning of the political system” (Skuland, 2005: 19; Robertson, 1993: 72). Rokkan and Lipset defined party system according to cleavages. According to them, “the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, cleavage structures of the 1920s ... the party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organizations are older than the majorities of the national electorates (Rokkan and Lipset, 1967). According to Evans and Whitefield (2000), the social and ideological bases for partisanship indicate a complex social and ideological structure underlying electoral choices. The social bases of Latvia belonged to ethnicity (non-Latvians), religious denomination, education and class (professional vs. agriculture and workers). The ideological bases include ethnic liberalism, nationalism, economic liberalism, west, social and political liberalism (Whitefield, 2000: 188).

During period of the awakening of the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, Latvia’s politics was dominated by two major political cleavages: the independence cleavage and the ethnic cleavage. Both cleavages were closely intertwined. Latvia, of course, also developed other cleavages, such as left-right cleavages rural-urban cleavages, elites-people cleavages and generational cleavages. The two cleavages on independence and ethnic politics dominated most of the Latvia’s political discourse of a decade (Pabriks & Purs 2001: 72). After the independence in Latvia, the tension increased in connection with the adoption of the citizenship legislation, but increased tension never resulted in inter-ethnic violence. On a day-to-day level, relations are to be reasonably good. For several reasons many Slavs are not interceded in being integrated into the Latvian societies (Aasland and Flotten, 2001: 1025).

Emergence of cleavages has relevancy of history. The interwar period is very significant for the Latvians as far as nation building is concerned. Absence of large parties and weakness in Russian ethnic mobilization is related to the traits visible during the interwar period. The definition of Latvian citizenship after independence is also related to the interwar period. Other important influence of memory of history is the experience of brief democracy, Russification, Sovietization, mass deportation, migration, and the related ethnic imbalance occurred during Soviet period of incorporation.

Smith-Sivertsen classified four cleavages as emerged in Latvian political system. These include the independent cleavage, ethnic inclusion/exclusion, rural/urban cleavage, disadvantaged strata against the occupational elites. Smith-Sivertsen developed a model of cleavages and parties of Latvia in the first decade of independence. The table given at the end of this chapter explains this model (Smith-Severtsen, 1998: 98).

To conclude, we can say, the parties that emerged during this period reflected these cleavages. These cleavages influenced the electoral outcomes also. These cleavages formed the basis of conflicts in the party system. The cleavage structure has a major role contributing to the stability of the party system. The next chapter will discuss about the involvement of parties in the electoral process and government formation.

Party positions on the national and socio-economic cleavages

	Parties with overrepresentation of the adoptable and the emerging middle-classes	Parties with overrepresentation of the disadvantaged strata
Latvian nationalist parties	For Fatherland and Freedom 1995 & 1998	
	People's Party (TP) 1998	Latvian Farmer's Union and Latvian Christian Democratic Union 1995
Socioeconomic parties	Latvia's Way 1995 Democratic Party- Saimnieks 1995	People's Movement for Latvia (Siegerist Party) 1995
		The 'New Party' 1998
		Social democratic alliance LSDP/LSDSP 1995&1998
Russophone friendly parties		National Harmony Party 1995 & 1998
		Latvian Socialist Party 1995

Source: Smith-Severtsen (1998: 98).

**Latvian Political Parties: Participation in Electoral
Process and Government Formation**

CHAPTER IV

Latvian Political Parties: Participation in Electoral Process and Government Formation

In a democratic political system, political parties as generally assumed are acting as a link between the society and the government. This link is made through participation in elections and representation in the government, formed after the election by the winning parties. It is assumed that modern democracies are characterized by multiparty system and free and fair elections participated by competing political parties. Parties have an important function in the policymaking, legislation and thereby the performance of government. The better performance of government contributes to legitimacy of the government and the parties that it represents. When a government gains legitimacy it helps to bring political stability, which is very important for the efficient functioning of democratic political system. Latvia after independence from Soviet Union chose to build a democratic political system. By 1993 Latvian political system was characterized by a multiparty system, and a large number of competing political parties were established. This chapter discusses the participation of these parties in various elections from 1993 to 2001, just before the eighth *Seima* elections, and the representation of parties in government and their contribution to the performance and stability of government.

Electoral Politics in Latvia

The current electoral system drew much from the system that prevailed in the interwar period before the incorporation of Latvia to Soviet Union.

Soon after the independence, Latvia decided to re-establish its 1922 Constitution with provision of making relevant necessary changes. Latvia is a parliamentary democracy. Elections will be held every four years. The current strength of the parliament *Saeima* is 100 members.

Latvia is governed under the constitution of 1922 (restored and revised in 1991), as amended. The president, who is the head of state, is elected by parliament for a four-year term; there are no term limits. The prime minister, who is appointed by the president, heads the government. The unicameral parliament (*Saeima*) has 100 members who are popularly elected for four-year terms. Latvia has over 20 political parties participating in elections, and most governments are formed by coalition (Valts Kalnins, 2001: 210). Administratively, the country is divided into 26 counties and seven municipalities. According to the Constitution, elections to the *Saeima* are general, equal, direct, and secret and based on proportional representation.

Table: Size of Election Districts

District	1993	1995	1998	2002
Kurzeme	14	14	14	14
Zemgale	16	15	15	15
Vidzeme	26	25	25	26
Latgale	20	19	18	17
Riga	24	27	28	28
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Central Election Commission.

Latvia is divided into five electoral districts – Riga and four historical regions (Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale). Only legally registered

political parties and legally registered associations of political parties may present electoral lists of candidates. Each party that submits an electoral list must pay a thousand Lats as a security payment (Ozolins, 2001: 135). This sum is returned if the party overcomes the election threshold of five percent. Given the experience of the pre-war Latvia where no election threshold existed, efforts have been made to reduce the number of parliamentary parties. The threshold of four percent was set for the elections of the 5th Saeima. This was raised to five percent for the elections of the 6th and 7th Saeima. In principle all citizens of Latvia regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religious or political convictions enjoy active voting rights (Valts, 2001: 29). However, some generally admitted restrictions apply: citizens below the age of 18, convicted or suspected criminals in imprisonment, and persons who are legally admitted as incapable are not eligible as voters.

The highest election turnout was at the elections of the 5th Saeima in 1993 when 89 percent of eligible voters participated. Then the turnout dropped to 72 percent at the elections of the 6th, 7th and 8th Saeima. This shows that electoral spirit somewhat dropped but then remained steady, as the activity at municipal elections saw some increase from 58 percent in 1994 and 57 percent in 1997 to 62 percent in 2001. The people have voiced support for the change of the election system. The substance of such proposals is to replace the proportional party list system with either a pure pluralist system or some kind of a mixed arrangement. The underlying idea is due to mistrust in political parties and a preference to vote for particular individuals rather than political organizations.

However, in reality no change is expected and even the municipal election system has become more party focused over time. Before the coup in 1934, Latvia had a highly fragmented party system. However, two parties – the Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party and the Latvian Farmers' Union – formed the backbone of the party system. After the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, the party system became substantially different. The two mentioned parties were restored but lost their pivotal position (especially the Farmers Union). Two of the main new cleavages were economic and ethnic policies. Especially in the middle of the 1990s, there were issues that largely determined differences among various political forces. Today parties cover almost the whole of the political spectrum except for extreme radicals where no parties of any significance exist. Parties that are represented in the parliament may be grouped into two larger blocks – the right wing and left wing. However, dividing lines between the two are not always entirely clear. Latvia received invitation to join the European Union on 13, December 2002. In May 2003 Saeima approved amendments to the Constitution of Latvia in order to organize referendum for Latvia's membership in the EU. The referendum was due to take place in 20th of September 2003 (Latvian Institute of International Affairs – LIIA).

Elections to Supreme Council:

The Latvian Supreme Council as instrument of independence changed the configuration of power in favour of independence forces in 1990. The election of March-April 1990 significantly gave a clear majority to the people's front whose only opposition came from the predominantly

Russian-speaking and reactionary Ravnopravie (Equal Rights Party) (Dreifelds, 1996: 74).

The Latvian Supreme Council was initially embraced wholeheartedly by Latvians as a vehicle for the establishment of their rights and the republic's Independence. Over two-thirds of the deputies were Latvians and 131 of the total 201 were affiliated with the Latvian People's Front (LPF). The first round turnout was 81.3 percent [18 March 1990 (first round; 170 deputies elected); 25 March, 1 April, and 29 April 1990 (run-off elections)]. For vote percentage and seats, see table below:

Table: Latvian Supreme Council Elections, 1990

Party/Grouping	Votes (%)	Seats	Seats (%)
LTF - Latvian Popular Front - Latvijas	68.2	131	65.17
Latvian Communist Party and Interfronte	21.5	55	27.36
Independents	10.3	15	7.46
Total	100	201	100

Source: Latvian Central Electoral Commission

Not surprisingly, even before the supreme council was in first session, in a republic-wide poll in April 1990, 77 percent of Latvians indicated satisfaction with its composition. Among Non-Latvians the situation was reversed, only 32 percent were satisfied with the composition of the new parliament and 57 percent were dissatisfied (Baltic chronology, 1989-90: 8). Further opinion polls also showed a similar trend (see table below).

**Table: Positive evaluation of the Latvians on Supreme Council
(in percent)**

Year	Month	Latvians	Others	Difference
1990	September	76	30	46
1991	January	98	67	31
1992	June	71	46	25
	January	36	23	13
1993	September	19	11	8
	December	11	6	5
	May	10	6	4

Source: Brigita Zepa, “Public opinion in Latvia in the stage of Transition Dynamics: Views of Latvians and Non-Latvians” EMOR Reports 2:3, July-September 1992.

Fifth Saeima – 1993 Parliamentary elections:

While, in 1990, the primary political contest had been between the Latvian People’s Front and the Moscow oriented Latvian Communist Party, the political fray in 1993 saw the participation of twenty-three groups. Mainly by their approaches to economic reform and the question of citizenship, traditional concepts of left and right did not apply. Rightist parties were categorized as such mostly on the basis of their exclusivity on the question of citizenship, their desire to “repatriate” post-war immigrants to their countries of origin, their toughness with respect to former communists and the need for a strong military defence system. For Fatherland and Freedom and the Latvian National Independence Movement were the two main right wing parties. The main left-wing parties were seen to be Ravnopravie, Harmony for Latvia and the Latvian Democratic Workers Party (Diena, May 18 to June 1, 1993). There was a 5 percent threshold for each of the twenty-three participating parties. The turnout was about 90 percent. Below

is the resulting distribution of votes and seats in the Saeima or parliament, which replaced the supreme council:

Date of elections: 5 and 6 June 1993.

Number of registered voters: 1,243,956.

Turnout: 91.18 percent.

Votes: Total Cast: 1,134,204; Valid: 1,118,316.

Party/Grouping	Votes	% Votes	Seats	% Seats
LC – Alliance ‘Latvia’s Way’	362473	32.41	36	36
LNNK – Latvian National Independence Movement	149347	13.35	15	15
Harmony for Latvia – Revival for the Economy)	134289	12.01	13	13
LZS – Latvian Farmers’ Union	119116	10.65	12	12
Equal Rights Movement	64444	5.76	7	7
TB – For Homeland and Freedom	59855	5.35	6	6
LKDS – Latvian Christian Democratic Union	56057	5.01	6	6
Democratic Centre Party	53303	4.77	5	5
LTF – Latvian Popular Front	29396	2.63	0	0
ZS – Green List	13362	1.19	0	0
LKPP – Party of Russian Citizens in Latvia	13006	1.16	0	0
LDDP – Latvian Democratic People’s Party	10509	0.94	0	0
Electoral Union ‘Happiness of Latvia’	9814	0.88	0	0
Citizens’ Union ‘Our Land’	8687	0.78	0	0
Saimnieciskas Rosibas Liga	8333	0.75	0	0
LSSP – Latvian Social Democratic Workers’ Party	7416	0.66	0	0
Anticommunist Union	5954	0.53	0	0
Republikas platforma	5075	0.45	0	0
Conservatives and Peasants	2797	0.25	0	0
Independents’ Union	1968	0.18	0	0
LLP – Latvian Liberal Party	1520	0.14	0	0
LVP – Latvian Unity Party	1070	0.1	0	0
Liberal Alliance	525	0.05	0	0
TOTAL	1118316	100	100	100

Source: Latvian Central Electoral Commission

Latvian way received 32.41 percent of the votes and thirty-six seats. The party is centre-right coalition of moderate nationalists, former communists

and émigrés, stemming from the Latvian popular front and pre-election government. The leader was Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the chairman of parliament and former Ideology secretary of the Latvian communist party. The party advocates a ‘gradual’ citizenship process and is a firm supporter of the market economy.

Latvian National Independence Movement received 13.35 percent of the votes and fifteen seats. The party is right-wing and nationalist, adopting a hard line on citizenship. It is led by Joachim Siegerist, a German-speaking émigré’.

Harmony for Latvia got around 12 percent of the votes and thirteen seats. The leader is Janis Jurkans, a former Foreign Minister, and the party has a generous altitude towards naturalization. Latvian peasants’ union with 10.65 percent of the votes and twelve seats is led by Ivars Berkis. The party advocates a ‘gradual’ approach to citizenship’ and priority support for agriculture. Fatherland and Freedom got six seats. The party wishes to ‘decolorize’ Latvia by forcibly repatriating Russians. Christen Democrat Union gained six seats. Democratic centre party with 5 percent of the votes managed five seats. The party is liberal on the citizenship issue. Equal Rights Movement which got seven seats defends the rights of Russians and advocates immediate citizenship for non-citizens. It is led by Sergejs Dimanis (Ian Jeffries, 2004: 187).

The winning theme of Latvia’s way was simple but effective: “only those who can unify themselves can unify others.” Latvia’s way garnered the largest support of any electoral organization, receiving 32.4 percent of the

total votes and thirty-six seats in the Saeima. Almost half of this group or seventeen people had previously been deputies and eight were imports from abroad. Most were young with sixteen born in 1950 or later and another eleven. Between 1940 and 1949, almost all came from professions requiring higher education, but only four were women and two were non-Latvians (Mimeographed document prepared by Saeima 1993). The elections were a victory for the moderate centre forces, and both the nationalist right and the more cosmopolitan left were disturbed by their unimpressive performance. The chairman of the people's front considered it a clear "defeat of the national conservative forces" and the leader of the Latvian democratic workers' party wrote an extensive post-mortem asking, why the non-communist left parties lost in the Saeima election (Diena, September 28, 1993).

Sixth *Saeima* – 1995 Parliamentary elections

The general elections to the sixth Saeima were conducted during 30 September to 1 October 1995. The turnout was 71.9 percent. Nine parties won seats in parliament surmounting the 5 percent threshold. There was no clear-cut election result with the Democratic Party Saimnieks winning eighteen seats and Latvian way winning seventeen seats. But the success of Joachim Siegerist, whose party came third with sixteen seats, was a real shock (pre-election polls suggesting around 5 percent of the votes). Below is the resulting distribution of votes and seats in the Saeima.

Dates of Elections: 30 September and 1 October 1995.

Registered voters: 1,328,779.

Turnout: 72.65 percent of votes.

Total votes cast: 965,339; Valid: 951,007.

Party/Grouping	Votes	% Votes	Seats	% Seats
Democratic Party 'Saimnieks'	144758	15.22	18	18
People's Movement for Latvia (Siegerist Party)	142324	14.97	16	16
Alliance 'Latvia's Way'	139929	14.71	17	17
Union 'For Fatherland and Freedom'	114050	11.99	14	14
Latvia's Unity Party	68305	7.18	8	8
United List of Latvia's Farmers' Union, Latvian Christian Democrat Union, Latgale Democratic Party	60498	6.36	8	8
Latvian National Conservative Party and Latvian Green Party	60352	6.35	8	8
Latvian Socialist Party	53325	5.61	5	5
National Harmony Party	53041	5.58	6	6
Coalition 'Labour and Justice'	43599	4.58	0	0
Political Union of Economists	14209	1.49	0	0
Union of Latvian Farmers	13009	1.37	0	0
Party of Russian Citizens of Latvia	11924	1.25	0	0
Latvia's Popular Front	11090	1.17	0	0
Political Association of the Underprivileged and Latvian Independence Party	9468	1	0	0
Party Our Land and Anticommunist Union	5050	0.53	0	0
Democrats Party	2546	0.27	0	0
Latvian Liberal Party	2163	0.23	0	0
Latvian National Democratic Party	1367	0.14	0	0
Total	951007	100	100	100

Note: *Coalition "Labour and Justice": Latvian Democratic Labour Party, Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party, Party for the Defence of Latvia's Defrauded People "Justice"

Source: Latvian Central Electoral Commission

Democratic Party Saimnieks (DPS) got 15.22 percent of the votes and eighteen seats. The DPS is the result of a merger, on 28 April, of the centre-left Latvian Democratic Party and the Saimnieks ('Master in your own home') party – (the Riga city council leftist Minority Saimnieks). The DPS advocates a socially orientated market economy and closer economic links

with Russia. The DPS is critical of the Central Bank's monetary policy, claiming that the high exchange rate harms exports (although an immediate devaluation of the Lats is ruled out). Promises include tariff protection for agriculture and a halt to land privatization.

Latvian way received 14.71 percent of the votes and seventeen seats. Its three top candidates are parliamentary speaker Anatolijs Gorbunovs, Prime Minister Maris Gailis and Interior Minister Janis Adamsons. Latvian way advocates the continuation of the reforms and speedy entry into the EU and NATO. People's Movement for Latvia (Siegerist Party), an extreme nationalist and popularity party, founded in November 1994, got around 15 percent of the votes and sixteen seats. The leader is the journalist Joachim Siegerist, who was born and raised in Germany and is vehemently anti-communist (Jeffries 2004: 189). Fatherland and freedom party, which earned 11.99 percent of the votes and fourteen seats, is the right-wing nationalist party taking a hard-line stance on the naturalization of non-citizens.

Latvian unity party got 7.18 percent of the votes, with eight seats. Its leader is Alberts Kavs (*Baltic Observer*, 5-11 October 1995: 7). National conservative party / Latvian National conservative party (LNNK) / Green party got 6.35 percent of the votes and eight seats. Anna Seile is the chairperson of LNNK. As a right-wing party, it advocates strong economic advantages for Latvian citizens only. Farmers Union / Latvian Christian Democrat union / Latgale Democratic Party received 6.36 percent of the votes, with eight seats. The parties signed a coalition agreement on 27 April

1995. The bloc agreed to form a post-election government with the bloc below right-wing.

Latvian socialist party, which received 5.61 percent of the votes and bagged five seats, is led by Alfred Rubiks. He is in prison serving a sentence for treason. The party advocates the granting of citizenship to all permanent residents (*Baltic Observer*, 5-11 October 1995: 1). National Harmony Party got 5.58 percent of the votes and six seats. Its leader Janis Jurkans, left of centre calls for harmony between Latvian and ethnic Russians (Jeffries (2004: 190).

The party lists include a total of 1007 candidates. Candidates were characteristically male (77 percent), educated (75 percent with higher education), and middle-aged (77 percent aged 30-60 years). This was the first modern election in Latvia to return to the autumn timing established prior to the soviet occupation (Davies, 1995: 124). Four parties received seats in double figures. Two of these were relatively new organizations, leaping to prominence. The leading party after the autumn 1995 election with 18 seats was the Democratic Party 'Saimnieks'. The party started in Riga taking a managerial and administrative approach; only one third of its newly elected deputies had served earlier (Davies/Ozolins, 1995: 126).

Seventh Saeima – 1998 Parliamentary elections:

Only six parties crossed the 5 percent barrier to share in the allocation of the 100 seats. The turnout was 71.00 percent. The results were as follows:

Date of Elections: 3 October 1998.

Number of registered voters: 1,383,661.

Total votes cast: 982,400; Valid 955,581.

Party/Grouping	Votes	% Votes	Seats	% Seats
TP - Popular Party	203585	21.3	24	24
LC - Alliance Latvia's Way	173420	18.15	21	21
TB/LNNK - Alliance For Homeland and Freedom /LNNK	140773	14.73	17	17
TSP - National Harmony Party	135700	14.2	16	16
LSDA - Latvian Social-Democratic Alliance	123056	12.88	14	14
JP - New Party	70214	7.35	8	8
LZS - Latvian Farmers' Union	23732	2.48	0	0
Alliance: DP; Lab our Party); LKDS Latvian Christian Democratic Union); LZP (Latvian Green Party)	22018	2.3	0	0
TKL - Popular Movement for Latvia	16647	1.74	0	0
DPS - Democratic Party Master	15410	1.61	0	0
LAP - Latvian Revival Party	5000	0.52	0	0
NPP - National Progress Party	4522	0.47	0	0
LVP - Latvian Unity Party	4445	0.47	0	0
Social Democratic Public Organization	3133	0.33	0	0
Popular Movement Freedom	3099	0.32	0	0
LNDP - Latvian National Democratic Party	2927	0.31	0	0
Conservative Party	2318	0.24	0	0
Maras zeme	2238	0.23	0	0
Helsinki-86	2088	0.22	0	0
Democratic Party	792	0.08	0	0
LNRP - Latvian National Reform Party	464	0.05	0	0
TOTAL	955581	100	100	100

Source: Latvian Central Electoral Commission

People's (Popular) party led by Andris Skele bagged twenty-four seats. Latvia's way led by Vilis Kristopans received twenty-one seats. For Fatherland and freedom / LNNK led by Maris Grinblats got seventeen seats. National Harmony party, an alliance of four left-wing parties led by Janis Jukans bagged sixteen seats. Social Democratic Alliance led by Juris

Bojars received fourteen seats. Left of centre New Party led by Raimunds Paws managed to win eight seats (*Baltic Times*, 8-14 October 1998: 1).

All of the parties except the social Democrats have ruled out forming an alliance with the National Harmony Party or 'communists' as they are simplistically referred to (*Baltic Times*, 8-14 October 1998: 8). Two solidly pro-European parties came out on top. The people's party is now hoping to patch together a coalition with Latvia's way whose platform supports for a stable currency and privatization of the few firms that remains in state hands. But the two parties are bitterly divided over who would lead the government. To build a majority they will probably look either to fatherland and freedom. The outgoing right-wing nationalist party was vehemently opposed to the liberalization of citizenship laws or the centrist New Party (*The Economist*, 10 October 1998: 57).

Role of Parties in Legislation and Decision Making

Latvian legislation stipulates that only registered political organizations may submit candidates for parliamentary elections. Moreover, there are restrictions of passive voting rights. However, the law does not set forth any particular procedures for candidate nomination within political parties. The parties under review have adopted a fairly uniform approach to selecting candidates. While local branches are encouraged to submit their candidates, a final decision is taken by the national organization. Usually, this decision is partly based on opinion poll results, rank-ordering the most well-known and positively viewed candidates (Janis 2006: 4).

The leadership of parliamentary factions is selected by means of voting within the faction. However, the highest executive bodies of some parties (TB/LNNK, LZS) make a formal recommendation before the vote. Other parties seem to rely on more informal consultations while the voting within the faction is still held. By-laws do not mention any formal procedures with regard to how parliamentary offices are allocated to elected deputies as this is a complicated bargaining process among the political parties (Jānis Ikstens 2006: 5).

Latvian legislation does not limit the amount of membership dues that can be collected. Thus, they can be used as an unrestricted income source. However, membership contributions constitute less than 10 percent of annual budgets for more than 70 percent of registered parties. A growing number of parties collect no membership dues at all, reaching 41 percent in 1998. The percentage of organizations relying on membership contributions only has decreased by half to 7 percent in 1998. One would expect that leftist parties, which traditionally have better-developed organizational structures, would turn membership dues into a significant source of income. It is true that, for many of them, dues have been a major income source in off-election years. However, the totals collected are less than impressive. On the contrary, it is some right-of-centre parties, which have reasonably developed organizations that consistently collect notable amounts in membership dues. It should be noted, however, that “Latvia’s Way” is said to collect additional sums from its parliamentary deputies and members of government. These parties also have more opportunities to utilize external (parliamentary, governmental, etc.) resources due to their participation in governing coalitions (Shuggart, 1989: 93).

A debilitating effect of lack of access to citizenship in Latvia is the restricted influence of the Russian-speaking minority over the composition of decision-making bodies, and a subsequent powerlessness over legislative and policy developments. Although the rhetoric of ethnic protectionism, common in the early independence elections of 1993, has given way in Latvia to the discourse of integration, minorities remain disproportionately under-represented in decision-making bodies and state institutions. Citizenship and language legislation go some way to explaining this situation, but nevertheless, the share of minorities within the top state structures is estimated to be far below even their 23 percent within the citizenry. No laws guarantee political representation to minorities. By contrast, minority representatives seeking election in national as well as municipal elections are required by law to demonstrate the highest level of fluency in the Latvian language to be registered as candidates, in breach of Latvia's international obligations removing these requirements (Shuggart, 1989: 93).

The role of parliamentary deputies and cabinet members within the extra-parliamentary party organization differs among parties. The constituent members of "For Human Rights in United Latvia" refrain from formalizing their role in the management of the party. LDP grants them a right to participate in meetings of the national executive but they do not have voting rights at those meetings. TB/LNNK gives parliamentary deputies and cabinet members full participation in the work of the national executive. LC, in turn, invites them to party conferences that are the highest decision

making bodies between congresses. LSDSP does not grant deputies and cabinet members any special status within the party (Janis, 2006: 7).

Contemporary competitive political parties in Latvia emerged in the late 1980s as a result of the gradual disintegration of the Soviet regime. While some of them could claim that they were heirs of inter-war democratic political organizations, virtually all of them had to be created from scratch. Latvian legislation adopted in the early 1990s laid out a basic organizational structure for a political party and established a fairly liberal regime of party registration and functioning. Along with proportional representation used for parliamentary and municipal elections, this contributed to a rapid growth in the number of registered political parties. However, organizational maturing of parties proceeds at a slow pace. Parties appear to concentrate their activities in major urban settings and their work in the countryside is sporadic. While most parties under review have developed their regional branches, they are hardly interesting interlocutors for the central office of the respective organization. Local branches play an even less significant role. This can partly be explained by the flow of funds from the central office to local/regional branches as most fund raising activities are conducted in a centralized fashion (Jānis Ikstens 2006: 8).

Conclusion

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the discussion of the previous chapters of this study and also see whether our hypotheses set in the beginning are proved true or null.

Systemic transition and political independence of Latvia in 1991 provided opportunity for its citizens of the politico-legal basis for building a multiparty and democratic system of governance. In order to establish a democratic system, it requires developing a political culture compatible to accommodate the new democratic values, norms and views by the society. Latvians adopted democratization as the process to inculcate such political culture and develop public trust in the system. That means, the systemic transition was not only about transition from one system to another, i.e., transition from communism to liberal democracy by demolishing the structures and institutions of old system, but also about change in the mindset and attitude of citizenry towards the new system, its values, structures and institutions.

Political parties play a very important role in the task of democratization. Thus, in order to safeguard the interest of various sections of people several political parties emerged in Latvia during transition which can be traced back to Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* period of liberal reforms. Democratization helped to develop national awakening in Latvia that mobilized people to work for separation and independence. For this purpose during the days of singing revolution popular front was formed.

Latvia achieved independence in 1991. Independent Latvia experienced a two way transition in the 1990s: transition to democracy and transition to independent statehood. During this period Latvia started building new state structures and democratic political institutionalization.

It can be assumed that an institutionalized party system is a necessary prerequisite for successful democratic transition and consolidation. In order to achieve political institutionalization of party system and parties, Latvia has to solve the challenges of social integration, financing of parties and filling the gap in the interaction between political parties and society. First chapter tried to build a conceptual framework on Latvia's transition from authoritarian communist system to liberal democracy, evolution of multiparty system and party institutionalization.

Generally studies on political parties have been done mainly based on the context of established western democratic regimes. The study of parties in transition countries which gained independence from Soviet Union and do not have the experience of liberal democracy and competitive party politics, but having high levels of ethnic complexity can provide different understanding of democratic development and party activity outside the idealized west European and American experience. In the period of transition from communism, the absence of political parties raises issue of enquiry on the subsequent role of parties in democratization and development of democratic political culture. The enquiry was on the two phases of party development: the ethnic and nationalist phase (1990-1998) and socio-economic issue based politics (since 1998). The scope of the study covered the period from 1990 to 2001.

The second chapter discussed the origin and development of political parties in Latvia and the ethno-political and socio-economic challenges faced in formative phase of development of political parties in Latvia. It also discussed about the opportunities during transition that helped form political parties. The democratic transition in Latvia witnessed a massive proliferation of political parties. As soon as the outgoing communist regimes legalized political pluralism there was virtual explosion of new political parties, associations and pressure groups to vie for a share in political power.

Initially, there emerged anti-communist opposition groups. Beginning as mass protest movements against communist rule these fronts provided a focus for mobilization of broad based and spontaneous popular pressure against communist power. These fronts were, however, programmatically vague, ideologically unclear and organizationally fragile and therefore, lacked stability and cohesion from the very beginning. Hence, they were soon to suffer fragmentation due to their inner contradictions.

Latvian leadership and people kept a deep hatred towards the policies of Sovietization which they identified with imperialist Russification. The one party dominance and dictatorship did not allow political pluralism to grow during Soviet period. However, Gorbachev's reforms and policies of limited liberalization extended political opportunity for party formation. His relaxation of political control meant the return of demands for national principles in the governance of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic. The

dilemma solved with force in the 1950s returned with a vengeance; reform of empire presented the possibility of the empire's dissolution.

The period from October 1986 to March 1988 was the first phase of the popular movement for independence, marked by ecological protests and the calendar demonstration. During this phase, the mass activities were mainly of a near-spontaneous nature organized by former dissidents, political prisoners and people outside the established elite circles. The second phase of pro-independence activities began in March 1988 when the creative unions' organization that united the majority of Latvian intellectuals, called for a discussion of the "tragic Consequences" of Stalinism and how intellectuals should deal with them. Mass demonstrations rocked the Baltic States in the summer of 1988. In mid-June, thousands of Latvians demonstrated in Riga, the capital, to mark the anniversary of mass deportations from Latvia under Stalin.

The "singing revolution" and "third reawakening of Latvia" of the late 1980s and early 1990s was fomented by the Latvian intellectuals, writers, journalists, physicians and teachers. Nationalism has been a powerful ingredient among Latvians providing the energy for Latvia to leave the Soviet Union peacefully and initiate radical change.

During the nationalist period the political priorities of important parties such as *For Fatherland and Freedom*, *People's Harmony Party*, *For Human Rights in United Latvia*, were centred on national and ethnic issues, citizenship and state language and the like. Parties like *Latvian Way (Latvia's Way)*, *Master*, etc favoured free market autonomy and political

priorities were economic development, security, and social stability of a regulated market. Some parties like Master and New Party ceased to exist because of loss of support base. Then emerged anti-market parties like *Social Democrats*, *Formers Association*, etc. Thus, during this phase of Latvian political system, the main influence can be basically classified as Latvian nationalist, Russian oriented parties, liberal centric and populists.

During this period Latvia has been trying to integrate in European economic and security structures. This led to massive reforms in various state institutions and implementation of European community directives. Thus politically and legally Latvia has been deeply influenced by the process of entry into European Union. The European integration led to changes in Latvia's social landscape. The service sector oriented economic development and foreign investment caused structural transformations in the former industrial labour force. The share of service sector in the economy increased and agriculture and industry has been decreasing. There is considerable increase in private sector workforce. This led to the rise of a new social environment. The foreign organizations and business groups not only hire the locals, but also disperse new values, aspirations and attitudes. As a result Latvia has been experiencing the growth of new social groups with different ideas and a new political identity. For example, the rise and success of People's Party is the result of Latvia's "internationalization" and support of a new "international" middle class and its culture in Latvia. Thus the ethnicity and nationalist oriented political preference has been replaced by class based politics now.

On common issues such as ethno political questions there were interactions and alignments among the various political parties and organizations. After the attainment of independence the organizations like LTF underwent splits. And a number of parties emerged out of the organizations with the purpose of contesting the Saeima elections. The parties organized around issues such as citizenship, nationality and language. The party system produced a large number of parties. Parties also exhibit a cleavage structure to which it belonged.

The third chapter discussed the aspects of organization, fragmentation and cleavage structure of these parties. Fragmentation occurred on the issues of party leadership's interests. The fragmentation of parties and their representatives in the Saeima made it very difficult for government to form and remain in power. In a parliament where parties tended to form around personalities or specific topics, a party could not always rely on its member's votes. For example, the For fatherland and freedom / Latvian National Independence party at one extreme and Janis Jurkans at the other were defined by their polarized views on the citizenship issue, whereas the centrist Latvia's way had a somewhat broader programme. Since independence in 1991, Latvia has had eight governments to understand the role of political parties in nationality.

The parliamentary commission on Human Rights and National Question, in April 1992, declared citizenship and language issues to be the most difficult problem facing Latvia. Since those who wished to include all 1991 residents in the citizenry and those who wanted to restrict citizenship to pre-1940 citizens and their descendants had diametrically opposing views,

and those supporting a restrictive policy were attempting to remove the demographic after-effects of soviet rule. During this period government and its bureaucracy created an impression that the restored Latvian nation was unwilling to accommodate the needs of the non-citizens and minorities.

During period of the awakening of the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, Latvia's politics was dominated by two major political cleavages: the independence cleavage and the ethnic cleavage. Both cleavages were closely intertwined. Latvia, of course, also developed other cleavages, such as left-right cleavages rural-urban cleavages, elites-people cleavages and generational cleavages.

The parties that emerged during this period reflected these cleavages. These cleavages influenced the electoral outcomes also. These cleavages formed the basis of conflicts in the party system. The cleavage structure has a major role contributing to the stability of the party system.

The fourth chapter discussed the participation of these parties in various elections from 1993 to 2001, just before the eighth *Seima* elections, and the representation of parties in government and their contribution to the performance and stability of government.

The current electoral system drew much from the system that prevailed in the interwar period before the incorporation of Latvia to Soviet Union. Soon after the independence, Latvia decided to re-establish its 1922 Constitution with provision of making relevant necessary changes. Latvia is

a parliamentary democracy. Elections will be held every four years. The current strength of the parliament *Saeima* is 100 members.

The president, who is the head of state, is elected by parliament for a four-year term; there are no term limits. The prime minister, who is appointed by the president, heads the government. The unicameral parliament (*Saeima*) has 100 members who are popularly elected for four-year terms. Latvia has over 20 political parties participating in elections, and most governments are formed by coalition. Administratively, the country is divided into 26 counties and seven municipalities. According to the Constitution, elections to the *Saeima* are general, equal, direct, and secret and based on proportional representation.

Latvia is divided into five electoral districts – Riga and four historical regions (Vidzeme, Latgale, Kurzeme, Zemgale). Only legally registered political parties and legally registered associations of political parties may present electoral lists of candidates. Each party that submits an electoral list must pay a thousand Lats as a security payment. This sum is returned if the party overcomes the election threshold of five percent. Given the experience of the pre-war Latvia where no election threshold existed, efforts have been made to reduce the number of parliamentary parties. The threshold of four percent was set for the elections of the 5th *Saeima*. This was raised to five percent for the elections of the 6th and 7th *Saeima*. In principle all citizens of Latvia regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religious or political convictions enjoy active voting rights.

The people have voiced support for the change of the election system. The substance of such proposals is to replace the proportional party list system with either a pure pluralist system or some kind of a mixed arrangement. The underlying idea is due to mistrust in political parties and a preference to vote for particular individuals rather than political organizations.

The election of March-April 1990 significantly gave a clear majority to the people's front whose only opposition came from the predominantly Russian-speaking and reactionary Ravnopravie (Equal Rights Party). The Latvian Supreme Council was initially embraced wholeheartedly by Latvians as a vehicle for the establishment of their rights and the republic's Independence. Over two-thirds of the deputies were Latvians and 131 of the total 201 were affiliated with the Latvian People's Front (LPF).

While, in 1990, the primary political contest had been between the Latvian People's Front and the Moscow oriented Latvian Communist Party, the political fray in 1993 saw the participation of twenty-three groups. Mainly by their approaches to economic reform and the question of citizenship, traditional concepts of left and right did not apply. Rightist parties were categorized as such mostly on the basis of their exclusivity on the question of citizenship, their desire to "repatriate" post-war immigrants to their countries of origin, their toughness with respect to former communists and the need for a strong military defence system. For Fatherland and Freedom and the Latvian National Independence Movement were the two main right wing parties. The main left-wing parties were seen to be Ravnopravie, Harmony for Latvia and the Latvian Democratic Workers Party. Latvian way received 32.41 percent of the votes and thirty-six seats. The party is

centre-right coalition of moderate nationalists, former communists and émigrés, stemming from the Latvian popular front and pre-election government.

The general elections to the sixth Saeima were conducted during 30 September to 1 October 1995. The turnout was 71.9 percent. Nine parties won seats in parliament surmounting the 5 percent threshold. There was no clear-cut election result with the Democratic Party Saimnieks winning eighteen seats and Latvian way winning seventeen seats. But the success of Joachim Siegerist, whose party came third with sixteen seats, was a real shock (pre-election polls suggesting around 5 percent of the votes).

Only six parities crossed the 5 percent barrier to share in the allocation of the 100 seats in the 1998 parliamentary elections to Seventh *Saeima*. People's (Popular) party led by Andris Skele bagged twenty-four seats. Latvia's way led by Vilis Kristopans received twenty-one seats. For Fatherland and freedom / LNNK led by Maris Grinblats got seventeen seats. National Harmony party, an alliance of four left-wing parties led by Janis Jukans bagged sixteen seats. Social Democratic Alliance led by Juris Bojars received fourteen seats. Left of centre New Party led by Raimunds Paws managed to win eight seats. All of the parties except the social Democrats have ruled out forming an alliance with the National Harmony Party or 'communists' as they are simplistically referred to.

The role of parliamentary deputies and cabinet members within the extra-parliamentary party organization differs among parties. The constituent members of "For Human Rights in United Latvia" refrain from formalizing

their role in the management of the party. LDP grants them a right to participate in meetings of the national executive but they do not have voting rights at those meetings. TB/LNNK gives parliamentary deputies and cabinet members full participation in the work of the national executive. LC, in turn, invites them to party conferences that are the highest decision making bodies between congresses. LSDSP does not grant deputies and cabinet members any special status within the party.

The study intended to test the following hypotheses.

1. Political parties are the key components in liberal democracy and therefore, in the democratic process of Latvia, political parties are significant for the development of political pluralism and emergence of democratic political culture.
2. Latvia after independence had weakly organized parties and highly fragmented party system and fluid social cleavages.
3. The fragmentation of political parties that form around personalities or specific themes, and crisis of legitimacy create difficulty for governments to form and remain in power.
4. The political parties in Latvia take up issues and interests of people through electoral process and through representation in Latvian state institutions.

Relatively all the hypotheses are tested positive. However, the Latvian experience with the evolution of multi-party system has been quite different. The fragmentation of political space in Latvia has not so much affected the evolution of political parties. Further, they have effectively participated in five post-communist parliamentary elections as well as a

series of other provincial and local elections. Political stability in Latvia has not been undermined by problems generally associated with coalition governments. Despite the fall of many coalition governments, political stability was not affected to the detriment of democracy.

The parties in Latvia have mostly a middle class base. They maintain quite strong organizational discipline with experiences of much lower percentage of defection, disintegration, etc. They have indeed played a major role in the consolidation of post-communist Latvian polity. On the basis of the previous performances of Latvian political parties in the parliamentary elections of 1990, 1993, 1995, 1998, and 2002 respectively, it can be analyzed that they have a bright future prospect in Latvian politics in the long run. They are going to make positive contribution to the consolidation of Latvian democracy and political institution.

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