Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in contemporary Latvia

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I, Ksenija Iljina confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.
ABSTRACT

This PhD project examines the role of commemorative and ritual practices in the transmission of Soviet myths in Latvia while taking into account the broader post-Soviet context. The study addresses the following research questions: How do different perceptions of the Soviet past coexist within contemporary Latvian society? What are the main forms and characteristics of the Soviet myth in today’s Latvia, and how do they differ from the Soviet myth in Russia and other post-Soviet countries?

A mixed-methods design was implemented, comprising a survey of 404 respondents to identify Latvian residents’ opinions about the Soviet past, their patriotic and nostalgic feelings, and their participation in commemorative and ritual practices related to Soviet repressions, occupation, and World War II events. The survey also investigated how individuals from different ethnolinguistic groups (Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents) interpret the meaning of Soviet myths and participate in contemporary commemorative practices related to the Soviet legacy. Additionally, the study included the quantitative analysis of 30 in-depth interviews with respondents to provide descriptive narratives of commemorative rituals and pay specific attention to interviewees’ experiences and beliefs, emotions, and personal memories of the Soviet past. Furthermore, the study compared secondary data analysis (survey data, media, and academic reports) with primary interviews with stakeholders (notably, the organisers of Victory Day celebrations and politicians) to analyse how the Soviet legacy and related commemorative practices are used for current political needs.
IMPACT STATEMENT

This thesis provides important theoretical contributions to the field of cultural memory studies by examining the role of mythologies and commemorative practices in its formation. The research conducted for this thesis, which examined how Soviet mythologies are spread in modern Latvia through residents’ participation in the Victory Day commemoration, has allowed for several important conclusions to be drawn that can be extended beyond the Latvian case to the transnational level. The conclusions regarding the relationship between personal family memory and collective memory obtained from the survey and interviews of Latvian residents supplement the existing theoretical academic discussion about post-memory (Hirsch, 2008; Kaplan, 2011; Assmann, 2016; Frosh, 2019) with empirical data. Additionally, this study can contribute to an analysis of ‘entangled memory’ (Feindt et al., 2014) in the Latvian context as it explores internal heterogeneity as well as the interaction and interdependence of Russian-speakers’ and Latvian-speakers’ memory cultures, not just their confrontation and competition. The methodological approach of this work, which employs critical discourse analysis, also allows for the examination of commemorative and ritual practices from the perspective of various social actors. The analysis of stakeholder power dynamics in the Latvian social memory context may have broader implications for studies on the political uses of memory and history.

The study of Eastern European historical memory, united by a common post-socialist experience, has become an important area of research in recent years, but the specificity of the memory of the Baltic region remains
insufficiently studied. This research contributes to the study of Eastern European historical memory, specifically the peculiarities of the Baltic region and the features that distinguish the cultural memory in Latvia from neighbouring Eastern European countries. Latvia has the highest proportion of the Russian-speaking population among European Union countries, making it a unique and rich field for observation in studying ethnolinguistic minorities. Additionally, the research discusses how Russia, as a post-imperial state, attempts to influence the processes of historical memory in Latvia. Thus, the findings obtained can be further used in socio-political studies of contemporary Russia and, more generally, within the framework of theoretical post-imperial and postcolonial studies. Given Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine and the intensified Russian state-media propaganda campaign, this study is of particular importance for advancing public knowledge and for practical application within the framework of the information security strategy of Europe.

Finally, the results from this study could benefit Latvian policymakers, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, and non-governmental actors working in the area of social memory. For instance, the data obtained regarding the similarities and differences in the historical memory of the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities in Latvia can serve as advisory material for implementing an integration programme. It can also be used to amend existing history study programs in national minority schools and to improve commemorative state policy. In general, the study pursued the social goal of exploring the complex relationships between the two ethnolinguistic communities of Latvia to promote their better understanding.
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, academic discourse concerning cultural memory studies has demonstrated a sustained interest in studying interpretations of the Soviet past in the states of the former Soviet Union. However, while a variety of theoretical frameworks have been introduced to analyse the subject, numerous areas of the field still need to be explored. This dissertation contributes to the ongoing multidisciplinary study of memory politics in the post-Soviet context, specifically focusing on the political instrumentalisation of Soviet mythologies and memories of the Soviet past in contemporary Latvia.

In this dissertation, ‘Soviet mythologies’ refers to the collective body of myths that represent the irrational reflection in individual and collective modern consciousness of value judgments about the Soviet period of history. Building upon the works of Gross (1982), Weiner (1996, 2002), Bell (2003), Sherlock (2007), Bouchard (2013), Lewis (2017), Davis (2018), Brunstedt (2021), and Weiss-Wendt and Adler (2021), this dissertation understands myth as a simplified view of reality (in this case, the view of Soviet history) that is free of contradictions and based on a selective interpretation of facts. Drawing upon these studies and others, the political utilisation of myths and their broader application in Latvian society, such as the formation of values and collective identities, are examined. This thesis explores the political role of myth and memory through the examination of two specific myths: the Soviet nostalgic myth, which posits that Latvia’s ‘Golden Age’ occurred during the Soviet period, and the myth of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, which is considered a central defining event of the Soviet era. These two myths are grouped under
the term ‘Soviet mythologies.’ This project delves into the complexity of myth and memory and scrutinises the significance of Soviet mythologies for contemporary Latvia while concurrently considering the broader context of the post-Soviet memory sphere.

This dissertation presents a collection of empirically rich case studies examining the political, social, and cultural dimensions of Soviet mythologies. The overall picture presented in this dissertation suggests that the memory of the Soviet past is still a contested issue and may continue to be so for the foreseeable future. In post-Soviet countries, the politics of memory is a crucial arena for competing mythologised historical narratives and is increasingly being utilised to achieve political goals and have a significant impact on domestic and foreign policy. This dissertation examines Soviet mythologies in the context of complex conflicts involving memory within and between Eastern European states, mainly focusing on ‘memory wars’ between Latvia and the Russian Federation.

In general, and particularly regarding the myth of Victory, Soviet mythologies have diverse interpretations in contemporary Latvia. As numerous academic studies have shown, alternative interpretations and conflicting viewpoints concerning World War II and the post-war Soviet period have contributed to a memory conflict that has divided contemporary Latvian society (see Hanovs and Vinnika, 2005; Burch and Smith, 2007; Apine and Volkovs, 2007; Onken, 2007, 2010; Eglitis and Ardava, 2012; Cheskin, 2012; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Zisere, 2013; Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; Swain, 2014; Kaprāns, 2016a; Tomsone, 2016; Horne, 2017). These studies suggest that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the condemnation of the crimes of the
communist regime and the re-examination of the Soviet legacy became a major feature of Latvian state’s policy of memory. However, institutionalised memories of the Soviet occupation and mass deportations of Latvians to Siberia are in constant conflict with mythologised narratives about the Soviet era, such as the glorification of the Soviet army’s victory over Nazi Germany in 1945, which is significant for Russian community identity. This dissertation challenges the established assumption in Latvian public discourse of two homogenous memory cultures (Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking), demonstrating that the mechanics of memory, commemoration, and myth-creation are not straightforward but more complex than previously believed. Rather than viewing conflicting visions of the past as a problem to be resolved, this project recognises difference as a fundamental aspect of social life. It approaches Russian-speakers’ and Latvian-speakers’ memories from the perspective of their entangled, cross-referential, and interdependent nature.

This dissertation aims to provide insights into the various interpretations of Soviet mythologies among Latvian residents and their relationship to commemorative practices. This study explores how commemorative and ritual practices help to construct and transmit the Soviet myth and how different social actors might influence these processes. Since the restoration of Latvian independence, commemorative rituals associated with the victims of mass deportations of Latvians to Siberia have been actively established. The institutionalisation of these practices is supported by the state and non-governmental actors interested in preserving the memory of communist terror – for example, in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.
In addition to the commemoration of the victims of Soviet terror, another commemorative culture that glorifies the Soviet victory over the Nazis also exists in Latvia. The most prominent example of the latter is the Victory Day (9 May) celebration by a significant portion of Russian-speakers in Latvia, which is in constant conflict with official state ambitions and ideologies, as well as with other Latvians’ memories of the Soviet occupation. This dissertation traces the evolution of commemorative practices and memory narratives in Latvia since the early 1990s, adding historical depth to our understanding of the current situation. Providing some of the most striking examples of the phenomenon being investigated, the case studies presented in this dissertation enable comprehension of the varied memories of Latvian residents.

This dissertation will not cover every aspect of the use of Soviet mythologies in contemporary Latvia or all the ways in which memories about the Soviet past have been expressed, as a project of this scale would be too large for a single dissertation. It focuses specifically on the relationship between the politics of commemoration and the interpretations of Latvian residents. As a result, this dissertation has had to be selective in the sources it relies on and the areas of investigation it pursues. While the analysis does not exclude cultural production such as films, theatre, and literature that shape Soviet mythologies, it places a greater emphasis on public discourse related to commemoration. This project will address some of the most significant aspects of this issue, offer theoretical frameworks for understanding these aspects, and provide an analysis of previously unexamined material. Through this, the dissertation aims to shed light on the specific ways commemorative
culture has operated in Latvia and contribute to a broader understanding of the intersections between memory, mythologies, and commemoration.

The research, therefore, considers the following research questions:

- What is the political use of memory about the Soviet past in contemporary Latvia, and how has the official state narrative about the Soviet past been formed and shaped in Latvia since the 1990s?
- What role does the memory of the Soviet past, specifically the Second World War and subsequent occupation of Latvia, play in the memory conflict between Latvia and the Russian Federation?
- How do differing perceptions of the Soviet past coexist in contemporary Latvian society, and how do they contribute to memory conflicts within ethnolinguistic communities in Latvia?
- Why are Soviet mythologies (such as the Soviet nostalgic myth and the Soviet Victory myth) shared among the population of Latvia, and what actors are involved in constructing these mythologies?
- What are the most significant components of commemorative and ritual practices related to the Soviet repressions, on the one hand, and to the Soviet Victory, on the other hand?
- How can commemorative practices be used for current political needs, and what other purposes may they serve?

Chapter 1 examines existing academic writings on the study of collective (cultural) memory, commemoration, and myth, discussing the field’s most significant theories and conceptual frameworks. The first part of the literature review is dedicated to the evolution of researchers’ views on cultural memory, the distinction between collective and individual memory and the
opposition of memory and history. This part of the literature review discusses the most recent academic literature, highlighting the specificity of national and regional contexts and addressing the issue of memory wars and the characteristics of commemorative culture in the region. In addition, the first section describes the concept of commemorative rituals, also known as ‘commemorations’ and ‘commemorative practices,’ and outlines theories that establish the importance of these rituals as crucial mechanisms in preserving a society’s culture, ensuring its sustainability, and fostering shared norms of behaviour and collective experiences. It also examines the theoretical foundations of the ‘third wave’ in memory studies (Erll, 2011; Feindt et al., 2014), which advocates for a transcultural approach and goes beyond a national perspective. In particular, it introduces such concepts as ‘postmemory’ (Hirsch, 2008), ‘multidirectional memory’ (Rothberg, 2009), and ‘entangled memory’ (Feindt et al., 2014).

The second part of the literature review discusses approaches to defining ‘myth’ within the framework of cultural memory studies. Simultaneously, an approach to the study of myths is outlined in which the focus is not on verifying their compliance with historical facts but on understanding the emotional appeal of a myth for a group that shapes its identity based on it. This section of the dissertation also discusses theoretical developments regarding the functioning of Soviet mythologies in post-Soviet societies (Levkievskaya, 2005; Kravchenko, 2016; Polegkyi, 2016; Weiss-Wendt, 2021; Brunstedt, 2021; and others) and explains the focus of this dissertation on two specific myths – the Soviet nostalgic myth and the myth of
the Great Patriotic War/the Myth of Victory – which are grouped together under the heading ‘Soviet mythologies’.

The **methodology chapter** describes the rationale for the mixed-methods approach chosen to analyse how the Soviet myth is constructed in present-day Latvia and the role that commemorative and ritual practices play in this process. It describes a parallel mixed-methods implementation in which quantitative and qualitative data sets are collected simultaneously and then merged to provide an integrative interpretation and analysis. This chapter explains the processes of data collection and the analysis of the primary data (a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of residents of Latvia and expert interviews) and secondary data (Latvian and Russian survey data, media, academic and policy reports). It describes a critical discourse analysis implemented to explore the use of the Soviet legacy for present political purposes.

**Chapter 3** explores Latvia’s official state memory policy regarding the Soviet past. Through a review of secondary data, this chapter analyses the development of an institutionalised anti-Soviet narrative in contemporary Latvia, starting in the 1990s. It also examines how this narrative intersects with the larger phenomenon of ‘wars of memory,’ including the contradictions between the Latvian state’s perspectives on the Soviet occupation and the interpretations of this period of history promoted by the Russian state through its memory politics. Furthermore, this chapter looks into the instrumentalisation of the memory of World War II and how the Victory myth can be used for political purposes. It specifically looks at how the mythologisation of Victory serves the foreign policy interests of the Kremlin and how the Kremlin’s
historical propaganda employs the narrative of the rehabilitation of Nazism in the Baltic countries.

Chapter 4 focuses on the alleged memory conflict between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking ethnolinguistic communities in Latvia, which is driven by competing interpretations of the Soviet past. Additionally, the concept of ‘Russian-speakers’ is problematised, and the extent to which Russian-speakers can align with the narratives formulated by the Russian state’s memory policy is examined.

This chapter delves into the perspectives of Latvian inhabitants concerning the Soviet occupation, drawing upon primary research data. It scrutinises commemorative rituals honouring the victims of Soviet repression, including the evolution of these rituals, the principal forms of commemorative practices concerning tragic events in Latvian history (such as Soviet deportations), and how Latvian inhabitants interpret these commemorative practices. It probes how individuals’ attitudes towards these practices correlate with official Latvian state commemorative policies.

The final section of this chapter investigates the Soviet nostalgic myth and the roots of post-Soviet nostalgia in Latvia. Descriptive statistics are employed to analyse the main trends in the survey respondents’ nostalgic feelings. Combined with the thematic analysis of interviews, these results provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the main causes of the diverse interpretations of the Soviet past. By synthesising and interpreting the quantitative and qualitative data analysis results, the central elements of the Soviet nostalgic mythological narratives can be discerned.
Chapter 5 endeavours to uncover Latvian inhabitants’ interpretations of the Soviet Victory myth and their views on Victory Day commemorations. The discussion includes an analysis of the evolution of these commemorations from 1990 to the present, the patterns of participation, and the political dimension of these practices. The analysis affords consideration to the respondents’ personal memories, which helps to clarify how individual experiences and beliefs influence the construction of mythologies and the meaning of commemorations, as well as how collective mythologised narratives related to the Victory are integrated into personal narratives.

Ultimately, this research project aims to comprehend the diverse ways in which Latvian residents perceive and make sense of Soviet mythologies and how these mythologies relate to commemorative practices. Given that this research problem has never previously been the focus of a scientific inquiry of this nature, the project holds particular significance: it should help to elucidate stakeholder power dynamics in the context of Latvia’s cultural memory and facilitate a better understanding between the two ethnolinguistic communities of Latvia. Additionally, the case of Latvia has much to offer in terms of understanding commemorative situations in other parts of the world, particularly in places with a traumatic historical legacy. In these areas, it is crucial to acknowledge the voices that may be drowned out by dominant public narratives and to recognise often-silenced perspectives. Overall, this dissertation aims to contribute to the ongoing ‘third wave’ in memory studies that advocates for revising the field’s theoretical foundations.

Finally, it must be noted that this dissertation commenced in 2018, and the primary data for the study were collected in the autumn of 2020. Since
then, events and developments in the region have necessitated modifications to the text, and thus, the analysis has been augmented with the latest facts. Given Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the intensified Russian state-media propaganda campaign, and countermeasures by the Latvian state, including some alterations in memory policy, the interpretation of historical events by Latvian residents is undergoing continual changes. While tracking these changes falls outside the scope of this study, this project can still provide valuable insights into the commemorative landscape of Latvia. In this regard, this study endeavours to enhance public and academic knowledge about historical mythmaking in the post-Soviet context.
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW AND KEY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

1.1. Cultural memory and commemoration

Cultural memory and commemoration have had increasingly high profiles in academic debates in recent decades (Burke, 1989; Olick, 1999, 2008; Misztal, 2004; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, 2011; Kansteiner, 2002; Kattago, 2015; Assmann, 2004, 2012, 2013a; Assmann and Conrad, 2010; Assmann, 1995, 1997, 2006; Erll, 2011; 2011a; Connerton, 2009). The concept of social memory was, apparently, initially articulated in the first half of the twentieth century by the art historian Aby Warburg (2000) and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992, p. 38); they believed memory to be a socially constructed phenomenon dependent on communication. Halbwachs suggested the idea of ‘social frameworks of memory,’ which implies that the social group has specific criteria which help to select relevant practices, assess their significance, and determine their mode of interpretation (ibid, p. 35). This approach posits that collective memory is not simply a collection of individual memories but rather a framework that shapes and defines what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. It allows members of society to preserve shared values, frames of reference, and a sense of belonging to a larger group, which extends beyond the scope of individual experience.

The cultural historian Jan Assmann (2008, p. 109) developed the theory explaining the difference between individual, social (communicative) and cultural memory (see Table 1.1). He adopts Halbwachs’s concept of ‘collective
memory’ as opposed to ‘individual memory,’ but he also segments the first further into ‘communicative’ and ‘cultural memory.’

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Memory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner (Neuro-mental)</td>
<td>Inner, subjective time</td>
<td>Inner self</td>
<td>Individual memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social time</td>
<td>Social self, person as carrier of social roles</td>
<td>Communicative memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Historical, mythical, cultural time</td>
<td>Cultural identity</td>
<td>Cultural memory</td>
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**Table 1.1.** Three levels of memory and identity introduced by Jan Assmann (2008 p. 109).

According to Assmann (2008, pp. 110-111), ‘cultural memory is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural, identity,’ ‘it is exteriorised, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent.’ He identifies the main differences between communicative and cultural memory as follows: 1) the content of communicative memory is ‘history in the frame of autobiographical memory’ and the recent past, while cultural memory deals with mythical history and the distant past; 2) communicative memory can be observed in ‘informal traditions and genres of everyday communication,’ whereas cultural memory implies a ‘high degree of formation.
and ceremonial communication'; 3) communicative memory is as a ‘living and embodied memory’ mediated through vernacular language, while cultural memory is transmitted through texts of culture (icons, dances, rituals, performances, etc.) (ibid, p. 117).

In addition to the opposition between individual and collective memory, memory studies often explore the dichotomy between memory and history (see, for example, Climo and Cattell, 2002; Cubitt, 2007; Tumblety, 2013). According to Halbwachs (1992, pp. 82-88), memory and history do not exclude each other but can be seen as distinct and independent ways of approaching the past. Agreeing with Halbwachs and building upon his ideas, Nora (1989, pp. 8-9) asserts that:

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.

Furthermore, Nora introduces the concept of ‘sites of memory’ (les lieux de mémoire) – material and intangible phenomena (including ‘places’ in the literal sense as well as practices and rituals) that unify history and memory and integrate functional and symbolic aspects.

Erll (2011) suggests that in the 1980s, a second phase of research on cultural memory began with the introduction of Nora’s influential concept of les lieux de mémoire (a first phase of research on cultural memory took place in the early twentieth century when Maurice Halbwachs introduced the concept of social frameworks of memory). This second phase of research explores the role of physical and symbolic sites, such as monuments, museums, and
ceremonies, in shaping and preserving cultural memory. While in the 1980s and 1990s, the memory studies followed Nora in ‘looking at the nation-state as a social framework of remembrance,’ Erll points out that a transcultural memory approach can be beneficial for a ‘third wave’ in memory studies (ibid., pp.7, 15). According to her definition, this ‘transcultural’ approach focuses on ‘the mnemonic dynamics unfolding across and beyond boundaries’ and ‘is based on the insight that memory fundamentally means movement: traffic between individual and collective levels of remembering, circulation among social, medial, and semantic dimensions’; in other academic contexts it ‘might be described with concepts of the transnational, diasporic, hybrid, syncretistic, postcolonial, trans-local, creolised, global, or cosmopolitan’ (ibid. pp. 9, 15; see also Levy and Sznaider, 2002; Huyssen, 2003; Landsberg, 2004; Hirsch, 2008; Rothberg, 2008; Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading, 2009).

The transcultural framework was developed by Rothberg (2008, p.11), who introduces the concept of ‘multidirectional memory’, which ‘posits collective memory as partially disengaged from exclusive versions of cultural identity and acknowledges how remembrance both cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites’ (ibid., p. 11). Thus, Rothberg’s approach to cultural memory allows us to focus not only on the confrontation and competition of memories in a heterogeneous post-World War II context but also on their interaction and solidarity since it considers memory ‘as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing’ (ibid., p.13). Moreover, Feindt et al. presented a methodological critique of those memory studies that ‘have widely assumed the homogeneity of the commemorating groups and privilege tangible manifestations of memory,’
suggesting their alternative concept of ‘entangled memory,’ which is based on acknowledging ‘multiple perspectives, asymmetries, and cross-referential mnemonic practices’ (2014, p. 35). In a synchronic perspective, memory’s entangledness means that ‘every act of remembering inscribes an individual in plural social frames [which leads to] the simultaneous existence of concurrent interpretations of the past’; in a diachronic perspective, this concept implies ‘the dynamic relations between single acts of remembering and changing mnemonic patterns’ (ibid., p.45).

Furthermore, ‘transcultural memory’ as an umbrella term may include both spatial and temporal dynamics of remembering. An example is the concept of postmemory that was introduced in 1992 by Marianne Hirsch; it ‘describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up’ (Hirsch, 2008, p. 106). Currently, postmemory researchers are studying how memory forms individual and group identity while focusing on those memories that are not purely personal but which have a strong impact on how people build relationships with society and the world (see Hirsch, 2008, 2012; Kaplan, 2011; Mitroiu, 2018; Frosh, 2019).

Recently, academic studies have appeared applying the concepts of ‘multidirectional memory’ and ‘entangled memory’ to the analysis of memories of Eastern Europe and the Baltic region (see, for instance, Kaprāns, 2016b; Blacker, 2019; Platt, 2020; Laanes, 2020). According to Blacker and Etkind (2013, p. 2), while memories of Eastern Europe ‘may clash and divide, the very
fact that they are in constant, often antagonistic contact with one another creates a form of entanglement, which has the potential to produce both conflict and solidarity.’ This ‘complex but identifiable entanglement of East European memory’ refers to events such as ‘the nineteenth-century competition among the European empires; the emancipating, utopian, and ultimately enslaving revolutions; two world wars that caused these revolutions and developed out of them; the direct or indirect reign of the Soviet Union with its egalitarian, internationalist theories and undemocratic, terrorist practices; and, finally, the postsocialist transformation with its programmatic inequalities and uncertainties’ (ibid.).

As noted by numerous researchers, the characteristic features of cultural and historical memories in the former Eastern bloc countries are directly related to the fact that after the traumatic experience of World War II, Eastern European countries fell under Soviet occupation, which extended their suffering for another four decades (Snyder, 2010; Koposov, 2011; Mink and Neumayer, 2013; Assmann, 2013b, 2016; Angé and Berliner, 2015; Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; Mitroiu, 2015; Blacker and Fedor, 2015; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017). Democratic development and national identity were suppressed, and, despite occasional attempts to publicise the mass repression of the 1930s during the Thaw, any recollections of political persecution and death in Stalin’s Gulag were silenced for decades until Gorbachev’s Perestroika. Although historical and cultural aspects are unique for every Eastern European country, they ‘share the long communist period and Russian influence, the same dictatorship form of government and the experience of the fall of the communist bloc’ (Mitroiu 2015, p. 2).
According to Snyder (2010, p. xix), ‘Mass killing separated Jewish history from European history, and Eastern European history from Western European history. Murder did not make the nations, but it still conditions their intellectual separation, decades after the end of National Socialism and Stalinism.’ Assmann (2016) suggests that the European memory can be represented as an ellipse with two centres: the Holocaust is the central event in one centre, while the crimes of Stalinism, mass terror, and the Gulag occupy the other centre. In Eastern European societies, such factors as Nazi collaborationism and the communist occupation form complex traumatic memories ‘as seen from the perspective of both victim and victimiser, and sometimes the two roles coincide, which makes the entire process of reckoning with the past more difficult’ (Mitroiu, 2015, p. 4) (for the discussion about competing victimhood in Eastern Europe see also Blacker and Fedor, 2015; Assmann, 2016; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017; the concept of victimisation is closely related to the cultural trauma theory that originated from psychoanalytic studies and is based on the idea that painful historical experience constructs groups’ identities and memories (LaCapra, 2001; Felman, 2002; Edkins, 2003; Alexander et al., 2004; Kaplan, 2005; Bucur, 2010; Hunt, 2010; Alexander, 2013; Balaev, 2014; Goodall and Lee, 2015; Leese and Crouthamel, 2016; Giesen and Eisenstadt, 2016). When victimisation narratives are structured in such a way that the history of suffering becomes the core of identity and the content of collective memory, this can lead to the emergence of ‘wars of memory’ and ‘clashes of memories’ – fierce disputes over the interpretation of history and memorial conflicts that occur in many Eastern European countries, and between them (Mälksoo, 2009; Stone,
The question of ‘wars of memory’ in Eastern Europe is closely connected with the increased politicisation of the past. Manilova (2017, p. 43) explains that in Eastern Europe, cultural memory is distinguished by the strong influence of the current political agenda – ‘after the collapse of the USSR, all the former Soviet republics faced the problem of reconstructing their national identities within the new geographical and symbolic boundaries, and adapting the established narratives of their collective pasts to the new political context.’ This re-examination of the past is often linked to selectively using historical events for political purposes in the present and reproducing and promoting specific memories (Smith, 2006; Čeginskas, Kaasik-Krogerus and Sääskilahti, 2021). This practice can be understood as a means of moulding collective memory to align with current political objectives and shape how people view and interpret their history.

The politics of memory is a well-established area of study within the field of cultural memory, which examines how memory is influenced by government policy (such as through memorial laws) and how memory shapes domestic politics and foreign policy (see, for instance, Barahona, 2001; Müller, 2002; Huysssen, 2003; Ashplant, Dawson and Roper, 2001; Torpey, 2003; Dawson, 2006; Lebow, Kansteiner and Fogu, 2006; Moore and Whelan, 2007; Olick, 2007; McDowell, 2008a, p. 49; Graham and Howard, 2008, p. 2; Mälksoo, 2009; Pakier and Strath, 2010; Hite, 2012; Lebel, 2013; Karner and Mertens, 2013; Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; Danilova, 2015; Mitroiú, 2015; Koposov, 2017; Toth, 2021). It looks at how society’s collective memories are
constructed, maintained, and used to define national identity and shape public discourse. The politics of memory can be understood as a means of controlling the narrative of a society’s past and shaping its future direction.

For this dissertation, the most relevant aspect of the politics of memory is the study of commemorative practices – public activities through which groups of people express ‘a collective shared knowledge of the past, on which a group’s sense of unity and individuality is based’ (Assmann, 1995 cited in Winter, 2008, p.61) and ‘through which the official version of the past is transmitted and national identity reinforced’ (Mitroiu, 2015, p. 7). Before delving into a more detailed discussion about commemorative rituals, it is essential to acknowledge that there are various definitions of ritual in academic literature. Among the most common and authoritative definitions are Geertz’s (1973, p. 112) very concise definition characterising ritual as ‘consecrated behaviour,’ as well as Turner’s (1973, p. 1100) longer definition, which defines ritual as ‘a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interests.’ Like Geertz, Turner draws attention to the sacred nature of ritual, but in addition, he emphasises its communicative nature by pointing out the presence of recipients and performers of the ritual as participants in a message-exchange practice. Several studies, including those by Durkheim (1995), Bourdieu (1980), Mauss (2009), Collins (1975), Goffman (1959, 1967), Wach (2019), Berger (2003), Cazeneuve (1966, 1971), Garfinkel (1956), Knottnerus (2012), Moore and Myerhoff (1977), Hubert (1968) and Eisenstadt (2013), emphasise the role of ritual in the formation, reproduction, and transformation of social
structures, as well as the creation of social order. For example, Eisenstadt (2013) views rituals as powerful regulators of social relationships, which largely shape the behaviour of individuals in society. Adonyeva (2007) proposes a definition of ritual that is both concise and comprehensive, making it useful for this dissertation as it summarises the characteristics mentioned above. According to Adonyeva’s definition, a ritual is a set of actions typically imbued with symbolic value, and its performance is usually prescribed by a religion or societal traditions (ibid).

Contemporary studies of rituals trace their roots to Durkheim’s work, ‘Elementary Forms of Religious Life’ (1912). Durkheim (1995, p. 330) argued that rituals assist a collective in periodically updating and reaffirming its unity. The functions of a ritual include facilitating the overcoming of crises, identifying the values relevant to society, bringing people together, and serving as a ‘guarantee’ for individual and societal well-being (ibid.). Durkheim believed that social cohesion was necessary for human existence and required ongoing reaffirmation. To that end, he posited that rituals were crucial for cultivating a sense of solidarity and interconnectedness among members of a social group.

The function of ritual extends beyond the preservation and sustainability of society. It also serves as a crucial mechanism for the communication of information and the construction of collective memory, which has increasingly become a topic of interest among scholars (Erll and Nünning, 2008; Feuchtwang, 2010; Nünning, Rupp and Ahn, 2014; Utkina et al., 2015; West, 2015). Lotman (1992, p. 201) describes ritual as a mnemonic symbol that plays a role similar to writing in oral tradition, defining it as the primary tool for preserving information in collective memory. Bayburin (1993) and Assmann
(2008) also share this view, stating that cultural memory is mediated through rituals and observing the rise of the oldest systems of memorisation or mnemotechnics in the context of rituals. Feuchtwang (2010, p. 284) further explains that ritual creates and reinforces memory and that ritual performance triggers and screens the sharing and organisation of different memories in society.

The idea of the renewal and maintenance of traditions through rituals has also become a central concept in the study of rituals by scholars such as Eliade (1954) and Jensen (1963). Another influential work in this field is the edited volume by Hobsbawm and Ranger, ‘The Invention of Tradition’ (1983), which introduces the concept of ‘invented traditions.’ These are ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, p. 1). Durkheim (1995, p. 35) also believed that rituals renew and maintain the collective’s traditions, norms, and values, allowing people to reconnect with their ancestors and cultural heritage. Commemorative rituals involving a dramatic performance to make the past present were particularly important for Durkheim (1995, p. 375-376). These rituals preserve the group’s moral identity and depict the mythical history of the ancestor. They typically take place at historical ‘places of memory’ associated with ancestors and mythical heroes and are associated with the ancestry of the participants (ibid., p. 377). By emphasising common ancestry and performing emotionally charged actions related to the sacred, rituals
strengthen ties in society, maintain unity, build identity, and keep collective beliefs alive (ibid., pp. 375-380).

The importance of Durkheim’s, Hobsbawm’s, and Ranger’s findings for the study of commemorative practices in modern societies is specifically highlighted by Danilova (2015, p. 2), who explains how the ‘invention’ of commemorative rituals can overcome the instability caused by social changes and ‘can potentially be used to re-legitimise the political (and military) inspirations of governments and reconcile societies with controversial political outcomes of modern conflicts.’ Furthermore, Winter (2008, pp. 70-71) argues that people often follow commemorative rituals without realising that they are intentionally created and learned; they take them for granted and believe them to be natural. Winter adds that ‘inevitably, commemoration overlaps with political conflicts’ and ‘between national history and family history,’ which means that regardless of its broader social and political significance, the commemorative ritual must be integrated into the framework of family life in order to survive (ibid.). Studies such as Bennett (1980), Barth (1981), Lane (1981), Kertzer (1988), Bloch (1986; 1998), and Flood (2002) identify a characteristic feature of rituals as their ability to function as a means of legitimising power relations in different societies. Furthermore, rituals can serve as a significant medium for spreading political myths (the political role of myths will be further discussed in the next section of the dissertation. In particular, this characteristic of rituals has been extensively studied in academic literature using the example of official rituals during the Soviet era, which were used as a tool of ideological influence that political elites employed
to establish specific values and norms in Soviet society (Lane, 1981; Stites, 1991; Glebkin, 1998; Rolf, 2009).

Blacker and Fedor (2015, p. 202) claim that specificities of commemorative culture in contemporary Eastern European states are largely determined by ‘the long period of several intervening decades of suspended and repressed mourning, by long-standing taboos, and by ongoing bitter conflicts over the basic facts of the historical record, together with the need to craft national histories for the region’s newly independent states.’ The aforementioned characteristic features are also distinctive of the commemorative culture in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which have been analysed by numerous researchers in the region. These researchers note a division between the commemorative culture of the titular Baltic populations and Russian-speaking minority communities, leading to a ‘war of memories’ (see, for instance, Skultans, 1998; Onken, 2010; Ločmele, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011; Eglitis and Ardava, 2012, 2014; Cheskin, 2012; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Hanovs, 2014; Swain, 2014; Kaprāns, 2016; 2017; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). For instance, Eglitis and Ardava (2014, p. 125) formulate this division of memory as follows: ‘While titular Baltic populations have embraced a narrative of the mid-twentieth century that elevates a story of occupation, victimisation, and struggle against the Soviet order, Russian-speaking minority communities have been more inclined to embrace the Soviet-era historical narrative of the heroic Soviet army liberation of Europe.’ As noted by Bonnard (2013, p. 193), these narratives suggest that “Latvians” have collectively suffered from the Soviet period, while “Russians” are
supposed to be proud of the victory over fascism and to show nostalgia for the Soviet Union’ (ibid., p. 194). The studies mentioned previously in the Latvian context are further examined in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis. They provide additional insight and clarification on the memory conflict between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking communities within Latvia and between Latvia and the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, based on studies of Russian commemorative practices related to events in Soviet history (Manilova, 2017; Hicks, 2017; Koposov, 2017; Kurilla, 2018; Gabovich, 2020; Epple, 2020), this dissertation traces their influence on Latvian commemorative culture. In this way, the dissertation supplements existing studies of commemorative and ritual practices related to World War II, particularly the commemoration of Victory Day, in the Latvian context (Procevska, 2010; Zelče, 2010; Ločmele, 2010; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c; Miķiņš and Zelče, 2011; Eglitis and Ardava, 2012; Kaprāns et al., 2012; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns, 2016a, 2016b, 2018; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). At the same time, drawing on the idea that ‘historical memory is the area of continuous myth making’ (Fodor, Lewis, and Zhurzhenko, p. vi), this dissertation situates commemorative practices within a broader perspective of the study of Soviet mythologies.

1.2. Soviet mythologies

Before defining the concept of ‘Soviet mythologies,’ it is necessary to define the terms ‘myth,’ ‘mythology,’ and ‘mythological’ themselves. Various approaches in social and historical sciences may imply very different meanings
and senses under these terms. According to Castaños (2013, p. 77), in popular perception, myths ‘denote an empirically false account, a set of distorted or invented propositions. Then, a myth is analysed by reference to factual discourses or to the validity claims of factual discourses, and data for the events on which the myth is based are crucial to the analysis. The main objective of such an exercise is to set the historical or sociological record right.’ However, in this dissertation, we will adhere to an approach to the study of myths in more specialised senses, according to which myths are not necessarily false (Gross, 1982; Weiner, 1996, 2002; Bell, 2003; Levkievskaya, 2005; Sherlock, 2007; Bouchard, 2013; Bottici and Challand 2013; Lewis 2017; Davis, 2018; Brunstedt, 2021; Weiss-Wendt and Adler, 2021). This approach, according to Brunstedt (2021, p. 7), ‘is less interested in ferreting out “myth” from “reality” than in looking at how myths structure reality’ and is based on works of structuralists and poststructuralists on myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 1966, 1969, 1969a, 1971, 1978; Jakobson, 1980; Lotman, 1992; Greimas, 1984; Derrida, 1992, 2002; Kristeva, 2010; Todorov, 2003; Barthes, 1986, 1991; Eco, 1972, 1976, 1984, 2011). As Davis (2018, p. 40) notes, ‘seeing little value in a debunking exercise, scholars are now tending to examine rather the subsequent appropriation and ownership of the myth by the people, studying it as a social construction in its own right rather than a web of deceit, and trying to understand its effect on the present.’

In this approach, Neklyudov (2000) defines the concept of ‘mythological’ as relating to that type of knowledge that is based not on rational proof but on faith and convictions (prescribed by cultural tradition, religious or ideological system, etc.). Neklyudov emphasises that mythology (or the
collection of myths) is a standard component of any societal or national consciousness present in all societies from ancient times. However, modern mythology is not equal to ancient mythology, ‘at least because it exists alongside the rapidly developing positive knowledge from which it has the opportunity to draw material for constructing its images and arguments’ (ibid.).

Importantly, Bouchard (2013, p. 277) highlights the connection between myths and beliefs and convictions in his definition of myth, while also emphasising the role of myths in shaping collective memory: ‘myths can be characterised as enduring, deeply rooted, inclusive representations that suffuse a nation’s past, present, and future with a set of values, ideals, and beliefs expressed in an identity and a memory’ (see also similar and even more concise definitions of myth, emphasising the importance of collective consciousness for its existence, belonging to Kirschenbaum (2006, p. 7), ‘the shared narratives that give form and meaning to the recall of past experience’ and Smith (2000, p. 2) ‘a widely held view of the past which has helped to shape and to explain the present’).

Emphasising the connection between mythology and memory, Ramsden (2010, p. 40) goes further and defines myth as ‘the way in which memories of the past have been selectively organised, an agreed version of the past that explains how a people came to be what they believe themselves to be in the present.’ Furthermore, ‘it is the subjective interpretation and overall “framing” of the facts that enables history to be transformed into myth,’ as stated by Sherlock (2007, p.3). This aligns with Bell’s (2003: 75) definition of a myth as something that ‘simplifies, dramatises, and selectively narrates the story.’ Myths are not natural occurrences but rather are ‘constructed, they are
shaped, whether by deliberate manipulation and intentional action, or perhaps through the particular resonance of works of literature and art,’ according to Bell (ibid.). The process of constructing a myth, or myth-making, Lewis (2017, p. 376) characterises as ‘an essentially creative endeavour involving the production and standardisation of one or more dominant narratives; this process also requires that competing versions be erased’.

This, in turn, leads to the question: who performs this selection of facts and controls the mythological narrative? For example, Davis (2018, p. 34) points out that myths can be used by those in power to justify present actions and defines a myth as ‘a shared and simplified narrative of the past with utility in the present thanks to its enduring emotional and moral appeal,’ which ‘may be exploited by a ruling elite to boost the morale of the population, often giving meaning and order to a difficult and chaotic period.’ Myth can also be a means of a struggle between opposing political and ideological positions, which in turn can create concerns about their erroneous, unethical, and hazardous use (see Cassirer, 1963; Kirk, 1970; Tudor, 1973; Cohen, 1975; McNeill, 1986; Levkievskaya, 2005; Sherlock, 2007; Bouchard, 2013).

According to Barthes (1991, p. 143), myths can give the appearance of not being political, fabricated or artificial; yet in fact, they are politically significant. By exploring the relationship between myth and power, Barthes claims that myth participates in the process of creation of an ideology (ibid.). In turn, Bouchard (2013, p. 3) argues that ‘Myths differ from ideologies in that the latter are a vehicle of myths, in addition to being informed by them.’ Sherlock develops a similar thought (2007, p.4): ‘While myth and ideology are clearly distinct phenomena, they enjoy an intimate relationship, with myth often
providing the basis for an ideology and an ideology often giving rise to myths. […] Myth, for example, through its dramatic rendition of past events, provides concrete reference points for often elusive abstract principles and generates emotional commitments that ideology is unable to offer by itself.’ However, according to Tudor (1973, pp. 126-127), ideology ‘endows the myth with academic respectability and a certain timelessly abstract significance.’ The connection between myth and ideology is more clearly traced in numerous studies devoted to the political functions of myth (see, for instance, Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Tudor, 1973; Bennett, 1980; Ellwood, 1999; Toporkov, 1999; Ricketson, 2001; Flood, 2002; Bottici, 2007; Boer, 2009; Esch, 2010; Tigar, 2018).

One of the key aspects that determine the political significance of myths is their ability to contribute to the construction of national identity, which, in turn, following Anderson (1983, pp. 6-7), can be defined as a feeling of belonging to an ‘imagined community’ (see also Smith, 1999; Sherlock, 2007; Bouchard, 2013; Vujačić, 2009, 2015; Guevara, 2016; Davis, 2018). Researchers of ‘founding’ or ‘origin’ myths, in particular, note this ability of myth to ‘tell the tale of how a political society came to be founded’ (Tudor, 1973, p. 65; see also Bouchard, 2013; Münch, 2016). Münch (2016, p. 54) claims that ‘rhetoric instruments to be found in [this type of] myths are exaggeration, glorification, and repetition. […] According to this notion of ‘myth,’ myths are stories told by societies or groups to design a specific picture of their imagined past.’ From this perspective, founding myths can also be defined as ‘collective narratives that interpret history in a selective and stereotypical manner’ (ibid.).
At the same time, Sherlock (2007, p.7) argues that ‘attachment to the core myths of a political system derives not only from social indoctrination and the political manipulation of symbolic discourse. The strength of regime myths also depends on shared values between the regime and the public, and on the satisfaction of group and private interests.’ It is also essential to consider that myth is a way of self-identification for society; it helps to define a system of values and associate with a particular cultural or political tradition and also helps to ‘order’ the world by presenting contradictory current events in the form of a simple and understandable narrative (For a discussion about the cohesive and identity-shaping functions of myth see Malinowski, 1954; Edelman, 1971; Kammen, 1991; Bell 2003, Levkievskaya, 2005; Weiss-Wendt and Adler, 2021).

There has been a proliferation of academic publications in recent times that examine the origin and functioning of Soviet myths in post-Soviet societies and, in particular, their political use (see, for instance, Levkievskaya, 2005; Mijnssen, 2009; Kustarev, 2013; Kravchenko, 2016; Barash, 2017; Manilova, 2017; Weiss-Wendt, 2021; Brunstedt, 2021). First and foremost, it is necessary to clarify that contemporary myths about the Soviet Union, while drawing inspiration from myths from the Soviet era, are not the same as those myths. In the mythology of the Soviet period, researchers identify characteristics of pseudo-religion, or the formation of secular religious beliefs, in which many features of classical non-theistic religions are reproduced (Pimenov, 1997, p. 290; Levkievskaya; 2005, p. 179; Kravchenko, 2016, p. 459). During the existence of the Soviet Union, this mythology, based on two founding myths, namely the myth of the Great October Socialist Revolution
and the myth of the Great Fatherland War, underwent substantial evolution.

Kravchenko (2016, p. 459) describes this evolution as follows:

The historical legitimacy of the USSR was, from the beginning of its existence, underpinned by the mythology of the ‘Great October Socialist Revolution.’ Lenin’s communist utopia was soon augmented by Stalin’s more pragmatic blend of modern ‘Sovietness’ with early modern (Orthodox-imperial) ‘Russianness.’ Later, Stalin’s legacy formed the basis for a new historical mythology of the ‘Great Fatherland War,’ which in turn granted legitimacy to the post-World War II generation of Soviet elites. These two mythologies acquired the character of a secular religion, complete with symbols, a pantheon of heroes, institutions, and sacralised texts.

During the Brezhnev era, there was a trend not only towards the merger of both mythologies but also towards the prioritisation of the mythology of the ‘Great Fatherland War’ over the mythology of the ‘Great October’ (see, for instance, Polegkyi, 2016, p. 87; Kravchenko, 2016, p. 459). It is noteworthy that when discussing the reasons for the emergence of this myth of war in the Brezhnev era, Koposov (2021a, p. 53) points out that ‘as the revolutionary faith in communism began to fade in the 1960s and 1970s, the war cult became critical to the regime’s legitimacy.’ In turn, Khapaeva (2016, p. 65) argues that during the Brezhnev era of ‘covert re-Stalinisation,’ the function of this myth was ‘to free Soviet society from its collective responsibility for the Stalinist terror and Soviet repressions. The myth countered the memory of crimes committed under the Soviet regime. It barraged the memory of the Gulag, and replaced the recollection of the irrational and unjustifiable suffering by the victims of the Soviet system with that of a “bloody but heroic struggle” against Nazi Germany.’

Kravchenko (2016, p. 459) notes that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the foundations were laid for a new Soviet mythology, ‘the Brezhnevite historical legacy came to be perceived as a Golden Age of stability and
prosperity for ordinary people.’ Therefore, when it comes to Soviet mythologies in post-Soviet times, they are closely connected to concepts such as ‘nostalgia’ and ‘the Golden Age,’ which turn people towards a ‘bright’ past, its values, ideas, and ways of life (see, for example, Dragunskii, 2003; Kustarev, 2013 on the ‘Soviet nostalgic myth’; Levkievskaya, 2005, Levinson 2015 on the ‘myth of the golden age’). Hence, it will be helpful to begin by looking at the definition of the concept of ‘nostalgia’ in order to determine the main characteristics of the contemporary Soviet nostalgic myth. Kattago (2015, p. 3) defines nostalgia as a ‘deep longing for a past that has been lost.’ In turn, Boym (2007, p. 7) suggests it is ‘a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed.’ Boym also introduces two types of nostalgia: while restorative nostalgia is based on the reproduction and reconstruction of the past, reflective nostalgia is focused on the longing itself and may include irony towards the past (ibid.). Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004, p. 505) claim that ‘ethnographically, the problem with applying the categories of “restorative” and “reflective” nostalgia to actual behaviours is that most nostalgic practices tend to fall in-between or, more frequently, function as both.’ Importantly, the distinction between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ components of specific nostalgic practices is determined by ‘the political field of possibility in which these practices can be put’ (ibid., p. 519). In turn, Boyer (2010, p. 25) states that ‘nostalgia always carries with it a politics of the future.’ Furthermore, Steinwand (1997, p. 10) argues that nostalgia is an extremely useful tool for nations during crisis times because it helps to shape and reaffirm their identities: ‘the myths of any nation appeal to the national nostalgia and encourage identification with such nostalgic images as the
nation’s “founding fathers” or some “golden age”, or decisive events in its history and the culture of the people.’ Hence, although nostalgia refers to the past as a kind of idealised time, in reality, it can serve the present’s political and other pragmatic purposes. At the same time, nostalgia can be perceived as an indicator of public dissatisfaction with the present (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; Barash, 2017; Gudkov, 2021a; Ponomarev, 2021).

The idea of a brighter past is likely as old as our civilisation, argues Bonett (2010, pp. 19-20), and adds that in antiquity, it ‘typically took the form of myths of a distant Golden Age or Eden.’ The term ‘Golden Age’ was introduced by the Greek philosopher Hesiod in his poem *Works and Days* (between 750 and 650 BC) as part of a narrative about the five successive ages of humanity (Golden, Silver, Bronze, the Age of Heroes and the Iron Age). Levkievskaya (2005, p. 179) notes that Soviet mythologies link the ‘Golden Age’ to the Soviet period of history and exploit the idea of the Soviet Union as a lost paradise that needs to be regained. Researchers have identified various value-based concepts associated with Soviet mythologies, such as social equality and ‘warm’ human relationships (Dragunskii, 2003; Kustarev, 2013), as well as effective social policy and comfortable living (free healthcare and education, guaranteed work, low housing costs, accessible leisure and recreation) (Kustarev 2013; Barash, 2017, 2019; Gudkov, 2021a). Kravchenko (2016, p. 459) notes that ‘after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Brezhnevite historical legacy came to be perceived as a Golden Age of stability and prosperity for ordinary people.’ Barash (2017, pp. 143-144) agrees and notes that it is in the memories of social guarantees in the Brezhnev era that the Soviet nostalgic myth is embodied as a myth of a state of general well-
being and social solidarity. An important addition to the analysis of Soviet mythologies is made by Levkievskaya (2005), who, in addition to the ‘social protection of the simple people,’ also highlights the following main conceptual elements: 1) ‘order, which provided safety and stability in everyday life’; 2) ‘the Soviet Union (and Russia as its successor) is a superpower able to defend its external interests’; 3) ‘the confrontation with the West as the main planetary evil’ (ibid., p. 179).

According to Ponomarev (2021), the mythologisation of Soviet times in the countries of the post-Soviet space is linked to economic hardship after the collapse of the USSR and a surge in nationalist sentiments in the former Soviet republics and other contemporary problems. This coincides with the opinion of Kustarev (2013) that after the collapse of the USSR, Soviet nostalgic myths supported those who ‘lost prosperity or status or simply became emotionally destabilised as a result of the disappearance of the familiar environment, and finally, those whose ideological expectations and personal calculations were not justified in new conditions.’ Several academic studies on the analysis of the Baltic region also indicate that discontent with the current economic situation is one of the main reasons for post-Soviet nostalgia (Jaago, 1999; Ekman and Linde, 2005; Grünberg, 2009; Onken, 2010; Matonyte, 2013; Platt, 2013; White and Frew, 2013; Kalinina, 2014; Duvold and Ekman, 2016; Duvold, Berglund and Ekman, 2020; Daudze, 2021). Chapter 4.4 of this thesis, dedicated to the Soviet nostalgic myth in contemporary Latvia, presents an analysis of primary data that allows for the refinement of the conclusions of the studies above.
Furthermore, within the scope of this research, we include not only the nostalgic myth but also the myth of Victory in World War II as part of ‘Soviet mythologies’ (such an approach is adopted, for example, by Barash (2017, p. 144) who identifies the ‘myth of a strong state, objectified in the memory of Victory, and the myth of a state of universal prosperity and social solidarity, embodied in memories of the minimum social guarantees of the Brezhnev era’ as the main Soviet myths of the post-Soviet era, and Kravchenko (2016), who distinguishes the Soviet myth of the Golden Age and the Soviet myth of the Great Patriotic War).

The rationality of combining these two myths under the heading of ‘Soviet mythologies’ lies, among other things, in the fact that they are very closely interrelated – nostalgia for Soviet times is often associated with the glorification of victory in the Great Patriotic War. Numerous researchers note that in post-Soviet Russia, the myth of the Great Patriotic War, which is a direct continuation of the myth that originated during the Brezhnev era, was institutionalised and formed the basis for a new collective identity and nation-building project; victory in the Great Patriotic War is undoubtedly a historical event around which there has been a consensus in society, and which in itself is an example of ideal social cohesion (see Chapkovsky, 2017, p. 202; Odissonova, 2021, p. 134; Barash, 2017, p. 129; Belov, 2017, p. 45; Fedor, Lewis, Zhurzhenko, 2017, p. 14; Polegkyi, 2016, p. 80, Davis, 2018; Tumarkin, 1994; Manilova, 2017; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017; Zhurzhenko, 2017; Hicks, 2017; Sniegon, 2019; Perrier, 2019; Mijnssen, 2009, 2010; Davis, 2018; Brunstedt, 2021). The fact that the myth of the Great Patriotic War became the basis of the language in which Russian authorities were able to

Although the academic literature on Russia’s use of the myth of the Great Patriotic War abroad is large and growing (see, for example, Lastovskii, 2013; Kravchenko, 2016; Laruelle, 2016; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017; Kozachenko, 2019), the question of its use in the Baltic context remains underdeveloped, and an attempt is made in Chapter 3.4 to fill this gap through an analysis of the use of the myth of the war in the context of Russia and Latvia’s wars of memory. The analysis in Chapters 3.3 and 3.4, which focuses in particular on Soviet mythologies in the contemporary Russian context, is based on studies that consider re-Sovietisation (manifested in particular in the return of Soviet symbols), the idealisation of the Soviet past and its intentional mythologisation, as being used by the contemporary Russian authorities for their foreign policy interests (Gudkov, 2012; Miller, 2012; Tsvetkova, 2014; Manilova, 2015; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017; Medushevskii, 2017; Sniegon, 2019; Epple, 2020).
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The chapter describes the methodological approach chosen to analyse how memories of the Soviet past and Soviet mythologies are embraced in present-day Latvia and the role commemorative and ritual practices play in this process. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design is used, which means that qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously, analysed separately and then interpreted integratively (Creswell, 2014; Watkins and Gioia, 2015). The mixed-methods design is widely accepted by scholars in the field of cultural memory and heritage studies because it minimises the limitations of qualitative and quantitative research approaches and optimises the different strengths of the two paradigms (Yang, 2007; Bergman, 2008; Bottici and Challand, 2013; Du, Litteljohn and Lennon, 2013; Creswell, 2014; Drozdzewski, 2015; Lennon and Weber, 2016; Bryman, 2016).

The quantitative phase of the study, which involved surveying Latvian residents over 18, aimed to investigate how individuals from different ethnolinguistic groups interpret the meaning of the Soviet past and participate in contemporary commemorative and ritual practices related to the Soviet legacy. However, survey data alone cannot provide insight into narratives related to Soviet mythologies or an in-depth examination of respondents’ feelings, emotions, personal memories, interpretations, and descriptions of commemorative rituals related to the Soviet legacy. The qualitative phase of the study, which involved conducting interviews, is instrumental in this regard. The qualitative findings can either confirm or disconfirm the quantitative...
research results, and a comparison and interpretation of the two data sets is produced in the discussion.

The survey (see Appendix 2) consists of 48 questions divided into three sections. The first section (questions A1-A10) collects socio-demographic information about the respondents. The second section (questions B1-B20) focuses on respondents’ attitudes towards the Soviet past and their feelings of nostalgia. It includes questions about respondents’ feelings about the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soviet political repressions and deportations, the Soviet occupation of Latvia, and the law on the prohibition of Soviet symbols. The third section of the survey (questions C1-C18) is dedicated to commemorative practices related to the Great Patriotic War. Most of the questions are closed-ended, which is more time-effective for respondents and easier for the researcher to code. A few questions include an ‘other (please specify)’ option, which allows respondents to provide their answers.

According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022), there were 1.55 million Latvian residents over 18 and a total population of 1.91 million people in 2020. Based on recommendations for setting a minimum sample size for large populations proposed by Cattell (1978), Gorsuch (1983), MacCallum et al. (1999), and Brown (2006), the sample size for this research was set at over 200 respondents. A total of 404 respondents participated in the survey.

The initial research design involved distributing the questionnaires in person to facilitate probability sampling, in which a sample is selected randomly (Bryman, 2016, p. 187). However, due to UCL and government guidance on COVID-19, it was necessary to avoid physical interaction with
research participants and move to fully online interactions. The questionnaires were distributed online through the UCL Opinio platform in September-October 2020. The data collector approached people for the survey using a Facebook posting. Participants were provided with information sheets (see Appendices 5, 6, and 7) explaining the nature of the study.

This change to the initial research design resulted in certain limitations. Convenience sampling, which ‘consists of a group of individuals who are ready and available’ (Fink, 2003), was used instead of probability sampling method for the quantitative phase of the research. While convenience sampling is a common approach in social research (Bryman, 2016, p. 202), it can lead to findings that are less representative of the total population. Table 2.1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. The data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia were used to compare the sample with the actual distribution of demographic indicators in Latvia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>49 (12.1%)</td>
<td>119 249 (7.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>82 (20.3%)</td>
<td>253 340 (16.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>86 (21.3%)</td>
<td>254 466 (16.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>70 (17.3%)</td>
<td>259 621 (16.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>75 (18.6%)</td>
<td>270 129 (17.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>24 (5.9%)</td>
<td>391 413 (25.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 548 218 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>166 (41.1%)</td>
<td>852 470 (55.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>217 (53.7%)</td>
<td>695 748 (44.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (0.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say / No response</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 548 218 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data source: the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022), population over 18 years old in 2020.

### Language spoken at home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvian</td>
<td>129 (31.9%)</td>
<td>1 185 671 (60.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>239 (59.2%)</td>
<td>702 042 (36.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19 (4.7%)</td>
<td>62 404 (3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 950 116 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belorussian</td>
<td>7 (1.7%)</td>
<td>58 594 (3.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>15 (3.7%)</td>
<td>4 179 (0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian</td>
<td>148 (36.6%)</td>
<td>980 123 (61.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuanian</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
<td>20 901 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>4 (1.0%)</td>
<td>36 109 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>190 (47.0%)</td>
<td>428 959 (26.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>10 (2.5%)</td>
<td>41 383 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12 (3.0%)</td>
<td>32 239 (0.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 602 487 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Citizenship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Citizen</td>
<td>334 (82.7%)</td>
<td>1 347 801 (84.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvian Non-Citizen</td>
<td>35 (8.7%)</td>
<td>195 216 (12.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Citizen</td>
<td>14 (3.5%)</td>
<td>39 453 (2.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3 (0.7%)</td>
<td>20 017 (1.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 602 487 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower than secondary school leaving qualification</td>
<td>18 (4.5%)</td>
<td>282 611 (17.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school leaving qualification</td>
<td>93 (23.0%)</td>
<td>879 591 (55.61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>104 (25.7%)</td>
<td>130 273 (8.13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree or higher qualification</td>
<td>148 (36.6%)</td>
<td>310 012 (19.34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24 (5.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 602 487 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civil status</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>131 (32.4%)</td>
<td>503 218 (31.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>182 (45.1%)</td>
<td>697 814 (43.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil partnership</td>
<td>42 (10.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>32 (7.9%)</td>
<td>401 455 (25.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 602 487 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>21 (5.2%)</td>
<td>107 083 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>28 (6.9%)</td>
<td>27 128 (1.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>14 (3.5%)</td>
<td>85 400 (5.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>44 (10.9%)</td>
<td>61 218 (3.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>22 (5.4%)</td>
<td>457 002 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29 (7.2%)</td>
<td>864 656 (54.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled labourer</td>
<td>174 (43.1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative worker</td>
<td>28 (6.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>27 (6.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>17 (4.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404 (100%)</td>
<td>1 602 487 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Data source: the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022), population over 15 years old in 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly household income per person</th>
<th>Frequency (Percent)</th>
<th>The actual distribution of the demographic indicator in Latvia****</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300 EUR</td>
<td>37 (9.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-800 EUR</td>
<td>144 (35.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 800 EUR</td>
<td>144 (35.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>60 (14.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>19 (4.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1. The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents compared with the actual distribution of demographic indicators in Latvia. (In cases where data were unavailable for the population over 18 in 2020, the most recent available data were used, as well as data for the population over 15 or all age groups (marked with an asterisk)).

The gathered quantitative data were coded and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Frequency tables were generated, and cross-tabulation was performed to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between demographic variables and attitudes towards the Soviet past, participation in commemorative practices, etc. Therefore, the quantitative stage of the survey helps to answer the following research questions: 1) What interpretations of the Soviet past exist among Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents?; 2) Is there any correlation between respondents’ other socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes towards the Soviet era?; 3) What are the main causes of nostalgia for the Soviet Union?; 4) How are the Soviet repressions interpreted by...
respondents?; 5) How do respondents evaluate and participate in commemorative and ritual practices related to the Second World War and how does it correlate with their attitudes towards the Soviet past?

Given that the sample is not representative of the population, survey data were used very selectively in the study. For example, a more significant number of Russian-speaking respondents took part in the study compared to Latvian-speaking respondents. In total, the survey approached 129 Latvian-speakers and 239 Russian-speakers (36 respondents either preferred not to disclose information about the language they mainly speak at home or chose the option ‘other’ in relation to the language they speak at home). One possible explanation for this may be that the subject of the survey was more interesting to Russian-speaking respondents, who were more willing to express their opinion.

Since groups of Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers are big enough in the sample, the survey data allowed us to draw some preliminary conclusions on how these different ethnolinguistic groups perceive the Soviet period of history and how their participation in ritual practices correlates with their attitudes. Given the large number of Russian-speaking respondents in the sample (n=239), some conclusions can also be drawn about differences in the opinions of Russian-speakers of two different age groups (under and over 35 years old, that is, people with no to very little experience of living in the Soviet Union and people who had direct experience of living in the USSR). However, because these data are not representative of the total population, they were used only as a supplement to the analysis of qualitative interview data.
A division into ‘Russian-speakers’ and ‘Latvian-speakers’ is widely accepted within existing academic research since these categories are used in official censuses, population registers, sociological surveys and public discourse (see Muižnieks, 2010, p.13; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). It is significant that Latvian state programme documents on integration policy (the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia guidelines 2012, 2017, 2020) also use the division into ‘Latvian-speakers’ and ‘Russian-speakers’ when discussing the conflict of memory in Latvian society. However, it is crucial to recognise that this generally accepted division into ‘Latvian-speakers’ and ‘Russian-speakers’ in our study is conventional and is used mainly for a critical assessment of state policy documents and existing academic research that employ such a division. The study of ‘Russian-speakers’ and ‘Latvian-speakers’ as a group is associated with limitations such as the potential for overlooking the distinguishing features of representatives of different ethnic groups and bilingual individuals who can move between more than one language and more than one culture. For instance, the language spoken by the residents of Latvia at home is often different from their ethnicity. In 2011, 93.3% of ethnic Russians, 7.6% of ethnic Latvians and 75.6% of representatives of other ethnicities spoke Russian at home; in 2017, 8.5% of ethnic Latvians spoke Russian at home, and 90.7% of ethnic Russians spoke Russian at home (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2019, 2022). This explains why in the survey sample, 148 people are ethnically Latvian, but only 129 speak Latvian at home. Furthermore, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers in Latvia are not ethnically homogeneous groups and consist of representatives of various ethnicities. According to the Central Statistical
Bureau of Latvia (2022), in 2011, Russian was the language most commonly spoken at home by 87.2% of Ukrainians, 88.7% of Belarusians and 76.2% of Poles in Latvia. However, a quantitative study of the views of representatives of ethnic minorities in Latvia (those who do not identify as either ethnic Russians or ethnic Latvians) would require a larger sample than we have available (similarly, we are unable to assess, for example, the differences between citizens and non-citizens of Latvia due to the small number of non-citizens participated in the survey). The analysis of the survey data is intended to help to explore the differences and similarities of social memory within such ethnically heterogeneous groups as Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, as well as between them.

In-depth interviews with 30 participants of the survey were carried out at the same time as the quantitative data collection to deliver ‘a more comprehensive account of the enquiry’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 641). Consecutive quota sampling was employed at this stage, which means that the sample reflects ‘a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age groups, socio-economic groups’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 203) (see Appendix 11 for the list of interviews). The interview participants were recruited from the questionnaire respondents. The sampling of respondents was not carried out randomly, as ‘the final selection of people was left to the interviewer’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 203). The rationale for sampling was based on the assumption that Russian-speaking respondents are more likely to participate in commemorative rituals associated with Victory Day, while Latvian-speaking respondents can provide valuable observations about criticism of these practices. Additionally, Russian-speaking and
Latvian-speaking respondents from different age groups were selected for interviews to determine any differences in how respondents of various ages assessed Soviet history and contemporary commemorative practices related to the Soviet myth.

Not only did the interviewing make it possible to obtain more detailed and complete answers to the questions set in the initial survey (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012), but it also facilitated descriptive narratives of ritual practices as well as respondents’ feelings, emotions and personal memories of the Soviet past. Consequently, interviews paid specific attention to individual experiences and the beliefs of interviewees while at the same time focusing on how ‘folklore narratives are integrated into personal narratives’ (Chase, 2008, p. 82).

The semi-structured form of interviews was employed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Galletta, 2013; Berg and Lune, 2014; Halperin and Heath, 2016; Lune and Berg, 2017), and the sequences of questions varied from the pre-set interview guide and additional questions were also asked (see Appendix 3 for Interview Guide). The interview questions corresponded with the survey questions to integrate qualitative and quantitative data at the later stage of the research. Each interview took between 30 and 80 minutes, and was audio recorded and transcribed. The interviewees were given the option of being pseudonymised or fully anonymised. The transcripts were indexed and coded using NVivo software. This allowed the grouping of responses to each question and cataloguing of themes under specific categories (the collapse of the USSR, Soviet nostalgia, everyday Soviet life, Soviet repressions, Soviet occupation, Victory Day...
commemorative rituals, commemorations for the victims of the communist
 genocide, Soviet symbolism, etc.). It also helped reveal the connections
 between themes and compare participants’ answers. Finally, a thematic
 analysis was conducted (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 149; Bryman, 2016, p.
 588; Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2011, p. 10).

This analysis allowed the researcher to examine variations in how
different groups of the Latvian population perceived Soviet myths and to
identify the most significant narratives that embody the Soviet past. Moreover,
the interviews focused on the clarification of respondents’ views and feelings
about the survey questions, to explore reasons why they answered in one
way or another. The results of the qualitative thematic analysis and those of
a quantitative statistical analysis were compared, related and interpreted
together to create a coherent picture and to produce a more complete
understanding.

Another important part of the research was interviewing experts and
stakeholders: member of the board of the public organisation ‘9maya.lv,’
Svetlana Savicka, organiser of the ‘Immortal Regiment’ in Riga, Margarita
Dragile, coordinator of the project ‘Russian memorials in Latvia,’ Aleksander
Rzhavin, and representatives of other governmental and non-governmental
organisations related to memory policy-making processes, as well as
politicians and academic experts (see Appendix 11 for the list of interviews).
In addition, official interview requests were sent to the Russian Embassy in
Latvia, the Riga City Council, the Latvian Association of Politically Repressed
Persons (LPRA), and The National Alliance ‘All for Latvia! – For Fatherland
and Freedom / LNNK.’ The answers to the request from the Riga City Council
and the Russian Embassy are presented in Appendices 27 and 28; in turn, representatives of The National Alliance stated that they could not take part in the interview ‘because they consider the topic of the research provocative.’ Moreover, the LPRA refused to answer the research questions without giving a reason. The inability to interview representatives of the National Alliance and the LPRA was compensated by a detailed study of their public interviews, policy documents and activity reports. Furthermore, the expert interviews were mainly focused on the Victory Day commemorative rituals, in which the Soviet myth is most clearly manifested; therefore, this study prioritised the opinions of those interviewed experts who were directly involved in organising the 9 May events. The logic of expert sampling lies in ‘selecting people to study or interview who are especially knowledgeable about a topic and are willing to share their knowledge’ (Frey, 2018, p. 648). The informants were expected to provide valuable insights into the researched subject; therefore, they were selected based on their knowledge, expertise and experience.

The interview topics included the Latvian state’s memory policies related to the Soviet legacy; nostalgia for the Soviet Union in Latvian society; organisation and funding of the 9 May commemoration in Riga; policies of preservation of Soviet monuments, and legislative initiatives related to the Soviet era (the law on the prohibition of Soviet symbols, the laws related to lustration, the publication of KGB archives, the law on commemorative dates). A critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2011; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Hammersley, 2014; Adger and Wright, 2015) was implemented to explore the interconnections present in the Soviet legacy and commemorative discourse, contemporary ideologies and social
changes. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can help to analyse the use of heritage for political purposes of the present (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996; Waterton, Smith and Campbell, 2006; McDowell, 2008a, 2008b, Graham and Howard, 2008; Wodak and Meyer 2009; Gegner and Ziino, 2012; Münch, 2016). Furthermore, CDA was employed, taking into account Smith’s (2006, pp. 29, 81) concept of authorised heritage discourse (a discourse which validates ‘certain social and cultural values, experiences and memories’ and determines ‘who the legitimate spokespersons for the past are’). Thus, CDA was helpful for exploring how the ‘authorised discourse’ of the Soviet past constructs contemporary commemorative practices in Latvia; by whom, how, and why Soviet myths in Latvia are intentionally constructed and which social actors are behind the successful dissemination of a myth. It should also reveal stakeholders’ intentions and motives concerning institutionalised rituals. The thematic guide (see Appendix 4) was used during interviewing, but all interviews were structured differently to accord with the interviewee’s expertise and competence. Furthermore, visual recordings were also used in this study as part of the ethnographic research.

The results of the primary data collection are accompanied by the secondary data analysis, including Dataset Records from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the Levada Analytical Center (Russia), VTsIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center) (Russia), the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia statistical reports, legislative acts and others. This project examines the primary ways in which the Soviet past, precisely the narrative of World War II, is utilised politically in Latvia and Russia today by summarising publicly available survey data, media coverage, academic
research, and official policy documents. Secondary data also help analyse
the public discourse surrounding the alleged memory conflict between Latvian
and Russian speakers in Latvia. This analysis is compared with primary data
from the residents of Latvia to clarify the issue further. Moreover, using
secondary data allows us to examine the evolution of commemorations
related to the Soviet legacy over a more extended period, beginning in the
1990s.

It is also necessary to point out that ethical issues (Wiles, 2012; Fujii,
2012) were considered carefully in this research. Ethical approval from UCL
Research Ethics Committee was obtained before the study began (see
Appendix 1). All interviewees were given information sheets explaining the
nature of the study, and they were asked to sign the consent forms (see
Appendices 8 and 9). The data collection occurred without any harm or
jeopardy to participants; interviewees made an informed decision on their
participation. The research did not require disclosure of classified information,
and the experts were not asked to provide any confidential information about
governmental plans. Hence, the risk of accidentally disclosing confidential
information was minimised in this research. The participants were given the
option to present their comments pseudonymously; therefore, their political
beliefs were not disclosed in the research without their consent. The
participants were not expected to disclose any information that may be
harmful to them in any way. Given that special category data were being
collected (e.g. ethnicity and political beliefs), they were stored securely for the
benefit of the research. The necessary safety measures were also taken for
data processing; data were managed following data protection laws, including
GDPR. All the primary data and part of the secondary data presented in this research were originally in Russian and Latvian, and translations for this research were carried out by the researcher.

Ultimately, the chosen research design and methods were suitable for this study because they provided insights into the various interpretations of Soviet mythologies among Latvian residents and their relationship to commemorative practices. Regrettably, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly limited the possibilities for ethnographic observation at the site of commemorative practices associated with Soviet repressions and Victory Day. For instance, the study includes a limited selection of ethnographic research from Victory Square in Riga. The fieldwork location was affected by Covid-19 in 2020-2021; therefore, following the updated version of the UCL Code of Conduct for Research, the research was conducted remotely. Although in-depth interviews helped to obtain data on how informants participate in commemorative rituals and what meanings they associate with them, ethnographic observations on site would improve the study by examining how participants interact with one another and with the ritualistic environment. The main benefit of ethnographic observation is that it is not solely reliant on informants’ statements. In this research, secondary data sources such as media reports and case studies were utilised in addition to informant testimony to mitigate potential bias in responses.
CHAPTER 3: The selective use of the Soviet past: Latvia and Russia in memory wars

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the intricate and contested nature of memory surrounding the Soviet past in Latvia. Through an examination of secondary sources, this chapter seeks to understand how the official state narrative about the Soviet period has been constructed and shaped in Latvia since the 1990s. Our analysis demonstrates how, over the past three decades, a complete condemnation of the Soviet period has become the foundation of the official Latvian memory policy.

This chapter further explores the political use of the Soviet past in contemporary Russia and how this intersects with the larger phenomenon of ‘memory wars’ between Latvia and the Russian Federation. Furthermore, it looks into how the memory of World War II and the subsequent occupation of Latvia is used as a tool in these memory conflicts and how the mythologisation of Victory serves the foreign policy interests of the Kremlin. The chapter also examines the Kremlin’s historical propaganda, focusing on the narrative of the rehabilitation of Nazism in the Baltic countries, and how it manipulates the memory of the Holocaust and the extermination of Jews. Overall, this chapter aims to shed light on the selective use of the Soviet past in Latvia and Russia, and the ways in which it is used for political gain.
3.2 The construction of an anti-Soviet narrative in contemporary Latvia

Since the restoration of independence in 1990, Latvia’s social mechanism and state system have undergone dramatic changes aimed at overcoming the Soviet past. According to the ‘Declaration on the Restoration of Independence of the Republic of Latvia’ adopted on 4 May 1990, the 1922 Constitution of independent Latvia was renewed. In addition, the declaration stated that it would ‘consider illegal the treaty of 23 August 1939 between the USSR and Germany, and the subsequent liquidation of the sovereignty of the Republic of Latvia on 17 June 1940, which was the Soviet military aggression’ (Supreme Soviet of the Latvian SSR, 1990). According to Kaprāns et al. (2012, p. 9), on the one hand, the crimes of the Soviet era began to be actively discussed in society; on the other, the strengthening of liberal democracy as a priority for Latvia’s development signalled a desire to forget the communist period as soon as possible. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a shift occurred from the dominant communist ideology to new ideologies of nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism, implying a comprehensive denouncement of anything linked to the Soviet period, consistent with what has been witnessed in the other Baltic countries (Matonyte, 2013). Although some variation may exist in the perspectives of Latvian political elites towards the Soviet past, an analysis of legislation and public policies within Latvia indicates a prevailing inclination towards anti-nostalgia. This involves a focus on negative evaluations and criticism of the Soviet way of life and endeavours to exclude individuals who held positions of power during the Soviet era from playing any role in public administration as a critical approach to managing the
Numerous researchers noted that the most characteristic feature of post-communist society is the social conflict over whether people who had served the Communist regime should be punished or whether it is necessary to part with the past without condemning it (see, for instance, Sakwa, 1999; Tismaneanu, 2008). One of the main obstacles to the transition period in the history of Latvia was the lack of a law on lustration, which was not adopted up to now. In 2015, Latvian artists and former Soviet dissidents sent a letter to President Raimonds Vējonis, Speaker of the Saeima Ināra Mūrniece, and Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma, calling for the adoption of a law on lustration. This letter stated: ‘25 years after the restoration of the Republic of Latvia, there was no legal or moral assessment of the consequences of the occupation and collaborationism. The traitors did not admit their criminal acts, they did not receive condemnation, and the victims did not receive atonement’ (University of Latvia, 2017). The adoption of the law on lustration in Latvia, as in other Baltic countries, was complicated by the absence of a significant part of the archives: on the eve of the proclamation of independence, the KGB took its documents to Moscow (Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, 2010).

As for the documents left in Latvia, in 1992, the Center for Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism was established (in 1995, it became part of the Constitution Protection Bureau). According to the Center, from 1941 to 1953, about 12,000 Soviet agents were registered with law enforcement agencies, and from 1953 to 1991, about 24,000 agents were registered with the KGB of the Latvian SSR (National Archives of Latvia, 2019).
In 1994, the Saeima passed a law prohibiting the disclosure of the names of people mentioned in the KGB files; this law closed the documents for ten years (Saeima, 1994). In 2004, the deadline for the publication of the card index was postponed for 30 years. However, in 2014 the Latvian parliament adopted amendments to the law, which provided for the publication of KGB documents in 2018 (Saeima, 2014). In October 2018, the Saeima, in the final reading, adopted amendments to the law ‘On the preservation and use of documents of the former State Security Committee and the statement of the fact of cooperation of persons with the KGB,’ after which the Center for Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism transferred the documents to the Latvian National Archives, and in December 2018 they were published on the website ‘kgb.arhivi.lv.’ Over time, some cases from the archive disappeared; according to the estimates of the historian Kārlis Kangers, the SAB stores only about 0.2% to 0.3% of all Latvian KGB materials (Latkovskis, 2017).

After Latvia regained independence from the Soviet Union, the Latvian Communist Party was prohibited by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia in September 1991. Currently, persons who have collaborated with the Latvian Communist Party after 13 January 1991 are prohibited from being elected to the Saeima and municipalities in Latvia. The 1992 Latvian Election Law required all parliamentary candidates to submit a written statement on whether they had connections with Soviet secret services. Subsequently, the law ‘On elections to the Saeimas’ of 25 May 1995 established a ban on election to the Saeima for persons who ‘are or have been staff members of the security services, intelligence services or counterintelligence services of the former
USSR.’ Until the end of 2015, the court decided there had been cooperation with Soviet secret services in only two out of 298 cases (these occurred in 2007 and 2010) (Stukâns, 2016).

As for the conviction not of individuals, but the criminalisation of the communist regime as a whole, since the restoration of independence, the Latvian political elite, like other Baltic and Eastern European countries, has adhered to a consistent course of condemning the crimes of the Soviet era. In the 1990s, the concept of genocide of the Latvian people dominated the political discourse. For instance, the law ‘On festive, commemorative and observance days’ (1990) set 25 March and 14 June as Commemoration Days for the Victims of Communist Genocide – on 25 March in 1949 the Soviet occupation regime deported over 43,000 people from Latvia to Siberia, while on 14 June in 1941 over 15,000 people were deported to Siberia (Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, 1990). Moreover, the Repatriation law of the Republic of Latvia stated that ‘the worst genocide was during the communist terror in the USSR, when hundreds of thousands of innocent people were deported to various death camps’ (Saeima, 1995b). Furthermore, on 22 August 1996, the Latvian parliament adopted a declaration ‘On the Occupation of Latvia’ (Saeima, 1996a). The document condemns ‘crimes committed by the Soviet regime, including mass deportations and the illegal confiscation of property.’ The spread of the victimisation narratives was closely related to the politics of memory and the active state policy of asserting a national identity (Skultans, 1998; Assmann, 2016).

In general, the concept of the ‘genocide victim’ that dominated Latvian memory policy during the 1990s is criticised by some researchers (see
Budryte, 2005; Finkel, 2010; Grodsky, 2012). According to Grodsky (2012, p. 55) 'being a victim of genocide is a very efficient mechanism to brush aside demands to confront injustices and crimes committed by members of the “suffering nation”. [...] The moral and the normative power of the genocide argument often leads politicians to misuse the term and to exaggerate the genocidal victimhood, instrumentally exploiting the very broad and ambiguous legal definition of the concept.’ In addition, experts who criticise the use of this term in the Latvian context note that on 14 June 1941, a higher proportion of Jews than Latvians were deported from Latvia, although the number of Latvians predominated in absolute terms (Zālīte and Eglīte, 2001). According to the Centre for the Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism, 14,428 people were deported from Latvia in 1941, 11,598 of whom were Latvians (or 0.8% of the total number of Latvians living in Latvia at that time), while 761 were Russians (or 0.4% of the total number of Russians living in Latvia at that time), and 1,789 were Jews (1.9% of the total number of Jews living in Latvia at that time) (Totalitārisma Seku Dokumentēšanas Centrs, 1998). Data on the ethnic composition of more than 43,000 people deported in 1949 are unknown.

In the 2000s, a certain transformation in the politics of memory in Latvia became apparent. In the official Latvian memory discourse, there was an active desire to place Latvia in the pan-European context of historical memory and to recognise the criminality of the communist regime at the level of European institutions such as the European Parliament. Simultaneously, the idea of equivalence between Nazi and communist regimes gained strength and formed the basis of the Latvian memory policy.
In Latvia, already in the 1990s, laws were adopted that affirmed the same attitude towards the victims of Soviet and Nazi repressions. Thus, in 1992, the Supreme Court ruled that both Nazi and communist repressions should be classified as crimes against humanity (Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, 1992). In 1995, at the legislative level, the victims of both regimes were given the status of ‘repressed’ (Saeima, 1995a). In 1999, the Latvian Historical Commission was established ‘in order to promote research into the crimes against humanity perpetrated in the territory of Latvia during the Soviet and Nazi occupations between 1940 and 1956 and to make the results known to both the Latvian and international public’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2014). The idea of equivalence between Soviet and Nazi crimes gained widespread acceptance in Latvia when it began to be promoted internationally (see Onken, 2007; Mälksoo, 2009). In 2006, resolution 1481/2006 of the Parliamentary Assembly – Council of Europe (PACE, 2006) ‘strongly condemned crimes of totalitarian communist regimes.’ In July 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE (2009) adopted the ‘Resolution on Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century,’ ‘noting that in the twentieth century European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist.’

The concept of equating communism and Nazism has met criticism from some researchers. Thus, for instance, Kaprāns (2016, p. 6) claims:

Instead of reconciliation and comprehensive understanding of what happened with Latvia during the 1940s, the so-called paradigm of two evils was reinterpreted in order to frame Nazis as a smaller evil, i.e. the Nazi occupation was implicitly seen as less damaging to Latvia. Such a reinterpretation which is still lingering also in Latvia’s social memory, of course, overlooked the victims of the Holocaust and Jewish suffering.
Academic criticism has also been directed at the interpretation of Latvian collaborationism and Holocaust involvement by the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (established in 1994, partially state-funded; the museum's permanent exhibition focuses on Latvian state history under Soviet and Nazi occupation from 1940 to 1991). For example, Bērziņš (2015) claims that the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia gives insufficient attention to the Nazi occupation and its crimes, fails to mention Latvian participation in the Holocaust and mentions Latvian collaborationism only sparingly, as opposed to the Soviet occupation.

In turn, according to Assmann (2016, pp. 158–159), such memorial museums that display ‘sacrificial history, presenting resistance to violence as the heroic origins of the nation’s birth’ may be criticised for reinforcing the national image as a collective suffering victim, which in turn may lead to an inability to ‘sympathise with the victims of their own state policy’ (for a similar discussion see Mark, 2008; Radonić, 2017).

However, the justification for uniting the two regimes under the rubric of ‘totalitarianism,’ which originates from Arendt's major work The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), has a solid foundation in political, philosophical and historical research. Snyder (2010, pp. 387, 408) argues that the mass murder implemented as utopias is the primary factor connecting Nazism and Stalinism: ‘The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers, some of which we can only estimate, some of which we can reconstruct with fair precision.’ The discussion on the equivalence of Communism and Nazism was advanced by the former Latvian Foreign Minister Sandra Kalniete, who delivered a prominent speech at the Leipzig Book Fair in 2004, in which the Nazi and the
Soviet Communist regimes were described as ‘equally criminal.’ Kalniete (2004) claimed that ‘The losers must also write their story, because it deserves a firm place in the overall history of the Continent. Without this, the broader history will remain unilateral, incomplete and dishonest.’ In addition, she stressed that ‘both totalitarian regimes – Nazism and Communism – were equally criminal’ (ibid.).

In 2005, the Saeima adopted the ‘Declaration on the Condemnation of the Totalitarian Communist Occupation Regime Implemented in Latvia by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,’ which included provisions such as ‘the Latvian state condemns the USSR totalitarian communist occupation regime implemented in Latvia; the Latvian state condemns the actions of all those persons who participated in committing the crimes under the said regime; Latvia recognises members of the national resistance movement as fighters for Latvia’s freedom and honours them’ (Saeima, 2005a). This declaration also obliged the Cabinet of Ministers ‘to establish a commission of experts to calculate the loss and damages inflicted by the said regime on Latvia and its population.’ In addition, it ordered the removal of any restrictions on documents confirming the crimes of the Soviet regime. However, the declaration did not contain a single mention of the genocide of the Latvian people, although, in the 1990s, this term was prevalent in Latvian official discourse (notably, the term ‘genocide’ is not used in relation to the deportations of Latvians in the programme documents of the European Parliament: instead, the concepts of ‘crime of Stalinism’ and ‘crime of the totalitarian communist regime’ are used). Additionally, significant emphasis was placed on Russia’s responsibility as the legal successor of the USSR and on European support. For example, the
document demanded ‘to continue maintaining claims against the Russian Federation regarding compensations for loss and damages caused to the Latvian state and its population during the occupation.’ It also expressed the hope that ‘the European Union, especially the European Parliament, and the EU member states […] would encourage Russia to hear and to satisfy Latvia’s demands for compensating damages it has incurred.’

A specially created Commission for calculating the losses during the Soviet occupation operated for four years and was closed in 2009 as part of budget cuts. Commission spokeswoman Ruta Pazdere said ‘if it were not for this damage, we would live two to three times better today’ (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2013). In 2013, the Commission was reactivated, and in 2016 it estimated the cost of damage caused by the Soviet occupation to be 300 billion euros. Ruta Pazdere stated that Latvia would not demand compensation from Russia and would make calculations solely for its own needs: ‘If we really demand compensation from Russia to the amount of 300 billion euros, then someone else will demand this, and Russia will simply go bankrupt. However, based on these calculations, we can demand symbolic compensation of at least 1 euro. The main thing is that Russia recognises what was in its history’ (Lenta.ru, 2016). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that Latvia’s demands to Russia for multi-billion-dollar compensation for the Soviet past are presented by ‘sick people with an already incorrigible psyche’ (RIA Novosti, 2016a). In 2018, Dmitry Peskov, the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation, also stated that Moscow disagreed that some compensation could be discussed (Vesti, 2018). He added that ‘one should not forget about the contribution that was made to the development of
the infrastructural, economic and social spheres of the Baltic countries during the Soviet era.' In general, the idea of ‘raising international awareness of the Soviet occupation and keeping Russia responsible for the Soviet crimes,’ outlined in the 2005 declaration, met with strong opposition from the Russian Federation (Kaprāns, 2016a). Thus, according to the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, ‘the annexation of the Baltic to the USSR corresponded to the norms of international law of that time, the term “occupation” cannot be used here, since there was no military action between the USSR and the Baltic states, and the introduction of troops was carried out on a contractual basis and with the explicit consent of the authorities existing in these republics’ (Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Estonia, 2021).

In 2014, the concept of condemning totalitarian Nazi and communist regimes was finally established as the foundation of Latvia’s memory policy with amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia which solidified the condemnation of both regimes: ‘The people of Latvia […] honour their freedom fighters, commemorate victims of foreign powers, condemn the Communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes and their crimes’ (Constitutional Court of Latvia, 2016). On the one hand, this approach was consistent with the international perspective and the authorities’ intention to integrate Latvia into the European policy of memory. On the other hand, however, it escalated the symbolic conflict with the politics of memory of contemporary Russia, in which the mythology of the Second World War occupies a central place, implying an unequivocal condemnation of the equating Nazism and Stalinism. Mythologisation of the Soviet era, especially the period of the Great Patriotic
War, is a fundamental element of memory politics in contemporary Russia. Given that this contributes to the memory conflict between Latvia and the Russian Federation, it is necessary to delve further into the issue of using Soviet history in the interests of the Russian state.

3.3 The political use of the Soviet past in contemporary Russia

During Perestroika (1985–1991), Russian society experienced a powerful political mobilisation, the revision of Soviet history took place, and the processes of forming the memory of the victims of repression were launched. However, the party leadership tried to limit the revision of Soviet history to criticism of Stalin, and, as a result, the revision of the Soviet legacy turned out to be largely illusory, and not all anti-democratic stereotypes and ideas were destroyed (Koposov, 2011, pp. 123–130). On 16 January 1989, a Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was issued ordering the cancellation of all decisions made by extrajudicial bodies (troikas, special meetings, etc.) and recognising all citizens convicted by these bodies as rehabilitated (Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 1989). In November 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted a declaration ‘On the recognition of illegal and criminal acts of repression against peoples subjected to forced resettlement, and on ensuring their rights’ (ibid.). During the period 1988–1991 about 1.5 million people were rehabilitated (Roginsky and Zhemakova, 2017).

On 18 October 1991, the law ‘On the rehabilitation of victims of political
repression’ was adopted, which directly condemned the crimes of the Soviet era:

During the years of Soviet power, millions of people became victims of the tyranny of the totalitarian state, were subjected to repression for political and religious beliefs, social, national and other signs. Condemning the long-term terror and mass persecution of its people as incompatible with the idea of law and justice, the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation expresses deep sympathy for the victims of unjustified repressions, their families and friends, declares its unswerving desire to seek real guarantees of ensuring the rule of law and human rights. (President of the RSFSR, 1991)

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, an attempt was made to break with Soviet symbolism and construct a new democratic identity. New nuances appeared in the official discourse of condemnation of terror, and Stalin’s harshness was increasingly seen as a direct consequence of the condemned revolution of 1917. Boym (2002, pp. 295-296) highlights that Russian public discourse in the late 1980s-early 1990s featured increased interest in reinterpreting Soviet history, Western attitudes, deideologisation ('de-sovietisation and de-mystification of Soviet everyday ideology'), irony, and postmodern use of totalitarian kitsch. Consequently, a trend of state-supported post-Soviet nostalgia emerged in Russian society between 1993 and 1996.

Several scholars have noted that one prominent example of nostalgic projects was the airing of the musical ‘Old Songs about the Main Thing’ [‘Starye pesni o glavnom’] on Russian state television on 1 January, 1996. This television show marked the start of a popular musical series in which Russian pop stars performed Soviet hits (Ivanova, 1997; Faibisovich, 1998; Oushakine, 2000; Lipovetsky, 2004; Nadkami and Shevchenko, 2004; Platt, 2013; Saprykin, 2021). ‘Old Songs about the Main Thing,’ which followed audience demand for nostalgia, exemplifies a postmodern game that combines
elements from the Soviet and Yeltsin eras. Employing Boym’s (2001) typology, which distinguishes between ‘reflective’ and ‘restorative’ nostalgia, it can be observed that ‘Old Songs about the Main Thing’ exhibits characteristics of ‘reflective’ nostalgia, implying an ironic demeanour towards the Soviet era.

Furthermore, ‘Old Songs about the Main Things’ can be seen as a project that created the idea of a past without conflict, where various elements are combined eclectically, and nostalgia for Soviet times serves as a symbol of stability during a society undergoing significant changes. According to Saprykin (2021), it must be perceived within the political context of the mid-1990s and the start of Boris Yeltsin’s re-election campaign in 1996, whose main objective was victory over the Communist Party of Gennady Zyuganov:

[After Yeltsin’s first presidential term] not daring to launch a decommunisation programme, having survived a confrontation with the ‘red-brown,’ the government obviously takes a course towards reconciliation... in order to soften social wounds with an unambiguous message: we are all children of one country, there is no impassable abyss between its Soviet and post-Soviet periods, we take all good things with us into the future.

On the one hand, the anti-Communist ideology was promoted, and the Soviet totalitarian past was censured during the election campaign. Thus, for instance, President Boris Yeltsin, in his message to the Federal Assembly on 23 February 1996, said:

It is important to fully realise that the tragic consequences of the communist experiment were natural. Of course, something could be avoided, something could be mitigated. But in general, mass repressions, and tough political monopoly, and class purges, and total ideological ‘thinning’ of culture, and isolation from the outside world, and maintaining an atmosphere of hostility and fear – all these are generic signs of a totalitarian regime. (Kremlin, 1996)

On the other hand, however, during this period, the Yeltsin administration began to exhibit a certain continuity with the Soviet past and
utilise projects that demonstrated characteristics of ‘restorative’ nostalgia. On 9 May 1995, commemorating the 50th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War, a major parade with military equipment was held in Moscow for the first time in the history of the Russian Federation. Moreover, this time it took place not only on Red Square, as was the case in Soviet times, but also on Poklonnaya Gora – where the Victory Memorial Complex was opened on that day. It was the first new memorial structure in post-Soviet Russia dedicated to the Great Patriotic War at that time. Since 1995, the parades in Russia on 9 May have become annual events (see Chapter 5 for the discussion about the origin of the Soviet 9 May ritual and its development in contemporary Latvia).

Tsvetkova (2014) states that the Kremlin began actively promoting the mythologisation of the Soviet past towards the end of the 1990s:

In the context of an anxious, uncertain attitude towards the future for many years, positive mythologisation of the Soviet past and mass retro-orientation have served as compensatory mechanisms which the authorities and their ‘elites’ actively instrumentalised as the country’s democratic development vector was lost in the early 1990s... The authorities began to gradually engage in an increasingly manipulative game with the population concerning the Soviet past.

Many scholars note that Putin’s Russia is characterised by a resurgence of Soviet symbols, glorification of the Soviet past and its deliberate mythologisation (Shary, 2008; Medushevskii, 2017; Mazur, 2019; Kolesnikov, 2020; Gudkov, 2021). These phenomena can be partly attributed to a national identity crisis and the collective trauma of the Soviet Union’s collapse. (Polegkyi, 2016; Saprykin, 2016). Gudkov and Zorkaia (2017, p. 181) argue that the search for a unifying national mythology led to the ‘conception of the past as a myth of continuity or infinity of the system’s existence’:
The origins of the state go back to the mythological past, which becomes a field of eternal struggle against enemies... Appealing to the mythological past from a sociological point of view is equivalent to recognising the non-alternative significance of the vertical structure of society, i.e. the constitutional function of power, the hierarchical structure of society, the priority of collective values of the whole, symbolically represented in the figure of the ruler (monarch, despot, leader, president, etc.) and the insignificance and facultative nature, the dependence of subjects – the individual or minority, social group, etc. In addition, the idea of social homogeneity and total unity of the country is formed, deprived of the idea of social complexity, differentiation, groups with their own interests and cultural autonomy.

In early December 2000, at the suggestion of Putin, a decision was made on a new anthem for the Russian Federation. The music of Alexander Alexandrov, that is, the music of the Soviet anthem, was taken as the basis for the new Russian anthem. This was useful for Putin from the point of view of the current political situation: opinion polls showed that 49.9% of the Russian population supported the idea of restoring the Soviet anthem (Newsru, 2000). Boris Yeltsin publicly opposed the return of the Soviet anthem. ‘I am categorically against the return of the USSR anthem as a state anthem. One doesn’t joke about such things,’ he said on 8 December 2000 in an interview (Kommersant, 2007).

In Vitaly Mansky’s documentary ‘Putin’s Witnesses,’ which is based on archival footage of the filming of an election film about Putin in 2000, the Russian president explains the need to bring back the Soviet anthem as follows:

The return of the anthem, the old melody, creates additional advantages for a person involved in politics in terms of increasing the rating, or, more precisely, in terms of increasing public confidence. This is necessary in order to do something based on the trust of the population. […] It was very important to feel that the overwhelming majority of the population has a certain nostalgia – it was impossible to deprive them of everything. […] Why, listening to Aleksandrov’s music, can we not think about the camps, but about the greatness and victory in the
Second World War. Why should we compare this music with the worst aspects of life during the Soviet period? (Current Time, 2018)

Hence, the increased appeal to the symbols of the Soviet past since Vladimir Putin came to power was initially meant as part of the efforts to influence public opinion and electoral processes. However, behind these processes, one can see deeper causes and consequences. According to Platt (2013, p. 465), the renovation of the Soviet anthem is ‘one of the memory projects that initiated the new configuration of recent history as a story of continuity in the Russian Federation’; these projects ‘may well be reactionary – but that does not mean that the projects are nostalgic in any well-defined sense of this term’ and might better be termed retro. Platt suggests that ‘Soviet retro’ ‘describes the revival or continuation of traditions that appear never to have been lost, rather than the quixotic overcoming of the deleterious effects of time and the total disjunction of collapse associated with post-socialist nostalgia’ (ibid., p. 464) (see also Goralik, 2007: ‘The influence of “Soviet retro” is not solely or even primarily fueled by nostalgia for the Soviet past, but rather by its unexpected consistency with the present’). This assertion is also expressed by Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004, p. 503), who claim that ‘nostalgic language does not seem adequate for describing the mechanism of such practices as the renovation of the Soviet anthem, ‘since they draw their power not from exploiting popular attachment to a particular historical era, but rather from lumping all historical referents – socialist and earlier – together in an effort to achieve an unproblematic historical legitimacy.’

This approach implied building an eclectic heroic narrative that would bring together the glorious history of pre-revolutionary Russia and the positive memory of the Soviet period. According to Manilova (2015, p. 70), ‘instead of
solving the dilemmas that inevitably involve the construction of a holistic narrative, a course was taken towards the selective “exploitation” of historical events, phenomena and figures corresponding to a specific context’ (see also Fedor, Lewis, Zhurzhenko, 2017 and Vasilkov’s (2000) discussion about what he calls ‘Putin’s doctrine of total succession’). In other words, the current Russian government, using the complex, multi-component history in its interests, simplifies it, combines the Soviet past with the Russian imperial past, and excludes everything that falls outside the framework of the heroic experience.

As Miller (2012, p. 331) points out, the main drawback was that this approach was initially built on ‘silence about problems and responsibilities.’ The state often employs the Russian Orthodox Church’s concept of memory of Stalinist repressions, which emphasises ‘reconciliation’ by balancing crimes with achievements and avoiding discussion of criminal responsibility (see Dorman, 2010; Koposov, 2011; Rousselet, 2013; Kolesnikov, 2017; Malinova, 2018; Shkarovsky 2021 for more details about the ROC’s influence on politics of memory in Russia). For example, on 4 November 2015, at the opening of the exhibition ‘My Story. XX century. 1914–1945. From great upheavals to the Great Victory,’ organised on the initiative of the Patriarchal Council for Culture, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow (2015) said the following:

We know that the 1930s were also difficult – a lot of blood, a lot of injustice, and all this should never leave our memory since this suffering cannot be minimised. However, there would not have been modern Russia if it had not been for the feat of previous generations, who in the 1920s and 1930s did not just plough the land – although this is very important – but created industry, science, and the country’s defence power. The success of this or that state leader, who stood at the origins of the revival and modernisation of the country, cannot be questioned, even if this leader distinguished himself with atrocities.
Two years later, on 30 October 2017, the Wall of Grief Memorial to the Victims of Political Repression was opened on Sakharov Avenue in Moscow. In this regard, Vladimir Putin said:

The opening of the monument is especially important in the year of the 100th anniversary of the revolution. I hope that this date will be perceived by our society as drawing a line under the dramatic events that divided the country and the people, will become a symbol of overcoming this split, a symbol of mutual forgiveness and acceptance of national history as it is – with its great victories and tragic pages. (Interfax, 2017)

It is symptomatic that the president chose to remain silent about the fact that 2017 was not only the anniversary of the revolution but also the 80th anniversary of the Great Terror. At the same time, it is evident that the accentuation of the ‘reconciliation’ motive coincides with the discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The concept of reconciliation is demonstrated in the ongoing debate in Russian society over the burial of Vladimir Lenin’s body. According to a 2017 poll by the Levada Center, 41% of respondents favoured removing Lenin’s body from the Mausoleum, 42% believed it should remain, and 18% were uncertain (Levada Center, 2021a). This issue has been a subject of debate for decades within the Russian Orthodox Church. In 2011, Vsevolod Chaplin, the chairman of the Synodal Department for the Cooperation of Church and Society of the Moscow Patriarchate, stated that ‘when discussing the topic of burial, it is important to consider the views of different groups in society and not take any actions that may cause division and conflict’ (BBC, 2011). This sentiment was echoed by Vladimir Putin in 2010, who also held a similar viewpoint (ibid.).

One of the striking examples of a merger of the Russian Orthodox
Church’s interests with the state’s promotion of a heroic historical narrative is the Main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces that was opened in the Military Patriotic Park Patriot on 9 May 2020. The park, which opened in 2015, features objects related to the ‘heroic past’ of the Soviet army, a new exhibit dedicated to the conflict in Syria, and various other educational, recreational, and cultural items.

The cathedral was decorated with images associated with significant events and personalities in the history of the Russian state, for instance, the images of Alexander Nevsky and Dmitri Donskoi. The project initially included the installation of a mosaic panel titled ‘The Bloodless Annexation of Crimea in 2014’ which featured Vladimir Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov and other modern Russian politicians. It also had a mosaic panel with the inscription ‘Crimea is ours’ and another one dedicated to the victory of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War with an image of Joseph Stalin (Meduza, 2020). Due to mixed public reactions, the mosaic was removed and placed in storage in the park’s museum.

Many symbols related to the Great Patriotic War were used in the design and construction of the main Cathedral of the Russian Armed Forces. For example, the height of the belfry is 75 metres since the opening of the temple is timed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the Victory. The height of the small dome is 14.18 metres – signifying the 1418 days and nights that the war lasted. There are also more encrypted numbers – the diameter of the drum of the central dome with eight windows (19.45 metres), and the diameter of the dome itself (22.43 metres) means the time and date when the act of unconditional surrender of Germany was signed – on 8 May 1945, 22 hours
43 minutes. The prominence of World War II symbolism in this temple is not coincidental because the myth of WWII, which has become a ‘founding myth’ of contemporary Russia, provides an ideal foundation for a reconciliatory and hereditary concept of historical memory. According to Weiss-Wendt and Adler (2021 p. 151), this myth ‘helps center the collective memory of the multifaceted Soviet experience on one congratulatory focal point, glossing over Stalinist crimes and cementing the new state-centred patriotism and nationalist consensus the Putin government has been cultivating.’ Within the scope of our research, it is necessary to delve more specifically into how the myth of World War II can be used to the Kremlin’s advantage, particularly in terms of foreign policy, as it carries a potential threat to the Latvian state.

3.4. Contested memories and instrumentalisation of the narrative of World War II

In the 2000s, the myth of victory in the Great Patriotic War became the foundation of Russia’s historical policy, which in turn led to the escalation of memory wars in post-communist countries of Eastern Europe (see Gudkov, 2005; Mijnssen, 2009; Koposov, 2011, 2021, 2021a; Zhurzhenko, 2011; Wood, 2011; Khapaeva, 2016; Polegkyi 2016; Kolesnikov, 2016; Manilova, 2017; Barash, 2017; Hicks, 2017; Domańska, 2019). As pointed out by Zhurzhenko (2017, p. 90), ‘post-Soviet Russian memory politics, not unlike those of the Soviet Union, have an important geopolitical and thus transnational dimension,’ contemporary Russia ‘draws its identity as a European great power from its historical contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany and the liberation of Europe.’ According to Weiss-Wendt and Adler
The mythologisation of the Soviet victory over Nazism brings with it [...] a self-righteous triumphalism and messianism (i.e., Russia as the only true victor that liberated Europe from Nazism) that are relentlessly held up to the countries of the former Socialist bloc that have less favourable memories of the Soviet era.

In 2005, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, the contours of a new narrative of military memory were outlined, shifting the emphasis towards the memory of the Victory over Nazi Germany and the idea of global power. Wood (2011, p. 174) claims that ‘by making World War II the central historical event of the twentieth century, Putin and his handlers have chosen an event of mythic proportions that underlines the unity and coherence of the nation, gives it legitimacy and status as a world power.’ This idea is realised symbolically through the increased role that military parades acquired at the beginning of Putin’s presidency. In the summer of 2000, Putin created a special Victory Committee tasked with developing a strategy for celebrating the 60th anniversary of Victory Day. At the invitation of the presidential administration, world leaders from the countries that had taken part in the Second World War, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, arrived in Moscow on 9 May 2005. Thus, the event acquired a large-scale international political significance.

The parade on 9 May, also in 2008, turned out to be especially large-scale. As Putin himself stated: ‘For the first time in many years, military hardware will be involved in the parade. This is not sabre-rattling. [...] This is a simple display of our growing defence capability, the fact that we are now able to protect our citizens, our country and our riches, which we have in great
quantity’ (Felgenhauer, 2008). The 2008 parade was also the most expensive since the collapse of the USSR; for the first time in 18 years, 111 units of military equipment were presented (in 2010, its number would grow to 161 units), while for the first time in the history of Russia, including the Soviet period, foreign military units took part in the parade (Sborov, 2011). Certainly, all this meant a demonstration of Russia’s return to great global power status.

According to Koposov (2011, p. 129), the myth of the Great Patriotic War ‘addresses several tasks at once: it unites the people and forms the basis of their identity, shows the need for strong power and the importance of power structures, emphasises the role of Russia in the victory over fascism and thereby substantiates its right to geopolitical claims and gives the possibility of an expression of aggressive feelings concerning external and internal enemies.’ Furthermore, Sherlock (2007, pp. 162–63) claims that the mythology of the Great Patriotic War has become a favoured tool of Russia’s power structures, which use it to validate their legitimacy and wage war against liberalism. This conclusion is confirmed by analysing recent Russian legislation related to memory policy.

In 2014, the law against the ‘Rehabilitation of Nazism’ was adopted in Russia. In fact, the law punishes the ‘incorrect’ interpretation of the role of the Soviet Union in World War II and the military history of Russia as a whole (The Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, Article 354.1, 2014). This law, among other things, prohibits ‘the dissemination of information expressing obvious disrespect to society about the days of military glory and memorable dates of Russia associated with the defence of the Fatherland’ and the dissemination of ‘knowingly false information about the activities of the USSR.
during the Second World War’ (ibid.). Russian authorities have consistently expanded the scope of the law, and in 2021, new amendments came into effect that further strengthened punishment to up to five years imprisonment. Russian civil society and international organisations have repeatedly condemned this law due to the suppression of political and critical statements on historical issues (FIDH, 2021). At the same time, according to some experts, the authorities use the law to fight the opposition; the recent tightening amendments are linked to the criminal case against Alexei Navalny, who was convicted of insulting a war veteran (Krasheninnikov, 2021). From 2015 to 2019, 25 convictions were handed down under article 354.1, 6 convictions were handed down in 2020, and in 2021 the number of convictions increased sharply, with 21 people being sentenced (the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, 2022). In July 2021, a new edition of the ‘Law on the Immortalisation of the Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945’ was also adopted, which prohibits the identification of the role of the USSR and Nazi Germany, and in April 2022, Vladimir Putin signed a law on fines for equating the USSR and Nazi Germany (Federal Law of the Russian Federation, 2021; Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses, Article 13.48, 2022).

On 4 July 2021, after the all-Russian vote, amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation entered into force. The new constitution has a block of amendments related to the powers of the authorities. The most sensational of them is the resetting of the presidential terms, which theoretically allows Putin to remain in power until 2036. Nevertheless, the amendment related to the ‘feat of the Fatherland’ deserves special attention:
‘It is proclaimed that the Russian Federation safeguards the historical truth and honours the feat of the defenders of the Fatherland. Denigrating the feat of the people who defended the Fatherland shall not be permitted’ (Kremlin 2020, p. 25). This amendment was put forward by Senator Alexei Pushkov, who told the president that recently there had been more attempts to rewrite the history of World War II and create ‘an alternative history in which the role of the USSR in victory will be devalued’ (Interfax, 2020a). ‘I share your position, of course. You could not fail to notice it. I speak about it publicly all the time. Attempts to rewrite history are harmful and, of course, have a certain subtext,’ was how Putin responded to the proposal (Interfax, 2020b).

The amendments to the constitution, like laws mentioned above, instrumentalise the memory of World War II and can be seen as part of the intentional mythologisation of the Soviet past by the Russian state. Importantly, the use of the war myth is beneficial to Vladimir Putin’s personalist rule for solving domestic political problems, including the symbolic unification of the nation, the political mobilisation of the population and increasing presidential approval ratings as well as for promoting his geopolitical interests (see Sokolov, 2009; Kolesnikov, 2020; Andriukaitis, 2020). It is no coincidence that since 2014, the Russian state has actively utilised this myth. It is evident that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 played a significant role in patriotic mobilisation and caused an emotional surge in Russians, accompanied by Russian national imperial pride (see also Levada Center, 2014 for the explanation of how the annexation of Crimea influenced Putin’s approval rating). At the same time, the Russo-Ukrainian War exposed unresolved
issues of Russia’s past. Historian Ivan Kurilla characterises the total appeal to
the past in Russia since the second half of the 2010s as follows:

The abrupt change in the country’s policy [after the annexation of
Crimea] led to a change in the historical perception of many people, for
whom it turned out that the most logical language for describing what
was happening was the language of the Soviet Union during Stalin’s
time. It was then that the Soviet Union expanded its territory, which was
a positive process in interpreting that time. This has yet to happen since
Stalin’s time. It turns out that the expansion of the country, the
annexation of Crimea turned out to be an impetus for a large part of
Russians to return to some kind of ideological framework, a view of the
world, which we know from the Soviet Union of the middle of the XX
century. (Shimov, 2016)

The justification for the use of the myth of the Great Patriotic War in this
context is not only that it is adequate for describing contemporary reality but
also that it is convenient for covering up current crimes, including territorial
conquest. For example, Koposov (2011, p. 164) claims that this myth promotes
the ‘peace-loving character of Soviet and Russian foreign policy and protects
the state from accusations of instigating war, committing violence perpetrated
by the Red Army on “liberated territories”, and occupying Eastern Europe. It
emphasises Russia’s role in the victory over fascism and justifies its right to
“recognition” (and, in an extreme version, to conquered territories).’ In turn,
according to Khapaeva (2016, p. 65), the basis of the myth of war is that ‘the
Soviet Union and the Russian nation are presented as the messianic nation,
that sacrificed itself for the happiness of mankind,’ ‘any crimes committed in
the name of this global victory are considered justified.’

Since 2014, the widespread use of ‘victorious’ iconography and
symbolism related to the Great Patriotic War has taken on a totalising
character. At the same time, the Russian military intervention in Ukraine and
the annexation of Crimea marked a turning point for the strengthening of
Latvian and other border countries’ concerns about the threat posed by Russia’s foreign policy course. There have been several studies that note how Russian state media began to actively utilise imagery connected to the mythology of World War II to demonise the authorities in Ukraine (see Polegkyi, 2016; Kravchenko, 2016; Fedor, Lewis and Zhurzhenko, 2017; Domańska, 2019; Kozachenko, 2019; Koposov, 2021, 2021a). In particular, the increased focus on the ‘rehabilitation of Nazism in Ukraine and other countries in Europe’ has become particularly noticeable in Russian political discourse. For instance, in his Crimean speech on 18 March 2014, Vladimir Putin accused the government of Ukraine of ‘neo-Nazism, Russophobia and anti-Semitism’ (Kremlin, 2014). According to Meister (2016, p. 15), this speech demonstrates that ‘the Russian state sees itself as a “protecting power” concerning its compatriots abroad, which justifies a Russian intervention, hybrid or conventional, in any state with Russian minorities’.

It should be mentioned that the so-called concept of the ‘Russian world’ (Russkiy mir) has acquired a unique role in Russian foreign policy. Without legal consequences, Russia extends this concept to all Russian-speakers worldwide, and to all ethnic Russians who, after 1991, found themselves outside the Russian Federation. In addition, the ‘compatriot diasporas are regarded as a potential supporting force for Russia’s foreign policy and as a tool for raising the status of the Russian language and culture’ (Pelnēns, 2010, p. 22). The foundations of the concept of the ‘Russian world’ were laid in the early 1990s, particularly in the so-called ‘Karaganov Doctrine’ (Karaganov, 1992). Later, in 2008, the goal ‘to provide comprehensive protection of the rights and legitimate interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad’ was
declared by the president of the Russian Federation in the ‘Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation’ (Kremlin, 2008). In 2017, in an interview with the director Oliver Stone, Putin explained why back in 2005, he called the collapse of the USSR the biggest catastrophe of the twentieth century: ‘I have often heard criticism in my address that I regret the collapse of the Soviet Union. First, and most importantly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 25 million Russian people ended up abroad in one night, and this is really one of the biggest catastrophes of the 20th century’ (RIA Novosti, 2017).

Thus, in Putin’s rhetoric, the narrative of the collapse of the USSR has not only been associated with Russia’s domestic political agenda and the desire to boost political ratings but also with the justification of Russia’s foreign policy claims. According to Zhurzhenko (2017, p. 91), after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with post-Soviet states moving towards the EU and NATO, ‘Moscow started to use their Russian minorities and the memory of the Second World War as leverage against the new national elites, trying to compromise them as ‘fascists’ and ‘Nazi collaborators.’

The use of the ‘denazification’ pretext was taken to a new level by Russian President Vladimir Putin when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, an event which has so far resulted in thousands of civilian casualties, including the deaths of at least two Holocaust survivors (Pannett, 2022; Savitski, 2022). These events look like the apotheosis of Putin’s accusations against European governments in the rehabilitation of Nazism, which have consistently and steadily continued over the past few years. As noted in the report ‘Vladimir Putin’s Historical Disinformation’ by the U.S. Department of State (2022), ‘Today, through speeches and articles, Putin, along with his disinformation and
propaganda ecosystem, invokes World War II imagery to justify expanding his autocratic powers at home and Russia’s aggression towards neighboring countries’ democratic and Euro-Atlantic connections and aspirations.’ Furthermore, accusing neighbouring countries of sympathising with Nazism is beneficial for President Putin to unite the Russian nation around the idea of fighting an external enemy under the pretext of an understandable and emotionally charged idea of fighting fascism (Andriukaitis, 2020; Kolesnikov, 2020).

The researchers draw attention to the fundamental role played by the president of the Russian Federation in the formation of the Russian policy of memory and the official historical concept, taking on the role of the main interpreter of history in the country (Kurilla, 2014; Kolesnikov, 2020). Putin’s increased instrumentalisation of the narrative about ‘the glorification of Nazism in Europe’ developed within the broader framework of the anti-Western confrontation. This narrative is most clearly manifested in the public speeches and historical articles of Vladimir Putin in recent years, where he is mainly proclaiming Russia as a fighter for the real truth about the Second World War and accusing the West of hypocrisy, rewriting history and ‘Russophobia’ (see, for instance, Putin, 2020; 2020a; Kremlin, 2021). It is not a coincidence that on 24 February, 2022, Vladimir Putin began his speech by discussing the eastward expansion of the NATO bloc, calling the United States an ‘empire of lies’ and accusing it of hypocrisy; but then, speaking of Ukraine, he moved on to the imagery and language of the Second World War, using the terms ‘Nazism’ and ‘genocide’ (Kremlin, 2022).

The invasion of Ukraine was unequivocally condemned by the world
community, while historians expressed separate criticism regarding the use of imagery of the Second World War to justify the criminal actions of the Russian president. Statement on the War in Ukraine by Scholars of Genocide, Nazism and World War II claimed: ‘We strongly reject the Russian government’s cynical abuse of the term genocide, the memory of World War II and the Holocaust, and the equation of the Ukrainian state with the Nazi regime to justify its unprovoked aggression. This rhetoric is factually wrong, morally repugnant and deeply offensive to the memory of millions of victims of Nazism and those who courageously fought against it’ (Jewish Journal, 2022). In turn, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum declared: ‘In justifying this attack, Vladimir Putin has misrepresented and misappropriated Holocaust history by claiming falsely that democratic Ukraine needs to be “denazified.” Equally groundless and egregious are his claims that Ukrainian authorities are committing “genocide” as a justification for the invasion of Ukraine’ (The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2022). Historian Timothy Snyder believes that ‘Putin’s Russian regime talks of “Nazis” not because it opposes the extreme right, which it most certainly does not, but as a rhetorical device to justify unprovoked war’ (Snyder, 2022). Snyder, in particular, refers to Timofey Sergeytsev’s handbook ‘What Russia Should Do with Ukraine’, published by the Russian state-owned news agency ‘RIA Novosti’ on 3 April 2022; in this handbook, ‘denazification’ means ‘de-Ukrainisation’, ‘Nazism’ means ‘movement for independence of Ukraine’, and ‘Ukrainian Nazis’ are accused of ‘genocide of the Russian people’ (RIA Novosti, 2022b). Thus, the semantics of the word ‘Nazism’ in this case is fundamentally different from the
generally accepted one and implies ‘Ukrainian identity,’ while genocide replaces the so-called ‘Russophobia.’

According to the International Centre for Defence and Security, misrepresentation and misusing of the Holocaust is one of the main activities of the Kremlin’s propaganda machinery: ‘The core idea is aimed simultaneously at two points: strengthening Russia’s “undisputable” contribution to defeating the Nazi regime (thereby saving many Jewish lives in Eastern Europe) and highlighting, exaggerating and interconnecting various cases of collaboration among the population in the Nazi-occupied territories (and potentially implicating some nations and whole countries in assisting the Holocaust). Moreover, by informationally misusing the Holocaust tragedy, the Kremlin is attempting... to align anti-Semitism with present-day “Russophobia”’ (Teperik, 2020). Noteworthy is the comment of the researcher of historical memory Izabella Tabarovsky:

The Kremlin has carefully constructed its historical narratives in such a way as to assign the darkest parts of shared Soviet heritage to its former vassals, while annexing the positive ones to itself... Putin’s divisions into ‘us’ – the Russians who fought the Nazis and were the Nazis’ victims – and ‘them’ – all the others who collaborated – is a crude and self-serving simplification. (Tabarovsky, 2020)

As Bērziņš (2015, p. 403) points out, in Latvia, tendentious interpretations of the events of the Second World War by the Russian Federation and various actors under its informational influence are especially noticeable; at the centre of these interpretations is the narrative of the crimes of ‘Latvian fascists’ and, in particular, of holding them responsible for the Holocaust. It is necessary to delve more deeply into how the narrative, according to which history was being revised in the Baltic countries and the
role of local Nazi collaborators in the Holocaust was hushed up, influenced the
memory conflict between Latvia and the Russian Federation.

According to the Latvian Foreign Ministry, ‘the rhetoric of everyday
manifestations of Nazism in Latvia and the Baltic countries has been voiced
by Russian officials for years. This is an element of the information war that
Russia is waging with the Baltic countries and other democracies’ (UNN,
2014). For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
regularly publishes analytical documents dedicated to the ‘Nazification’ of
Latvia and the distortion of history by the Latvian state. For example, a report
by the Russian Foreign Ministry called Neo-Nazism: a dangerous challenge to
human rights, democracy and the rule of law stating that ‘the falsification of
history in Latvia is employed as an intentional policy’ (The Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2015, p. 63). In turn, the report Regarding
the Situation of the Glorification of Nazism and the Spread of Neo-Nazi
and Other Practices that Contribute to Fuelling Contemporary Forms of Racism,
Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance stated: ‘The
leadership of the Republic of Latvia continues to pursue a consistent course
of revision of the history and results of the Second World War, as well as the
whitewashing and protection of former Waffen-SS Legionnaires and Nazi
collaborators, who are elevated to the rank of participants in the “national
liberation movement”’ (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian
Federation, 2020). The topic of recognition of Latvian legionnaires as criminals
and their participation in the Holocaust has received wide coverage in
academic research (see. Levin, 1990; Vestermanis, 1996; Ezergailis, 1999;
Dribins, Gūtmanis and Vestermanis, 2001; Caune, Stranga and Vestermanis,
official position of the Latvian state concerning the Latvian legionnaires, back in 1998, the Saeima of Latvia adopted the ‘Declaration on the Latvian Legionnaires in the Second World War,’ which reads in particular:

While forced service in the armed forces of the USSR is not considered an expression of support for Stalin’s bloody regime, some political demagogues interpret the forced service of Latvian legionnaires who fought in the German armed forces as an expression of support for the German Fascist regime, regardless of the fact that Latvian citizens had no say on the inclusion of the Latvian Legion in the Waffen SS. Indeed, some Latvian citizens did join the Latvian Legion voluntarily; however, they did so because in 1940–1941, the USSR committed genocide in Latvia... Some Latvian citizens believed that by joining the Legion they were protecting themselves and their families against new mass repressions by the USSR, which actually did occur later... They never took part in Hitler’s punitive acts against peaceful inhabitants. Just like the Finnish army, the Latvian Legion did not fight against the anti-Hitler coalition; it fought against one of its members – the USSR, which was an aggressor in relation to Finland and Latvia... Therefore, in 1946, the Western allies – namely, the United States, Great Britain and France – clarified the issue of Latvian and Estonian legionnaires and granted them the status of political refugees. In 1950, the representative office of the United States repeatedly declared that ‘The Baltic Waffen-SS Units (Baltic Legions) are to be considered as separate and distinct in purpose, ideology, activities, and qualifications for membership from the German SS.’ (Saeima, 1998a)

The Latvian Foreign Ministry, in turn, states that ‘In its attitude towards legionnaires, the Latvian state strictly proceeds from well-known principles – the principle unequivocally voiced in Nuremberg that soldiers conscripted by force from occupied countries should not be included in the number of participants in criminal organisations of the SS’ (NEWSru, 2004; see also Nollendorfs and Neiburgs, 2004 for the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia regarding The Latvian Auxiliary Police Battalions’ and the Latvian Legion’s involvement in the Holocaust).

In September 2019, the Minister of Defence of Latvia, Artis Pabriks, paid tribute to the memory of the members of the Latvian Legion who fell in the
Battles of More and stated: ‘Our duty is to honour these patriots of Latvia to the depths of our souls... Latvian legionnaires are the pride of the Latvian people and state’ (The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, 2019). Immediately after this, the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation sent an appeal to the UN Secretary-General about the need to convene a meeting on the facts of the rehabilitation of Nazism and fascism in the European countries. In turn, the deputy of the European Parliament from Latvia, Inese Vaidere, in July 2021, stated, ‘Equalising legionnaires with the SS troops is Soviet propaganda... And this disinformation is still being actively spread by Russia in order to denigrate Latvia’ (Eurasia Expert, 2021).

The participation of Latvian officials in the commemoration of Latvian legionnaires is one of the most controversial issues and is actively used by Russian officials to substantiate the thesis of the rehabilitation of Nazism at the state level. The most famous commemorative event is 16 March, the unofficial Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires. On 16 March, 1944, the 15th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS and the 19th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS for the first time jointly participated in hostilities against the Soviet army (see Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011 for more on the history of this day and the emergence of the commemoration tradition in the Latvian emigre environment, and then in independent Latvia). In 1998-1999 this day was the official memorial day of the Latvian state (Saeima, 1998). The condemnation of the commemoration of legionnaires at that moment was expressed not only by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation but also by the governments of Europe. For example, sharp criticism was expressed by German Chancellor Helmut Kohl (Kangeris, 1999; Rozenšteine et al., 2011).
In 2012, The Council of Europe’s Commission against Racism and Intolerance published a report which claimed that ‘ECRI cannot but express concern about any attempt to justify fighting in the Waffen SS and collaborating with the Nazis, as it risks fuelling racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance’ (The Council of Europe’s Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2012). In 2014, Richard Howitt, European Parliament Spokesperson on Human Rights, issued a statement condemning the commemorations on 16 March (Howitt, 2014). In turn, the Jewish community of Latvia has also been consistently opposed to the marches on 16 March for many years (Sukharenko, 2011).

In an official statement, the National Alliance ‘All For Latvia!’ – ‘For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK’ claimed to be the only party that officially honours Latvian legionnaires, including high-ranking officials, despite disapproval from the ruling elite (National Alliance, 2019). They have also repeatedly proposed that 16 March be recognised as an official commemorative day. However, the party’s nationalist views on legionnaires have become increasingly marginalised since the 2000s, and they do not have significant support among the broader Latvian political elite. As noted by Rozenšteine et al. (2011, p. 151), the period before Latvia’s accession to the EU in 2004 was accompanied by the integration of Latvia into the space of European history. It meant the rejection of the discourse about the Latvian legionnaires as historical heroes created in the mid-1990s, as well as the condemnation of cooperation with the Nazi regime. In 2000, the Latvian legislation on holidays and commemorative dates was amended, and 16 March was excluded from the list of official commemorative dates (Saeima,
The official position of the Latvian government regarding 16 March, announced in 2019, is as follows:

The State of Latvia has been consistent in condemning the crimes against humanity committed by both totalitarian regimes [those of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany] – Latvia denounces the Holocaust and mourns its victims... 16 March is not an official remembrance day, and people, on their own private initiative, pay their respects to the fallen soldiers. The senior officials and members of the government do not participate in those commemorative gatherings in the centre of Latvia’s capital city (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2019)

This ‘disapproving attitude of the Latvian ruling elite’ towards the 16 March commemoration is nevertheless ignored by the Russian official discourse, as shown above. Similarly, the Russian official discourse chose not to notice the condemnation at the state level of the production of the musical drama ‘Cukurs. Herberts Cukurs,’ which caused a scandal in 2014. It is worth dwelling on this case in more detail since it is a very revealing.

In 2006, the Jewish community had already expressed concern about the glorification in the public space of Latvia of Herberts Cukurs (a Latvian pilot who joined the so-called Arajs Kommando during the Second World War, which participated in the mass extermination of Jews, for more details see Ezergailis, 1988, 1996; Strods, 2000; Nollendorfs and Neiburgs, 2004; Ruks, 2014); at that time the President of Latvia Vaira Vike-Freiberga expressed her official support to the critical attitude of the Jewish community towards Cukurs’s name popularisation, and so did Edgars Rinkevichs, the Head of The Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Latvian News, 2014). In 2014, Representatives of the Jewish community condemned the musical dedicated to Cukurs (Latvijas Avīze, 2014). The day before the musical’s premiere, Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs noted that the performance about
Cukurs deserves condemnation: ‘Participation in the Arajs Kommando is unworthy of glorification. Let the audience judge for themselves, but the government’s position is such that it is bad form’ (Latvijas Avīze, 2014). However, despite this official condemnation by the Latvian authorities, on the same day, a comment by Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Foreign Ministry’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, was published, expressing concern about the ‘lack of reaction from the official authorities of Latvia, with whose tacit consent the scandalous the musical is planned to be shown on 16 October in Riga’ (Dolgov, 2014). The controversy surrounding the musical about Cukurs highlights that depicting him as a hero and minimising his war crimes is not widely accepted in Latvia. This perspective is only embraced by a relatively small group of radical nationalists and is considered marginalised in the public sphere. While representatives of mainstream ideological positions in Latvia, such as liberalism and social democracy, may have internal divisions on various issues related to 20th-century history, they do express consistent views condemning the war crimes committed by Cukurs and denouncing any glorification of him as unacceptable. When Russian officials make statements like Dolgov’s, they obscure the distinctions between various ideological positions in Latvia and wrongly attribute marginal nationalist views to the entire Latvian political establishment.

At the same time, returning to the official position of the Latvian state regarding Nazi collaborationism, it should be noted that along with condemning, for example, the glorification of Herberts Cukurs as a member of the Arajs Kommando involved in the massacres of Jews, a consistent course is being pursued to deny the collective guilt of the Latvian soldiers who joined
into the German armed forces. Indicative in this regard is the case of the monument ‘Latvian Beehive for Freedom,’ installed in September 2018 in the Belgian city of Zedelgem by the Zedelheim Municipal Council and the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. In 1945-1946, a prisoner of war camp was located at Zedelgem, where about 11,700 Latvian soldiers who fought on the side of Nazi Germany were kept (Latvijas Okupācijas muzejs, 2021). In 2021, heated discussions around this monument were initiated by Wilfred Burie, President of the Belgians Remember Them Association (Paris Match Belgique, 2021; The Brussels Times, 2021a, 2021b; Meerman, 2021; Binet, 2022; The Belgians Remember Them, 2022). It is notable that in 2020 Burie was awarded the honorary distinction by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, while the association cooperates with the Russian Embassy in Belgium (The Belgians Remember Them Association, 2020).

In response to these discussions, the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia issued an official statement: ‘Most of the Latvian soldiers were forced to enter the German army ranks... There is no evidence to suggest that Zedelgem prisoners were, in general, complicit in the crimes of war or genocide... Attributing any collective guilt to the Latvian soldiers is wrong.’ (Radovics, 2021). In December 2021, a group of 15 international historians, including two experts from Latvia, Didzis Bērziņš and Mārtiņš Kaprans, made an expert assessment of the memorial and concluded that it was ‘inappropriate’ (The Brussels Times, 2021a). Sharp criticism of the monument from the Russian Federation was also expressed at the meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in 2022, as well as by Maria Zakharova, the spokeswoman in Russia’s foreign ministry, and in numerous publications in the Russian media (The
In May 2022, the Municipality of Zedelgem informed the Occupation Museum about the monument’s demolition, after which the Ambassador of Latvia to Belgium, Andris Ražans, immediately sent a note of protest to the Belgian Foreign Ministry (Puķe and Tomsone, 2022). However, on 31 March 2022, the monument was demolished. The Latvian Foreign Minister suggested that the municipality of Zedelgem may have faced powerful disinformation of various origins locally and internationally when non-democratic and aggressive regimes launched smear campaigns against democratic European countries for their geopolitical purposes (ibid.).

Summarising the above examples dedicated to the memory of Latvians who joined the German army during World War II, one can conclude that the official Latvian discourse does not agree that it is possible to equate the interpretation of them as victims with the justification of Nazi crimes. Thus, on the one hand, participation in Nazi crimes against the civilian population is unequivocally condemned by the top leadership of Latvia. However, on the other hand, the commemoration of the Latvian legionnaires who died during the Second World War is supported by the Latvian government, while being the subject of criticism from various parties. At the same time, the Russian Federation is using with all its might a narrative of glorifying Nazism directly at the highest state levels in the Baltic countries.

One of the most effective tools for disseminating this narrative is the Historical Memory Foundation’s efforts, which deserve special mention. According to the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it forms a ‘part of a
systematic and targeted information campaign against the Baltic states,’ although aimed mainly at the inhabitants of Russia, but spreading beyond its borders through media reports (Viksne, 2021). The leaders of the Historical Memory Foundation, Alexander Dyukov and Vladimir Siminidey, have been recognised as persona non grata in Latvia since 2012 (The Constitution Protection Bureau of Latvia, 2019, p. 23). According to the Constitution Protection Bureau of Latvia 2019 public report, ‘The Kremlin directly and indirectly finances a series of pseudoacademic organisations and studies producing various publications and videos supporting narratives of historical memory favourable to the Kremlin. The Historical Memory Foundation, for instance, specialises in working on the Baltic States... [Alexander Dyukov, Vladimir Siminidey and their co-author, a Member of the Latvian Parliament, Nikolai Kabanov,] are also interviewed by Russian propaganda media as supposed experts in Baltic history, enabling them to reach a significant audience’ (ibid.)

Notable, for example, is the exhibition ‘Thirty years of independence of the Baltic states. Political prisoners. Censorship. Neo-Nazism’ organised by the Historical Memory Foundation and held in the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation in 2019. The Latvian State Security Service commented on the exhibition as follows: ‘This exhibition can be seen as another activity of the Kremlin’s information influence, aimed at supporting the Russian public of the ruling regime, and, at the same time, encouraging mistrust towards the European Union and NATO, which the Baltic countries have joined. The exhibition is also being used to spread other traditional Kremlin propaganda
messages, such as alleged Russophobia in the Baltic states, the resurgence of Nazism, and persistent violations of the rights of Russians' (Viksne, 2021).

Another telling example is the foundation’s 2021 report ‘Executioners in Retirement: Latvian Nazi Criminals in the Service of the CIA,’ focusing mainly on the Zhestyanaya Gorka massacre investigation (Dyukov and Simindey, 2021). From the most eloquent title of this report, one can indirectly conclude that the topic of Nazi collaborationism is exploited by being placed into a broader canvas of the binary opposition of Russia and the hostile West. Familiarisation with the contents of this report as a whole confirms this preliminary assumption. The Zhestyanaya Gorka massacre attracted attention in 2019 when archaeologists discovered previously unknown burials of over 500 people from the time of the Nazi occupation in the Novgorod region, upon which the FSB department for the Novgorod region opened a criminal case (in the 1940s, more than 2,600 burials were discovered at this site) (RIA Novosti, 2022c). In May 2019, the Investigative Committee of Russia opened a case over the genocide, and, in August 2019, the FSB Department for the Novgorod region disclosed a list of ‘karateli’ (punishers, the members of the Nazi troops) who, during the Great Patriotic War, destroyed the civilian population in the village of Zhestyanaya Gorka; 19 people appear in the document, all of them natives or residents of the Latvian SSR (Sputnik, 2019e). The report by Dyukov and Simindey (2021, p. 26), in turn, claims that among those listed were ‘servicemen of the Latvian SS Legion and the members of the veteran organisation Daugavas Vanagi, who later collaborated with the CIA.’ The Russian media also picked up on this case, interpreting it provocatively (see, for example, the news article dated 15 March 2021, ‘The Zhestyanaya Gorka
Tragedy: why in Russia they mourn, and, in Latvia, they honour the karateli who killed thousands of civilians in the Novgorod region’ (LIFE, 2021).

In January 2022, the Historical Memory Foundation published another ‘investigation,’ alleging that Jānis Kažociņš, adviser to the President of Latvia Egils Levits and former head of the Latvian Constitutional Protection Bureau, is a relative of Jānis Cīrulis, who was involved in the Zhestianaya Gorka massacre (The Historical Memory Foundation, 2022a). The office of the President of Latvia commented on the publication, calling it ‘a tool of Russian propaganda, which often spread false information about Latvia,’ and also refuted ‘the data on family ties of Jānis Kažociņš in this falsified article’ (Viksne, 2022). In turn, the Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze conducted its research and came to the following conclusion: ‘The “research” disseminated by Dyukov is undoubtedly a propaganda product developed at a high professional level... Alexander Dyukov is not a historian, but a hired agent of the Kremlin, a professional liar and manipulator’ (ibid.).

As can be seen, Kremlin historical propaganda exploiting the narrative of the rehabilitation of Nazism in the Baltic countries is closely connected with the idea of discrediting the West and creating the image of an enemy. At the same time, the dissemination of this propaganda beneficial to the Russian authorities goes hand in hand with the use of international tension and open diplomatic confrontation by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID). The latter closely cooperates with the Historical Memory Foundation, whose employees regularly participate in interdepartmental meetings on history and human rights at the Russian MID (Dossier Center, 2020). In turn, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also participate in the
foundation’s events, broadcasting propaganda narratives about the ‘rehabilitation of Nazism’ in the Baltic countries in their official statements. In particular, on 17 March 2021, at the opening of the Historical Memory Foundation’s forum ‘Genocide of Soviet Peoples: The Holocaust in the Baltic States,’ Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova stated: ‘To justify the Nazi henchmen, the Latvian authorities resort, among other things, to outright lies... The participation of collaborators in the massacres of civilians in the north-western regions of Russia is a figure of silence at all’ (Izvestia, 2021).

For the Latvian state, the annexation of Crimea became a turning point for strengthening control over the dissemination of Russian media and semi-professional historical narratives about the events and period of the Second World War and subsequent Soviet occupation. The Latvian Saeima’s 2018 report Russia’s influence on the Latvian information space highlighted six main narratives that are found in Russian media content and pose a threat to information security in Latvia: ‘Revival of fascism in Latvia’; ‘Latvia voluntarily became part of the USSR’; ‘Systematic discrimination against Russian speakers in Latvia’; ‘Negative attitude towards NATO troops in Poland and the Baltic countries’; ‘Latvia is a failed state’; ‘Ukraine’s fault in the annexation of Crimea’ (Saeima, 2018, p. 20). According to the report, Russian narratives disseminated in the Latvian information space were more supported by the audience segment that regularly used Russian media (Saeima, 2018, p. 4). As the research states (ibid.), a significant part of the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking population received information from Russian media, while the level of trust in this information was much higher among Russian-speakers. Thus, according to the above research (ibid., pp. 10–11), in the period from
2015 to 2017, 63% of Latvia’s population (52% of Latvian-speakers and 82% of Russian-speakers) regularly watched TV programmes produced in Russia, while 52% of Latvian residents regularly read Russian-language news websites.

It should be mentioned that in December 2013, Vladimir Putin signed the ‘Executive order on measures to make state media more effective.’ With this order, Putin ‘gave the instruction to establish a federal state unitary enterprise, the International Information Agency Rossiya Segodnya, the main purpose of which is to provide information on Russian state policy and Russian life and society for audiences abroad’ (Kremlin, 2013). A similar task was entrusted to the news agency Sputnik, created in 2014. In the same year, another media project, Baltnews, owned by Rossiya Segodnya, began its activity, targeting the Russian-speaking audience of the Baltic countries. In 2016, Latvian authorities shut Sputnik website in the Latvian domain zone ‘.lv’ due to disinformation coverage of Ukraine; in July 2019, access to the website baltnews.lv was blocked (Latvian State Security Service, 2021). Furthermore, at the end of 2020, a criminal case was opened against seven residents of Latvia who were accused of collaborating with media outlets ‘Sputnik’ and ‘Baltnews’ (ibid.). Furthermore, during 2016–2019, the National Electronic Media Council (NEPLP) repeatedly suspended the broadcast of at least 16 Russian TV channels, citing EU sanctions and the need to protect the Latvian information environment from disinformation (LSM, 2021).

After Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the National Electronic Mass Media Council of Latvia announced a ban on broadcasting all 80 Russian TV channels operating in Latvia (NEPLP, 2022). Moreover, in
March 2022, the Saeima instructed the National Electronic Mass Media Council to block access to Russian websites that disseminated Kremlin propaganda and supported and glorified Russia’s invasion of Ukraine (Saeima 2022d). Immediately after that, 71 websites were restricted, but this list is constantly growing (NEPLP, 2022a). At the same time, journalistic investigations revealed that pro-Russian Latvian residents are finding ways to circumvent these bans, in particular, by purchasing special equipment to watch banned Russian TV channels (Nekā personīga, 2022). Moreover, there is reason to believe that Russian semi-professional historical accounts are still consumed by the population of Latvia through Internet publications – from Sputnik articles to countless documentary videos on YouTube, including, for example, on the channel of the Historical Memory Foundation (2022b).

Significantly, after 2014 the Kremlin stepped up its activities to use local Latvian organisations for historical propaganda and to disseminate falsified historical narratives. In 2015, the Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism, ‘Re:Baltica’ conducted a study on four Russian organisations – Rossotrudnichestvo, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, and the Foundation for Defence of Rights of Compatriots Abroad that ‘promote Russia’s version of the history of the 20th century’ and ‘support local NGOs who defend its policies in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania’ (Re:Baltica, 2015). The investigation by Re:Baltica reveals that ‘there are more than 40 such organisations in the Baltic states that have received at least 1.5 million euros through legal means during 2013-2015, according to the most conservative calculations.’ The Latvian Security Service (2016) claims that the goal of the Russkiy Mir Foundation (created by Vladimir
Putin in 2007, headed by Vyacheslav Molotov’s grandson, the politician and historian Vyacheslav Nikonov) is ‘strengthening the influence of Russia through the instruments of “compatriots policy,” which is one of the most significant risks for the constitutional system of Latvia.’ In turn, according to the research by the Centre for East European Policy Studies, the Russkiy Mir Foundation’s activities should be considered as ‘historical propaganda’ to spread values that are contrary to Latvian national values (it includes, in particular, creating a stereotype about the bias of Latvian historical science) (Lerhis, 2014, p. 180).

For instance, one of the main grant programmes of the Russkiy Mir Foundation was aimed at popularising the history of the ‘Russian world’. In particular, the foundation developed special teaching methods and provided grants to teachers and schools in Latvia. According to Re:Baltica’s estimates, the total amount of approved grants for the Russkiy Mir Foundation in Latvia in 2008–2012 exceeded 170,000 euros (Re:Baltica, 2015). These funds were used to organise cultural events and conferences, as well as to publish textbooks and other methodological materials which explain the events of the Great Patriotic War and the Soviet occupation in a way that benefits Russia. In 2008, a grant from the Russkiy Mir Foundation for the publication of the book *Baltic Russians: History in Cultural Monuments* was received by Aleksandrs Gapoņenko, whom the Latvian State Security Service (2020) describes as a ‘pro-Kremlin activist.’ According to Re:Baltica (2015), over 20 Latvian organisations regularly receive funding from the Russkiy Mir Foundation for various cultural and historical projects.

Furthermore, the activities of the House of Moscow (established by the
Government of Moscow in 2001 and opened in Riga in 2004) deserve special mention. The purpose of the creation of the House of Moscow is described as ‘strengthening the international authority of the Russian Federation and the Moscow Government on the territory of Latvia; promoting the development of international relations; organisation and implementation of cultural, social, informational and economic programmes to support Russian compatriots and programmes’ (Maskavas Nams, 2021). For instance, the House of Moscow in Riga promotes activities of the Historical Memory Foundation, whose leader Alexander Dyukov participated in conferences and presented his books in the House of Moscow before he was listed as persona non grata in Latvia in 2012 (Regnum, 2011).

In addition, the House of Moscow has financed local organisations, such as, the Latvian Association of Anti-Hitler Coalition Fighters (LABAK, Latvijas antihitleriskās koalīcijas cīnītāju asociācija). In 2017, LABAK received €60,955.00 from the House of Moscow and €27,140.00 in 2018. In 2019, the amount of funding received from the House of Moscow was only €3,960.00, but the organisation received funds of €56,056.00 directly from the Moscow Center for International Cooperation (formed by the Moscow City Property Department), as well as another €732,03 from the Russian Embassy in Latvia (The Register of Enterprises of the Republic of Latvia. 2021). Not only LABAK provides financial assistance to veterans of the Great Patriotic War and organises historical conferences for Russian compatriots, but also regularly speaks publicly against the ‘glorification of Nazism’ in today’s Latvia (Alinin, 2012; Sool, 2020). A notable example of LABAK activities is a controversial campaign called ‘Apologise to the veteran, Navalny’ in February 2021, which
allows us to conclude that not only ‘historical projects’ but also anti-opposition actions of the Kremlin under the pretext of protecting the memory of the Great Patriotic War, can be indirectly financed through the House of Moscow (Sputnik, 2021a; for more details about the case against the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny for libel against a veteran of the Great Patriotic War, Ignat Artemenko see Dollbaum, Lallouet and Noble, 2021).

As noted by the Latvian State Security Service (2021), in 2020, there was the increased implementation of historical policy projects by the Russian diplomatic corps in Latvia, which could be explained by the fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin declared 2020 the ‘Year of Memory and Glory’ in Russia, to preserve historical memory and to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 (Kremlin, 2019). In particular, in the geopolitical interests of Russia, a series of events was organised, to promote Russia’s claim to be the legal successor of the Soviet Union and the winner in World War II (and, accordingly, to reduce attention on the crimes of the USSR, including the occupation of Latvia and the deportation of Latvians) (ibid.).

For the Latvian state, the threats posed by the instrumentalisation of the myth of the Great Patriotic War by Russia are manifested not only as a memory conflict with the Russian Federation impacting the countries’ diplomatic relations but also as an internal conflict between ethnolinguistic groups. For the Latvian state, the instrumentalisation of the myth of the Great Patriotic War by the Russian Federation not only impacts the memory conflict with the Russian Federation, affecting diplomatic relations between the countries, but
also the internal conflict between ethnolinguistic groups. For instance, Uldis Neiburgs, a historian at the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, notes:

The existence of the myth of Victory likely strengthens the identity of Latvian Russians, but at the same time, does nothing to facilitate their understanding of Latvians or their belonging to the Latvian state. A desire to understand the true history of World War II could contribute to the unification of the population. (Sprūde, 2015)

In particular, with these considerations in mind and especially in the current geopolitical situation, the Latvian state aims to completely restrict the activities of local Latvian organisations engaged in historical propaganda supported by Russia. However, as will be shown in the future course of work, Soviet mythologies in Latvia (including the myth of the Great Patriotic War) do not exist solely due to pro-Russian initiatives from above.

3.5. Conclusions

In summary, the politics of memory in Latvia has undergone significant transformation since the country restored independence in the 1990s. The fall of communism and the rise of liberal democracy shaped Latvian memory politics, emphasising the importance of humanistic, victim-centred approaches and accountability for historical crimes. Initially, the concept of the genocide of the Latvian people dominated political discourse. Laws were passed to commemorate victims of Soviet repression along with laws banning the activities of the Communist Party of Latvia, which were also crucial for nationalist mobilisation. However, in the 2000s, a shift occurred towards placing Latvia in a pan-European context of historical memory and
recognising the criminality of the communist regime at the level of European institutions such as the European Parliament.

Latvia’s attempt to treat both Nazi and communist regimes equally was criticised by various groups within and outside of the country. One of the most controversial issues is the official commemoration of Latvians who joined the German army during World War II. The official discourse on the memory of Latvian legionnaires in Latvia, which is dominated by mainstream liberal and conservative positions, is a complex balancing act between condemning the participation of Latvian soldiers in Nazi crimes against civilians and rejecting the idea of collective guilt for those who joined the German armed forces. Latvian radical nationalists, who maintain an uncompromising stance on Latvia's Soviet past, sometimes dispute Nazi war crimes and place the entire responsibility for all wartime crimes on communist ideology. While this position is primarily marginalised in Latvia at the state level, it is often falsely portrayed in Russian public discourse as a view shared by Latvian political elites. The analysis of this chapter, which includes examples such as 16 March (the Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires) commemorations and the installation of the monument to Latvian soldiers who fought on the side of Nazi Germany in Zedelgem, reveals the persistent conflict between Latvia and Russia surrounding the memory of World War II.

The Russian government under Putin has engaged in a selective approach to history, building an eclectic heroic narrative that combines the glorious history of pre-revolutionary Russia with the positive aspects of the Soviet period and downplays or ignores the negative aspects. This approach creating a sense of continuity with the past includes the use of Soviet
symbols, the glorification of the Soviet past, and the mythologisation of the Soviet period. This approach is beneficial for Russian rulers as it enables them to garner electoral support and unite representatives from diverse ideological positions, including those with communist views. However, the approach has been criticised by historians for being built on silence about problems and responsibilities, particularly in relation to the Stalinist repressions, as well as for its selective use of history to serve the government’s interests to influence public opinion and electoral processes, rather than presenting a holistic narrative.

The myth of World War II, which has become the ‘founding myth’ of contemporary Russia, is used as a basis for a reconciliatory and hereditary concept of historical memory. This myth is used to further the Kremlin’s goals, particularly to further its anti-Western agenda, and may pose a threat to the Latvian state. In the 2010s, the Russian state media began to actively utilise imagery connected to the mythology of World War II to demonise neighbouring countries and their governments, and the focus on the topic of ‘rehabilitation of Nazism in Ukraine and other countries in Europe’ has become particularly noticeable in Russian political discourse.

The historical narratives about World War II that Russia promotes are not only aimed at Russian citizens, but also spread to other countries through media and semi-professional historical accounts produced by Russians. In turn, the Latvian state considers the official Russian mythmaking and memory politics a threat to its national security, and the Latvian government adopts measures to control the dissemination of these narratives. This dissertation will further explore how Latvian residents perceive these narratives and
Soviet mythologies to identify any discrepancies between their interpretations and the state’s politics of memory.
CHAPTER 4: COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SOVIET PAST IN LATVIA

4.1. Introduction

This chapter delves into the complex and often conflicting interpretations of the Soviet past in Latvia. By examining both primary and secondary sources, it seeks to understand how different perceptions of the Soviet period coexist within contemporary Latvian society and how they contribute to memory conflicts within ethnolinguistic communities. The chapter specifically focuses on the alleged memory conflict between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking communities in Latvia, driven by competing interpretations of the Soviet past, and problematises the concept of ‘Russian-speakers’ and the extent to which they align with the narratives formulated by the Russian state’s memory policy. Additionally, drawing upon primary research data, the chapter examines the perspectives of Latvian inhabitants concerning the Soviet occupation and commemorative rituals honouring the victims of Soviet repression. It discusses how Latvian inhabitants interpret these commemorative practices and how it correlates with official Latvian state memory policies.

Despite the scale of Soviet repressions and numerous traumatic memories of the Soviet past, the anti-Soviet narrative is not the only characteristic of contemporary Latvian society. Nostalgia for the Soviet Union, which is present to a greater or lesser degree in all countries in the post-Soviet space, is also common in Latvia. For example, according to PEW Research Center (2017), in 2015-2016, 30% of respondents in Latvia believed the
The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a detrimental event (for comparison, the figure was 69% in Russia, 79% in Armenia, 70% in Moldova, 54% in Belarus, 34% in Ukraine, 23% in Lithuania, 15% in Estonia). Drawing from Nadkarni and Shevchenko’s (2004) thesis that nostalgic practices in various post-socialist countries may have different symbolic meanings, even diametrically opposite, the distinctions in the interpretation of similar nostalgic practices in Russia and Latvia are examined in greater detail in the final section of this chapter. This section investigates the Soviet nostalgic myth and the roots of post-Soviet nostalgia in Latvia by employing descriptive statistics to analyse the main trends in the survey respondents’ nostalgic feelings. When combined with the thematic analysis of interviews, these results provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the main causes of the diverse interpretations of the Soviet past. By synthesising and interpreting the quantitative and qualitative data analysis results, this chapter aims to uncover the central elements of the Soviet nostalgic mythological narratives and their impact on society.

4.2 The memory conflict between ethnolinguistic communities in Latvia in the context of Latvian Russian-speakers’ influence by the Russian Federation

According to numerous studies, Latvians’ historical memory has been marked by ‘wars’ between Latvian-speakers’ anti-Soviet perspective and Russian-speakers’ pro-Soviet perspective (see Eglitis and Ardava, 2012; Bonnard, 2013; Kaprāns, 2016). For instance, Eglitis and Ardava (2012, pp. 1038-1039) summarise the main notable characteristics of Latvians’ historical
memory as follows: 1) A conflict of memory narratives between ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking population ‘centred on narratives of World War II and, in particular, the Soviet ‘occupation’ or ‘liberation’ of Latvia’; 2) the presence of two different media environments targeting Russian- and Latvian-language audiences, who play ‘an active role in reproducing and sustaining conflicting memory narratives that have historical roots and powerful contemporary effects in politics and society’; 3) the failure of shared political dissatisfaction in both Russian- and Latvian-speaking communities to serve a unifying function.

This confrontation between different representations of the Soviet past is noted not only by researchers but also receives attention from the state’s policy of memory. The conflict of social memory between the two communities of Latvia, Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking, has been the subject of several official strategic documents of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia in recent years (see Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, 2018, 2020). For instance, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia guidelines (2012) read as follows:

In Latvia with the formation of a large Russian speaking community of immigrants during the occupation, signs of a two-community society can be observed: separate information spaces, an observable rift in the political sphere based on national characteristics, differing social memories, language segregation at the workplace, in schools and kindergartens. [...] In two decades since the independence of Latvia was renewed, much has been achieved to overcome the reality of the two-community society that formed during the occupation of Latvia. As a result of the deliberate Russification policy implemented by the Soviet Union aimed at securing Latvia as an integral part of the USSR, 1.5 million USSR citizens arrived to Latvia over the fifty years, about a half of whom remained living in Latvia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the sudden placement in another independent State created tension in the society basically consisting of the Russian speaking community’s post-Soviet ‘lost fatherland’ trauma and insecurity about their future prospects in Latvia, as well as the Latvians’ uncertainty about their
prospects of renewing, maintaining and developing the Latvian cultural space. A significant part of this trauma is a conflicting social memory based on the Soviet ideological interpretation of the occupation of Latvia, Latvia’s fate in the World War II and life under the Soviet regime. (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, pp. 8-9)

Furthermore, the Guidelines on national identity, civil society and integration policy until 2027 state that ‘Social memory or ideas about the history of Latvia affect the cohesion of society. […] In turn, attitudes towards such events as the Soviet occupation and the dissolution of the USSR support a symbolic confrontation between Latvians and Russian-speakers, based on their biographical experiences and different external sources of historical knowledge’ (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020).

The strategic documents suggest various solutions to address memory conflicts and emphasise the importance of incorporating Latvian social memory within the broader European context. For instance, the Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018) state:

[The Russian speaking population’s attitudes towards the Soviet Union] creates obstacles for a shared understanding of Stalinist crimes and the victims to be commemorated, being an important part of Latvian social memory. It is also at odds with European social memory, where Communism is seen as a totalitarian regime and Stalinist crimes are denounced in a similar way to the crimes of the Nazis. Thus, a different understanding of the events of WWII manifested by a considerable part of the society jeopardises not only the Latvian national identity but also its geopolitical identity or affiliation to the Western world. (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p. 30)

In 2017, in addition to the guidelines, the Ministry of Culture issued another document: ‘Experts’ proposals for the social integration policy plan for 2019–2025.’ In particular, in order ‘to promote unifying notions about Soviet occupation in Latvian society, the consequences of the Nazi occupation and the Second World War in Latvia,’ a range of activities were proposed, including online distribution of videos about the Soviet occupation, lectures, and other
educational events (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2017, pp. 180–181). The most recent Guidelines for the period until 2027 propose a three-pronged programme: 1) ‘Civil Society and Integration’; 2) ‘National Identity: Language and Cultural Space’; and 3) ‘Cohesive social memory’ (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020, p. 53). The last point implies several sub-goals, namely: ‘strengthening the understanding of the events of the Second World War, as well as the Soviet and Nazi occupation, based on reliable facts’; and ‘ensuring understanding and research of the history of Latvia in local and European contexts.’

It should also be noted that the Guidelines (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020, p. 9) assign the Museum of the Occupation a significant role in implementing tasks related to social memory. The museum regularly researches the development of social memory in Latvia and takes measures to increase students’ and young people’s knowledge of the history of Latvia’s independence and occupation. In 2019, a methodological guide for conducting lessons ‘Historical heritage of Latvia. Past. The present’ was developed by the museum; as part of these lessons, discussions about the Soviet occupation were organised (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020, p. 9). In the project’s first year, 46 teachers and more than 2,000 students from all over Latvia participated. One of the most important aspects of the museum’s educational programme is watching the documentary film Contradictory History (Pretrunīgā vēsture, 2010), directed by Ināra Kolmane. The film describes the events in Latvia and its society during World War II (1939–1945); at the beginning of the Soviet period; and today, after the restoration of Latvia’s independence in 1991. The authors of the film ask the
questions: ‘How is it possible that different ethnic groups living in Latvia have radically different views on the history of the country and the most important political events in it?’; and ‘How is it possible that history still divides Latvian society?’ (Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, 2021). In 2016, a branch of the Occupation Museum was opened, in the so-called ‘Corner House’ in Riga, at the junction of Brīvibas and Stabu Streets. In Soviet times, since the autumn of 1940, the building housed the State Security Committee of the Latvian SSR. It currently houses an exposition dedicated to the history of the KGB in Latvia. The website of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (2021) also offers a scientific examination of historical disinformation narratives that Russian media have promoted in recent years.

Considering the importance given to the divided nature of social memory of Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers in Latvian public discourse, the concept of ‘Russian-speaker’ should be discussed in more detail. According to the latest official statistics, in 2017, the Latvian language was the mother tongue of 60.8% of the country’s population, while Russian was the mother tongue of 36% (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2019). At the same time, 61.3% of the population spoke Latvian at home, while 37.7% spoke Russian at home (ibid.). This discrepancy between the mother tongue and the language spoken at home is usually related to the fact that 37% of Latvians have a spouse of different nationality (ibid.). Furthermore, 91.9% of ethnic Latvians said they speak Latvian at home, and 7.5% stated that they speak Russian; among ethnic Russians, 90.7% mainly speak Russian at home, and 8.5% speak Latvian at home (ibid.).
Another issue which arises in connection with the division into ‘Russian-speakers’ and ‘Latvian-speakers’ is the concept of bilinguals. According to the Latvian Language Agency (2014) research, in 2014, 72% of respondents whose native language is Latvian reported they have good or very good knowledge of Russian, while among members of the ethnic minority community, 44% feel that they speak Latvian well or very well. In 2019 only 20% of respondents whose native language is not Latvian had a ‘very good’ knowledge of the Latvian language, and the same number of respondents rated their knowledge of Latvian as ‘good’ (The Latvian Language Agency, 2021). Among respondents aged between 18 and 34, the figures were 26% and 35%, respectively (ibid.).

According to numerous studies (see, for instance, Beiker, 2002; Curika, 2009; Poriņa, 2009; Muižnieks, 2010; Cara, 2013; Providus, 2014; The Latvian Language Agency, 2021) Russian-speaking schoolchildren are gaining ever better competence in the Latvian language because of the reform of bilingual school education that began in 2004. The bilingual education system and the compulsory 60% teaching of subjects in Latvian at the national minority secondary schools was a continuation of the state policy of social integration that began in the 1990s, the goal of which was stated to be ‘the foundation of a one-community society based on the Latvian language’; it received harsh criticism from the Russian-speaking segment of Latvian society (Muižnieks, 2010, p.35).

Although according to previous studies (Curika, 2009, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p. 14), the bilingual education system has significantly improved the knowledge of the Latvian language among
young people; however, it is acknowledged that the interpretation of the history of Latvia and civic values still varies greatly between pupils in Latvian schools and in schools for national minorities. It is clear that in some cases, Russian-speakers (particularly the children of mixed families) can be bilingual and assimilate into Latvian culture. However, existing academic research does not provide any for an en masse assimilation of Russian-speakers and formation of shared historical memory with Latvia-speakers (see, for instance, Romanov, 2000; Kronenfeld, 2005; Cara, 2013).

As can be seen from Latvian government policy documents, the concept of ‘bilingualism’ is usually used exclusively in relation to school education, although integration programmes themselves are closely related to the issue of social memory. For example, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia guidelines (2012) use the word ‘bilingual’ only in the combination ‘bilingual education,’ whereas in relation to society and individuals, only the concepts ‘Two-community society,’ ‘Russian-speakers’ and ‘Latvian-speaker’ are used. Nevertheless, the motives for the introduction of ‘bilingual education as part of the integration policy’ in the same document are associated precisely with the problems of ‘divided memory’ (see Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p.9).

It is widely believed in public discourse in Latvia that many local Russian-speakers are mainly influenced by or identify with the Russian Federation (Saeima, 2018; Gusachenko, 2021; Eiropas Parlaments Latvijā, 2020; Veebel, 2021). Indeed, studies devoted to determining the main characteristics of the Russian-speaking Latvians’ identity (as well as the role of the media and political elites in the Russian-speaking identity construction
process) have noted that many Russian-speakers in Latvia have strong historical, cultural and political ties to the Russian Federation, while some members of this community belong to Russia in symbolic terms and have a tendency to self-isolate themselves from the Latvian memory community (Aasland, 1994; Laitin, 1995, 1998; Smith, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Hanovs and Vinnika, 2005; Eglitis, 2002; Zepa, 2005; Galbreath, 2005; Zepa et al. 2005; Zepa and Šūpule 2006; Rodins, 2005; Pisarenko, 2006; Lerhis, Kudors and Indāns, 2007; Petrenko, 2008; Zelče 2009; Hazans, 2010; Solska, 2011; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). By contrast, Burch and Smith (2007, p. 923) argue that ‘despite having an obvious cultural affinity with Russia and with the transnational Russian community across the territory of the former Soviet Union, a population raised in the different socio-cultural setting of the Baltics has found it hard to conceive of actually living in Russia or to identify politically with the contemporary Russian state.’ Furthermore, according to Kronenfeld (2005, p. 272), most Russophones in Latvia follow ‘a middle course, beginning to identify with the Latvian state while remaining culturally distinct from ethnic Latvians, <…> forming a new, specifically Baltic Russian, identity.’ Similarly, Cheskin (2013, p. 246) claims that although Russian-speakers in Latvia ‘maintain certain elements of cultural “Russianness”, they increasingly feel estranged from the Russian political space and, therefore, they are creating an identity of their own which is neither fully “Russian” nor that of the titular nationality.’

This argument was supported during the in-depth interviews carried out for this research in 2020. Indeed, many Russian-speaking respondents noted that they experience neither a sense of belonging nor any patriotic
feelings towards either Russia or Latvia. It is important to note that some respondents attributed the lack of patriotic feelings towards Latvia to the fact that they have a negative attitude towards the Latvian state, even though they love Latvia as the place where they live:

I have always envied the Russians because they have a specific patriotic feeling, and the Latvians, who feel that this is their homeland, but I have no such feeling. I am not a patriot of either Russia or Latvia. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

I call myself Russian, but I don't feel connected with Russia. When I meet people from Russia, I do not feel solidarity with them. Russians in Latvia and Russians in Russia are not alike, but it's hard for me to explain why. Maybe because we are more like Latvians. I love the place where I was born. I love Riga, Latvia. I know every corner there, but I am not a patriot of Latvia. I do not like the Latvian state. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

For me, Latvia as a state and a place where I live are two different concepts. I cannot call myself a patriot of the Latvian state, although I love Latvia and the land where I was born. I also have double feelings towards Russia, I am grateful to Putin for the fact that he pays a pension to my grandmother, who has Russian citizenship, but she lives in Latvia. But my family would not want to live in Russia, and I do not feel patriotism. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

I like living in Latvia, I like Latvia for such things as nature, but I do not feel like a patriot of Latvia because I am not Latvian. Although I think in Russian and speak Russian, I cannot call myself completely Russian because I do not live in Russia and in my mentality I am more connected with Latvia. [Interview 10, Russian-speaking female, 18 years old]

I was born in the Soviet Union. My grandfather and grandmother fought for our land, but I can't call myself a patriot of Latvia and even more so, I cannot call myself a patriot of Russia. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

I feel like I am without my homeland because I definitely have nothing to do with Russia except for a common language. We have a very different mentality from the Russians from Russia. I love Latvia and its nature. I was born here, and there are a lot of bright good memories, but, on the other hand, I constantly feel that I am a stranger here anyway. My Latvian-speaking colleagues are completely different, they do not treat me as belonging to their circle, and they don't accept me. [Interview 5, Russian-speaking female, 27 years old]
As part of the survey, respondents were also asked about their patriotic feelings towards Latvia. Thus, among those participants in the survey who declared Latvian as the language they speak at home, the share of those who consider themselves Latvian patriots was significantly higher (76.7%) than for Russian-speaking respondents (46.4%). The respondents were also asked whether they have patriotic feelings towards any other country. Of the Russian-speaking respondents, 34.7% said they feel patriotism towards the Russian Federation, which is 11 times the number of Latvian-speaking respondents who consider themselves a patriot of Russia (3.1%). Based on the quantitative and qualitative primary data, it is clear that the opinions of the Russian-speaking respondents are not homogeneous. Although we can observe that, in general, among the Russian-speaking respondents, patriotic feelings towards Latvia are less noticeable compared to the Latvian-speaking respondents, the proportion of Russian-speaking patriots of Latvia among the respondents not only was far from small, but it was higher compared to the number of Russian-speakers who feel patriotism towards the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, we may pay attention to the fact already mentioned in the Methodology chapter that Russian-speakers in Latvia are not an ethnically homogeneous group, and it consists of representatives of various ethnicities (according to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2022, in 2011 Russian was language mostly spoken at home for 87.2% of Ukrainians, 88.7% of Belarusians and 76.2% of Poles in Latvia). Thus, the generally accepted division into categories ‘Russian-speakers’ and ‘Latvian-speakers’ can be criticised since the division between Latvian- and Russian-speakers may look

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too binary. It can overlook possible historical differences in the social memory of various ethnic minorities (Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and others), uniting all their representatives under the term ‘Russian-speakers’.

The fact that Russian is the language spoken at home by representatives of various ethnicities in Latvia is reflected in government policy documents and guidelines. For example, Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012, p.16) state that ‘the concept Russian-speakers is used as a sociological category which describes the community of respondents or residents of Latvia, who nominate the Russian language as the language of communication within their families. Latvia’s Russian-speaking community comprises various ethnic groups, which do not always consider the Russian language as their native language.’ These guidelines also report that ‘A widespread practice among the national minorities too, is assimilation within the Russian-speaking environment. […] Jews, Belarusians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Poles and Germans can be mentioned among the most Russified nationalities: […] the 2000 census shows that 39.6% of residents consider the Russian language to be their native language, including 79.1% of Jews, 72.8% of Belarusians, 67.8% of Ukrainians, and 57.7% of Poles’ (ibid., p. 27).

The survey by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences (2015) showed that 67% of Russians in Latvia and 69% of other ethnic minorities experienced a close or very strong connection with Latvia. At the same time, the sense of belonging to Russia differed among Russians and other ethnic minorities: 30% of ethnic Russians in Latvia felt a close connection to the Russian Federation, while among other minorities, this figure was 18% (ibid.). We can also turn to
the analysis of the 2014 survey conducted by the SKDS research centre, which aimed to identify the feeling of belonging to the Latvian state among ethnic minorities (68.9% of the survey participants were ethnic Russians, 7.2% – Ukrainians, 11.4% – Belarusians, 5.8% – Poles, 6.6% – representatives of other ethnic minorities). Among the Russian-speaking representatives of ethnic minorities, 21.9% considered themselves patriots of Latvia, while among the Latvian-speaking representatives of ethnic minorities, 27.6% considered themselves Latvia patriots (SKDS, 2014). Importantly, the 2014 survey clarified the Latvian minority population’s attitude towards the Russo-Ukrainian War. When answering the question ‘Which side do you like: Russia, Ukraine or neither?’, the respondents most often (41%) chose the answer ‘neither,’ while 36% of respondents said that their sympathies are on the side of Russia, and 15% that they are on the side of Ukraine (SKDS, 2014). Among Latvian-speaking representatives of ethnic minorities, 66.8% closely or very closely followed the events in Ukraine through the media, compared with 69.7% of Russian-speaking respondents; however, among ethnic Ukrainians, this proportion was significantly higher – 82.5%, compared with ethnic Russians (66.6%), Belarusians (67.9%), Poles (66.5%), and other ethnic minorities (61.8%) (ibid.). Unfortunately, the data of this survey did not compare the attitude of Ukrainians and Belarusians in Latvia to the Russo-Ukrainian War, but it is quite reasonable to assume that differences between these groups of respondents could be noticeable here as well.

The official Guidelines of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia (2017, p.19) state that ‘Russian-speakers’ in Latvia have their own ‘geopolitical orientation’ that is different from Latvian-speakers. However, especially in the
current political climate, Latvian Russian-speakers (not to mention Russian-speaking Ukrainians in Latvia) could not always be influenced by or identify with the Russian Federation. As the war between Russia and Ukraine continues to develop at the time of writing this PhD thesis, the opinion of Russian-speakers in Latvia regarding their support for the Russian Federation is undergoing significant changes. This can be seen both in the comparison of the data of sociological surveys in 2014 with 2022, and in the framework of sociological assessments of the change in the opinions of respondents from March to May 2022, which demonstrates a significant deterioration in the attitude of Russian-speaking respondents to the Russian Federation. The SKDS survey commissioned by the Society Integration Foundation in March 2022 shows that 20% Russian-speaking respondents supported the Russian Federation in the invasion of Ukraine, 25% supported Ukraine, and 46% found it difficult to say (The Society Integration Foundation, 2022). The results of a similar survey conducted by the SKDS research centre in April 2022 show that support for Russia in connection with the war in Ukraine among Russian-speaking residents of Latvia decreased to 13%, while support for Ukraine increased to 30%, but, as before, more than half respondents do not support either side (Baltic News Network, 2022). For comparison, among the Latvian-speaking respondents, support for Ukraine over March-April 2022 increased from 87% to 89%, while the number of those who supported the Russian Federation remained unchanged – at 1% (ibid.).

Commenting on the results of these sociological surveys, Zaiga Pūce, Director of the Secretariat of the Society Integration Foundation, stated that
the widely held opinion that the Russian-speaking part of the Latvian society is a single group with homogeneous views is wrong:

The survey data shows very clearly that the biggest divisions are among Russian-speakers – the majority do not support the war in Ukraine, while a significant part is confused, contrary to what they have hitherto believed. [...] Now it is very important to form a sense of belonging to Latvia among those who, after many years of being in the Russian information space, still haven’t formulated their point of view on the events in Ukraine. [...] Previously, integration policy was focused on achieving specific goals – language acquisition, a sense of belonging, and a common understanding of history. We see that most of the society has learned and uses Latvian language, and feels they belong to Latvia. However, this is not enough. In the future, we need to look wider through the lens of social cohesion. The cohesion of society must be based on the values of the Constitution, European values and the understanding that the statehood, independence and security of Latvia are our foundation, our common and individual responsibility and duty. (The Society Integration Foundation, 2022)

At the Latvian government level, calls were made to the effect that not all Russian-speakers in Latvia were ready to comply with the actions of the Russian Federation. Thus, on March 2, 2022, the Prime Minister of Latvia, Krišjānis Kariņš, stated that ‘to be Russian-speaker is not necessary to comply with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and this should be remembered by everyone, including when communicating with Latvian Russians’ (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2022). In turn, the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, said in his speech on March 5: ‘Putin’s regime has united Latvians fighting for support to Ukraine. Latvians of all ethnic backgrounds, irrespective of their home language, stand with Ukraine today. [...] As for those remaining few here in Latvia and elsewhere who fail to see through the veil of Russian propaganda, let us calmly explain to them what is really happening’ (President of the Republic of Latvia, 2022).

The idea that the Russian-speaking community in Latvia includes representatives of different political views and national identities is also
shared by academic experts. For example, Juris Rozenvalds, a political scientist and professor at the University of Latvia, believes that ‘The Russian-speaking community in Latvia is not homogeneous. There are, of course, those who support Mr. Putin, but the majority of Russian-speakers in Latvia are already Europeanised Russians, Russians who have personal ties to Russia but do not want to live in such a Russia’ (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2022a). Speaking about the diversity of political identities of Russian-speakers in Latvia, one should also pay attention to such a phenomenon as immigration to Latvia of citizens of the Russian Federation, which in particular increased after the occupation of Crimea in 2014, but became more active after the re-election of Vladimir Putin in 2012 (Fanailova, 2016; OCCRP, 2021). Since 2014, the editorial office of the online media Meduza created by Russian nationals has been operating in Riga; however, with the tightening of Russian media legislation in 2022, the editorial offices of Deutsche Welle and Radio Liberty moved from Russia to Latvia (ibid.). In just one month since February 24, 2022, the Latvian embassy in the Russian Federation issued 161 visas to journalists and public figures who face persecution in Russia because they disagree with the political regime (Radio Svoboda, 2022). In addition to immigrants from Russia, one can also mention (often Russian-speaking) immigrants from Belarus. Since August 2020, when protests began in Belarus, followed by the detention of journalists, political activists and just participants in peaceful protests, Latvia has opened a humanitarian corridor for Belarusian refugees (Andreeva, 2021). Many Belarusians who were forced to leave due to disagreement with the Lukashenko regime are actively helping Ukrainians in the war with Russia, as evidenced by the volunteer
activities of the BYSOL solidarity fund, created to support victims of repression in the Republic of Belarus (Vasiukovich, 2022).

At the same time, the falsity of equating all Russians (or Russian-speakers) with supporters of Russian political ideology does not mean at all the Kremlin’s disinformation campaign cannot be successful in Latvia, and does not have its own audience. Mārtiņš Priedols, a researcher of disinformation and information perception from the University of Latvia, claims: Not only Russian-speakers are attached to ideological misinformation. Some Latvian-speakers also find the ideas expressed by Russian ideology very acceptable, if not completely acceptable’ (Priedols, 2022).

The idea that the entire Russian-speaking population of Latvia supports the policies of Vladimir Putin is a disinformation narrative that benefits the Kremlin. For example, the Belarusian Investigative Center (2022), based on official Latvian statistics, refuted the following fake news statement aired on Zvezda TV channel (a Russian state-owned nationwide TV network run by the Russian Ministry of Defence) on May 15, 2022: ‘The Minister of Defence of Latvia suggested that Russia take the monument to the liberators together with Putin’s supporters. That is, to take away the monument and 40% of the Russian population of Latvia’ (The discussion about the demolition of the Soviet monument is given more detailed attention in Chapter 5 (5.3) of this dissertation). In fact, on May 12, 2022, Defence Minister Artis Pabriks wrote on his Twitter account in response to Russia’s proposal to take the monument from Latvia: ‘Together with Putin’s supporters.’ (Pabriks, 2022). Thus, interpreting the words of Pabriks, Zvezda TV channel not only miscalculated the number of Russians in Latvia (they are
not 40%, but 24% ethnic Russians in Latvia, according to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2022) but also unfairly called all of them supporters of Putin.

The political scientist Kārlis Daukšts claims that the notion that all Russian-speakers are supportive of Kremlin policies is beneficial for politicians, and this is used to support an artificial conflict between Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers:

The confrontation is seen only at the level of political rhetoric and not in everyday life. A political clash and the use of ethnolinguistic issues to achieve political goals can be beneficial to Russian organisations that support compatriots in Latvia, and the ‘Russian Union of Latvia,’ on the one hand, as well as to the National Alliance calling for the condemnation of the Soviet occupation regime, on the other hand. Russia creates and supports Latvian organisations that advocate for the rights of Russian speakers. In turn, the Latvian political elites believe that the Russian language can be a geopolitical tool for putting pressure on the domestic policy of Latvia and for ‘breaking away’ Latvia from the natural with the European Union, and with those values that were proclaimed as the foundation of the Latvian state after the proclamation of independence. At the everyday level, the Latvian-speakers who follow the aggressive propaganda rhetoric of the Russian media also experience certain fear about Russia, a feeling of mistrust and uncertainty. […] There is no mass persecution of Russian-speaking people or a massive negative attitude towards Russians in Latvian society. At the same time, both on the part of the Russian media and on the part of individual pro-Russian activists in Latvia, one can see a desire to present the situation with the rights of Russian speakers in Latvia in a much more negative light and this coincides with the propaganda media narrative about ‘the revival of Nazism’ in Latvia. [Interview E6]

Furthermore, as noted by Kaprāns (2016, p. 5), '[After the restoration of independence of Latvia] the dilemma of citizenship was a sensitive issue, as it divided society into citizens and non-citizens and set the scene for further ethnolinguistic tensions. The decision to grant Latvian citizenship only to those individuals who had lived in Latvia before Soviet occupation conflicted with the interests of a large minority group.' Table 4.1 shows the population in Latvia
by citizenship over the period 2000-2022, while Table 4.2 demonstrates the population by citizenship and ethnicity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Citizens of Latvia</td>
<td>1,770,007</td>
<td>1,728,213</td>
<td>1,680,011</td>
<td>1,647,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(74%)</td>
<td>(83%)</td>
<td>(85%)</td>
<td>(86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-citizens of Latvia</td>
<td>503,974</td>
<td>295,122</td>
<td>232,143</td>
<td>197,888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21%)</td>
<td>(14%)</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens of Russian Federation</td>
<td>19,233 (1%)</td>
<td>34,091 (2%)</td>
<td>42,299 (2%)</td>
<td>40,855 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other citizenship</td>
<td>83,848 (4%)</td>
<td>12,945 (1%)</td>
<td>14,504 (1%)</td>
<td>21,662 (1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizens of Latvia</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>1,236,024</td>
<td>1,215,246</td>
<td>1,191,251</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>324,048</td>
<td>316,920</td>
<td>307,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusians</td>
<td>28,359</td>
<td>27,529</td>
<td>26,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>16,209</td>
<td>16,093</td>
<td>15,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnicities</td>
<td>103,771</td>
<td>104,223</td>
<td>106,344</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-citizens of Latvia</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>524</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>176,382</td>
<td>153,098</td>
<td>130,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusians</td>
<td>37,898</td>
<td>33,074</td>
<td>28,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>25,498</td>
<td>22,278</td>
<td>19,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnicities</td>
<td>27098</td>
<td>23,169</td>
<td>19,418</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Other citizenship</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>29,989</td>
<td>34,352</td>
<td>33,180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusians</td>
<td>4,016</td>
<td>5,396</td>
<td>5,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>4,628</td>
<td>6,268</td>
<td>7,775</td>
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As can be seen from the above table, according to data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022), the number of non-citizens in Latvia steadily decreased over the period 2000–2022, and by 2022 it had decreased more than 2.5 times, totalling 197,888 people (of which 65.9% were ethnic Russians, 14.3% were ethnic Belarusians, 9.8% were ethnic Ukrainians, 0.2% were ethnic Latvians, and 9.8% were other ethnicities. Among ethnic Russians living in Latvia in 2020, 65.3% were citizens of Latvia, 27.7% were non-citizens of Latvia, and 8.7% were citizens of Russia. According to the Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, in the spring of 2022 compared to the spring of 2021, the number of non-citizens of Latvia wishing to naturalise increased approximately twofold (in March 2022, the number of those wishing to naturalise and become citizens of Latvia was 105, and in April it was 92), with ‘one of the main reasons being the military actions in Ukraine’ (Delfi, 2022a). It should also be noted that the number of citizens of Russia in Latvia increased more than twofold from 2000 to 2020 (the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2022). After it became known in the summer of 2022 about the plans of the Russian State Duma to consider a bill to simplify the acquisition of Russian

<table>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<td>10,114</td>
<td>15,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvians</td>
<td>1,237,463</td>
<td>1,216,443</td>
<td>1,192,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>530,419</td>
<td>504,370</td>
<td>471,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarusians</td>
<td>70,273</td>
<td>65,999</td>
<td>60,097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>46,335</td>
<td>44,639</td>
<td>42,929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnicities</td>
<td>139,335</td>
<td>137,506</td>
<td>141,110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.2.** Latvian population by citizenship and ethnicity in 2013, 2016 and 2020. Data source: the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022).
citizenship for residents of Baltic countries, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that in the future, those who wish to obtain Russian citizenship would have to leave Latvia (RBC, 2022). In April of the same year, the Saeima of Latvia approved a law whereby citizens of Latvia may be deprived of citizenship for supporting actions that threaten the territorial integrity of other democratic countries, including support for Russia’s war in Ukraine (ibid.).

An important consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which academic experts pay attention to, is the aggravation of interethnic relations in Latvia. Thus, Mārtiņš Kaprāns, a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia, believes that ‘If before this attack the relations between the Latvian and non-Latvian part of society could be called “moderately peaceful coexistence”, then what is happening in Ukraine now inevitably gives rise to anxiety and suspicion in the hearts of people’ (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2022b). The survey conducted by SKDS in March 2022 shows that among Latvian-speaking respondents, 43% admitted that society became more cohesive after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, 23% said that cohesion remained at the same level as before the war, and 26% believed that society had become more divided (The Society Integration Foundation, 2022). However, among Russian-speakers, 49% believed that society had become more divided, 8% more cohesive, and 36% believed that cohesion had remained at the same level (ibid.).

It is currently difficult to fully assess the impact of the current war in Ukraine on the relations between ethnolinguistic groups within Latvian society. As is evident from the analysis presented in this chapter, the opposition between Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers is an obvious
oversimplification, and the notion that Russian-speakers in Latvia are necessarily influenced by or identify with the Russian Federation is a misconception, though various political actors may exploit it. Taking into account these observations, the analysis of interpretations of the Soviet past by residents of Latvia presented below endeavours to go beyond the commonly accepted portrayal of a conflict between two memory cultures (the memories of Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers) in the public discourse of Latvia, demonstrating their interdependency and uncovering deeper foundations other than the simple opposition of anti-Soviet and pro-Soviet perspectives.

4.3. Latvian residents’ memories and interpretations of the Soviet occupation and repression

Given that the widely held belief in the public discourse of Latvia is that a symbolic conflict between the memories of Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers is supported by their differing attitudes towards the Soviet occupation (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2012; 2020; Eglitis and Ardava, 2012), our primary research considered the question of respondents’ attitudes towards the occupation of Latvia. From the respondents’ answers to the survey questions, it can be seen that the conflict of the historical memory of the residents of Latvia is manifested not only in a different attitude towards certain historical events but even in the recognition or denial of the historical facts. Table 4.3 shows the distribution of answers of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents to the survey question about the main reason for the
inclusion of Latvia in the Soviet Union in 1940; more than a third of Russian-speaking respondents denied the fact of the occupation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think was the main reason for the inclusion of Latvia in the Soviet Union in 1940?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russian-speaking respondents</strong> (total)</td>
<td><strong>Latvian-speaking respondents</strong> (total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Free expression of the will of the people of Latvia’ (33.5%)</td>
<td>‘A secret arrangement between Stalin and Hitler’ (58.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘A secret arrangement between Stalin and Hitler’ (20.5%)</td>
<td>‘Pressure from the USSR, against the will of most Latvians’ (19.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Pressure from the USSR, against the will of most Latvians’ (10.9%)</td>
<td>‘Free expression of the will of the people of Latvia’ (11.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.3.** What do you think was the main reason for the inclusion of Latvia in the Soviet Union in 1940?’ (respondents’ answers listed in descending order of popularity).

Regarding the re-occupation of Latvia in 1944, only 15.1% of the Russian-speaking respondents believed that ‘occupation’ was the correct term to describe what happened, while among the Latvian-speaking respondents, 72.1% believed that in 1944 the Soviet Union occupied Latvia.

It must be pointed out that, according to Section 74 (1) (Acquittal of Genocide, Crime against Humanity) of the Criminal Law of the Republic of Latvia ‘For a person who commits […] the glorification, denial, acquittal or gross trivialisation of […] crime against peace or war crime committed by the
USSR or Nazi Germany against the Republic of Latvia and its inhabitants, the applicable punishment is the deprivation of liberty for a period of up to five years or temporary deprivation of liberty’ (Latvijas Vēstnesis, 1998; 2014 amendments). Although the text of the law does not say anything about the ‘occupation,’ the Russian-language Latvian media refer to Law 74 (1) as a law providing for ‘criminal liability for denying the Soviet occupation,’ and this is how many of the research participants perceive it. In several cases, the research participants refused to comment on their attitude to the Soviet occupation of Latvia, referring to the law. For example, one of the informants stated:

Your question falls under the criminal article in Latvia, I cannot answer it... This is a very extremist law. This is extremism and nationalism on the part of the state, which testifies to the fact that no free discussion is possible today. That is, when there are not enough arguments, you need to jail people. That’s how I feel about it. This tells me that the people who adopted this law have no other arguments. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

Publicist Illarion Girs became the first person in the history of Latvia to be prosecuted under this law. In 2014, he published an article titled ‘Civil Disobedience to the Neo-Nazi Latvian Dogma,’ in which he claimed:

I publicly deny the probability of statements about genocide in Latvia committed by the Soviet power. The years when Latvia was part of the USSR were the best for Latvian people from the perspective of welfare and prosperity, including for ethnic Latvians, because the peak of cultural development was reached during the Soviet era. Yes, I glorify Latvia’s entry into and time within the USSR from the position of common interests of the majority of the multi-ethnic Latvian nation, and it was worth it. (Latvian Centre for Human Rights, 2014)

In December of the same year, Girs was detained and searched as part of the criminal proceedings initiated against him, but during the investigation, the charges could not be proved. In December 2019, the prosecutor’s office of
the Riga Judicial District brought charges against a board member of the Russian Union of Latvia, Alexander Filey, under Art. 74 (1). He was charged with posting on Facebook to congratulate his friends on the anniversary of 17 June 1940 (Occupation of the Latvian Republic Day) and claiming that the Soviet army ‘freed Latvia from the dictatorial regime of Karlis Ulmanis’ (TASS, 2019).

To justify their disagreement with the use of the term ‘Soviet occupation,’ many Russian-speaking respondents claimed that ‘it was a free democratic expression of the will of the Latvian people,’ with one of the most common arguments being that the Latvian population welcomed Soviet soldiers with flowers:

> When Soviet troops entered Riga in 1940, they were greeted with flowers, just like in 1944. There are a lot of photos on the Internet showing this. [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]

> To tell the truth, there was no occupation of Latvia; I do not recognise this fact, because at school we were told that everyone happily greeted the Red Army in 1940. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

> In Soviet times, this was not considered any kind of occupation. We lived here until the time of the First Republic, and my great-grandmother says that Soviet soldiers were greeted with flowers. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

> I believe there was no occupation. It’s just that in the end there were more of those who were ‘for,’ and it all turned out that way. People got what they wanted. [Interview 19, Russian-speaking female, 24 years old]

> Very often, Russian-speaking respondents switched from talking about the Soviet past to a comparison with independent Latvia; they talked about the industrial and construction achievements of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and the economic problems of modern Latvia, on the other. For instance, one
of the most common claims was that ‘In fact, independent Latvia did not create anything in this country’ [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]. Thus, one of the main observations that can be made from in-depth interviews with residents of Latvia is that when respondents who deny the Soviet occupation were asked to clarify their opinion, they said that ‘the Soviet government did a lot to improve the infrastructure of Latvia.’ Here are just a few examples:

I don’t think it was an occupation. Everything here was built by the Russians, i.e. all the bridges, and the entire industry began to work under the Soviet Union. It seems to me that it was a mutually beneficial contract. [Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]

There was no occupation, Latvians greeted the Soviet army with flowers when it came to Latvia. There were so many factories built: VEF, RAF, the radio manufacturing plant named after Popov, the Avtopribor manufacturing plant, ALFA, Gidrometpribor... Now there is none of this, everything is plundered. [Interview 21, Russian-speaking male, 56 years old]

Many people in Latvia say that if there hadn’t been the Soviet occupation, we would be living in paradise now. I say this: we had 30 years without Soviet power. Why, during all this time, was only one bridge built, when all the other bridges were built by the Soviet authority? It is then necessary to demolish the Purvciems, Plavnieki, Kengaraugs, Imanta neighbourhoods in Riga, because all these areas were completely built by the Soviet authority. [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]

Moreover, even some respondents who admit that there was an occupation note that it was a positive phenomenon for Latvia:

There was definitely an occupation, yes. But I do not see anything terrible in this... This does not define the Soviet Union in any way. This was a forced strategic move, there was no other way. I think that it is hypocritical to use all the heritage of the Soviet Union, everything that the Soviet Union created in Latvia, and at the same time criticise the USSR. [Interview 11, Russian-speaking male, 18 years old]

The dissatisfaction with the current political, social and economic situation in Latvia is the most likely reason for the popularity of this opinion. As
stated by Bernhard and Kubik (2014, p. 126) in the Baltics, ‘mass public disenchantedment with economic development and political corruption created a problem of legitimacy for the iteration of a triumphant narrative of the recent past’ and created ‘a widely shared sense that power and resources passed from one elite to another without reflecting or meeting the needs of the masses.’ The issue of positive attitudes towards the Soviet Union among the population of Latvia is examined in more detail in Chapter 4.4, which is dedicated to the Soviet nostalgic myth.

As for the interpretation of the events of 1944, it has already been noted in the previous section that the Russian-speaking population of Latvia is more inclined to share the Soviet portrayal of the ‘liberation of Latvia from Nazism’ rather than using the term ‘the Soviet occupation’ (see Eglitis and Ardava, 2012). The analysis of our interviews reveals that this portrayal was the most popular among Russian-speaking respondents; practically all of them expressed thoughts similar to this: ‘It seems to me that “occupation” is an incorrect term, because, in fact, Latvia was liberated from the Germans’ [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old].

The interviews also revealed that most Russian-speaking respondents rejected the concept of equalising Stalinism and Nazism, which, on the one hand, was consistent with the personal memory of the respondents, who noted that their relatives fought in the war against Nazism, and, on the other hand, coincided with the official Russian state’s narrative of condemnation of such an approach. Particular attention deserves the fact that the proportion of Russian-speaking respondents who cited the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as the cause of the Soviet occupation in 1940 was nearly three times lower than that
of Latvian-speaking respondents (see Table 4.3.). As is known, the secret additional protocols to the agreement between the Stalinist USSR and Nazi Germany divided Finland, the Baltic states, and Poland into Soviet and German spheres of influence. According to Snyder (2015, pp. 179-180), ‘Peace with the Soviet Union meant, at the very least, a free hand for Hitler. [...] A Holocaust would begin there twenty months later. Within three years, most of the millions of Jews who lived there would be dead.’ In Latvian public discourse, the Hitler-Stalin Pact is understandably more associated with Soviet occupation and deportations.

In September 2008, the European Parliament (2008) adopted the Declaration of the European Parliament on the proclamation of 23 August (when the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact was signed) as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism. At the same time, Latvia included 23 August in the list of commemorative days (amendments to the law ‘On festive, commemorative and observance days’ were introduced on 16 July 2009). Not only has this date become an official day of remembrance for victims of Stalinism and Nazism in the Baltic states, but it also commemorates the Baltic Way – a political demonstration that occurred on 23 August 1989 across the three Baltic states, involving 2 million people (The Baltic Way, 2019).

In total, 10.1% of Latvian-speaking respondents indicated that they do not support the inclusion of 23 August in the list of official commemorative dates, while 69% stated that Latvia was equally affected by Stalinism and Nazism, and therefore they support the fact that 23 August is a commemorative date in Latvia. Among Russian-speaking respondents, 41.8%
said that they do not support the inclusion of this date in the list of official commemorative dates, while 25.5% indicated they support the idea that 23 August should be an official memorable date.

For comparison, according to a Levada Center survey, in 2009, 34% of those polled in Russia supported the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, while 23% condemned it. However, in 2017, 45% of Russians polled approved of the pact, while 17% condemned it (Levada Center, 2017). This trend of public opinion, as observed in the Levada Center survey, coincides with Vladimir Putin’s evolving views on the matter: while in 2009 he called the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact an ‘immoral agreement,’ in 2015, he stated that it contributed to the security of the USSR (Interfax, 2009; 2015). In 2019, European Parliament issued the resolution ‘On the 80th anniversary of the start of the Second World War and the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe,’ which, in particular, stated: ‘Despite the fact that on 24 December 1989 the Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR condemned the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in addition to other agreements made with Nazi Germany the Russian authorities denied responsibility for this agreement […] and are currently promoting the view that Poland, the Baltic States and the West are the true instigators of WWII.’

During our interviews, Russian-speaking respondents explained that they have a negative attitude towards the commemorative date of 23 August, based on the fact that they condemn the equating of Nazism to Stalinism:

I think this date reminds us of historical events, which can be a reason for historical discussion, for example, in the media. On this day, one can discuss what happened in that historical period, but it is wrong that this day in Latvia is listed as the day of commemoration of the victims of the genocide. Of course, it is wrong to combine Nazism and Stalinism in
one day because I categorically do not accept the equating of fascism and Stalinism. [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]

In any case, it is wrong that on this day [23 August] Latvians unite communism and fascism. To date, Putin has condemned the equating of fascism and communism. This is a very politicised issue, which requires a certain discussion globally, not only in Russia or Latvia. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

Fascism was condemned by the Nuremberg trials, and communist ideology is not a crime in itself. Nobody denies there were repressions in Stalin’s time, but you cannot condemn the entire communist regime. When on 23 August they talk about the victims of totalitarianism, uniting fascism and Stalinism – I think this is wrong. The Soviet era is also the time of the great Victory in the war, and after Stalin there were many good things in the USSR. My relatives fought against fascism, and I am opposed to their memory being defiled in this way. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

A significant difference in the evaluation of the events of Nazi and Soviet occupation by Russian- and Latvian-speaking respondents is evident in the data of the survey by the University of Latvia’s Institute for Social and Political Studies (LU SPPI, 2009). Table 4.4. compares the answer to the question ‘What historical event of the 20th century are you most ashamed of?’ among Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘What historical event of the 20th century are you most ashamed of?’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latvian-speaking respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Participation of Latvians in Soviet repressions (32.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Participation of Latvians in the Holocaust (26.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The occupation of Latvia in 1940, the proclamation of the Latvian SSR and joining the USSR (20.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.4. ‘What historical event of the 20th century are you most ashamed of?’, responses of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents (LU SPPI, 2009).

‘Participation of Latvians in Soviet repressions’ was the most popular answer of the Latvian-speaking respondents, while only 12.7% Russian-speaking respondents indicated that they are most ashamed of this historical event. The most popular answer of the Russian-speaking respondents was ‘Participation of Latvians in the Holocaust’. However, in percentage terms, even more Latvian-speaking respondents (26.5%) than Russian-speaking respondents (21.8%) indicated the ‘participation of Latvians in the Holocaust’ as the most embarrassing historical event.

It was previously noted that the memory of Soviet repressions is not only very significant for Latvia but also competing with the memory about the Holocaust. Furthermore, considering that the memory of the Holocaust is of crucial importance for the memory conflict between the Russian Federation and Latvia, a few words should also be said about the various representation of the Holocaust and the institutionalisation of its memory within Latvia.
Holocaust memory scholars note that the Soviet Union deliberately pursued a policy of hushing up crimes against Jews; instead of the Holocaust, it was customary to talk about the destruction of the ‘Soviet civilian population’ (see Ezergailis, 1999; Dribins, 2007; Vestermanis, 2007; Bērziņš, 2013, 2015). Particularly for this reason, the development of the memory of the victims of the Holocaust in the post-Soviet era was a difficult task in almost any state of Eastern Europe (Judt, 2005). The difficulties in dealing with memories of the Holocaust in the Baltic states also resulted from the fact that it competed with memories of the Soviet repressions and clashed with remembering the Balts in the German army as freedom fighters (Laanes, 2017).

According to the 2017 data from the ‘Monitoring of Social Memory’ by the University of Latvia, 44% of Russian-speaking respondents and 31% of Latvian-speaking respondents indicated that greater attention on the part of the state to official Holocaust commemoration in Latvia is necessary (Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017, p.38). As for the participation of Latvian residents in the commemoration of the genocide of the Jewish people (on 4 July), 93% of Latvian-speaking and 86.6% of Russian-speaking respondents did not participate in them at all during 2010-2012 (Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013, p.20).

Although within the scope of this study, it is not possible to discuss in more detail the institutionalisation of Holocaust remembrance in modern Latvia, at least some initiatives supported by the Latvian state can be mentioned here, for example, the Žanis Lipke Memorial, Rumbula Forest Memorial and the museum ‘Jews in Latvia’ (the latter is also active in research, along with the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia), as well as
initiatives by the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia founded in 2003 (for more on this issue, see Melers, 2013; Bērziņš, 2013, 2015; Zellis, 2016; Radonić, 2017; Himka and Michlic, 2019; Krumina-Konkova, 2021). It should be noted that Latvian government officials regularly participate in Holocaust remembrance events, including at the invitation of the Israeli government (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2020; Saeima, 2020). Furthermore, the inclusion of information about the Holocaust in the school history curriculum is one of the priorities of the Latvian Ministry of Education (Dribins, 2006; Makarovs and Boldane, 2008). In general, we see that the low level of participation of the Latvian population in the commemoration of the mass victims among the Jewish population during the Second World War indicates that the process of institutionalisation of the memory of the Holocaust has not been completed in Latvia, and work in this direction both among private actors and within the framework of state support may need improvement. Although for many reasons, the institutionalisation of the memory of the Holocaust and the recognition of responsibility for the crimes committed by Nazi collaborators in Latvia is a difficult task, in general, there is every reason to believe that the Latvian society can move along the path of finding a consensus among various groups of the Latvian population.

Turning to the question of the respondents’ attitude to Soviet repressions, we have to draw attention to the significant discrepancies between the answers of our survey’s Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking participants. Russian-speaking respondents were three times more likely to say that mass repressions were a political necessity than Latvian-speakers (26.4% versus 8.5%). Among the Russian-speaking respondents, 36%
reported that they or people they know have had family members who were affected by Soviet repression and mass deportations. In contrast, among the Latvian-speaking respondents, this figure was 55.9%. Of survey participants who confirmed that their family or those of their acquaintances included people who became victims of Soviet political repressions and/or deportations, 87.8% believe that deportations were a political crime of the Soviet regime; while among respondents whose relatives were not subjected to repressions, this opinion was shared by only 38.4%. Respondents whose relatives did not face repression very often argue that deportations concerning the population of Latvia should not be regarded as some kind of exceptional phenomenon, characteristic only of the Soviet Union. Additionally, some Russian-speaking individuals have stated that the extent of deportations is overstated and that Latvian-speakers and politicians are giving too much attention to the topic.

Here are some quotes from the in-depth interviews:

I do not deny the fact of repressions. I cannot say that I am very competent in these matters, but it seems to me that, one way or another, there have always been repressions. It’s just that in Soviet times they were probably not hidden. [Interview 10, Russian-speaking female, 18 years old]

These are politicians who stir up conflict... Latvians suffered from deportations, and they told their children all about this to turn them against the USSR. Everyone suffered, both Latvians and Russians, but they are saying that only Latvians suffered. [Interview 19, Russian-speaking female, 24 years old]

Many Russians, good people, were repressed, and many people suffered, but now politicians like to say that the Latvians were oppressed. But in fact, it was not only them. [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]

It is also noteworthy that some respondents mentioned that ‘it is unacceptable to talk about repressions.’ In Soviet times, people not only hid from acquaintances that family members were repressed; also, victims did not
discuss the repression with their own family members, suffering the traumatic experience on their own. Thus, the long-standing ‘lack of a language’ for discussing repression has led to the perception that it is unnatural to talk about this experience with another person. Another important motive revealed in the interviews is the unwillingness of people who suffered from repression to feel like victims: ‘Specifically in my family history, I cannot imagine that my grandfather, who was repressed, would have felt like a victim of the system. Rather, he felt that what happened was a mistake and blamed specific people, but he did not feel he was a victim of the regime’ [Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old].

Interestingly, among the Latvian-speaking respondents who said that their relatives had been repressed, the prevailing opinion was that, while the memory of victims of the Soviet totalitarian regime must be remembered today, this does not mean that those who perpetrated repressive crimes need to be prosecuted or punished today. Here are some examples:

My great-grandfather was deported to Siberia for many years. He suffered a lot, and my grandfather also, and his brother. My grandmother’s father was killed. There were so many people in my family who suffered in Soviet times. […] It’s so long ago. I don’t think that people who suffered under the Soviets would like to remember this today, we shouldn’t remind them about people who made them suffer. They should have been punished a long time ago, but not now. [Interview 3, Latvian-speaking female, 31 years old]

My grandma told me about this. Her family was deported to Siberia, because they were Latvian patriots. The Germans were very kind and gave them food, but they showed they were the bosses here. But the Russians raped everyone, and they killed people. They killed my grand-grandfather. So yes, my family suffered due to the Soviet authorities. But it was another generation who suffered, not my parents. History is history, and in certain circumstances people should act this way just to survive. I think they shouldn’t be punished, because it was almost a century ago. We should get on with life. [Interview 6, Latvian-speaking male, 32 years old]
It is known that in most families that suffered from repression, even in the late Soviet times, the topic of state violence was taboo, and parents tried not to tell children anything about it, ‘just in case’ (see, for instance, Arkhipova, 2021). In this regard, it is understandable that the respondents may be unwilling to remember and discuss repressions. However, it is important to emphasise that, in general, the respondents’ discourse is characterised by the active use of various ‘figures of silence’: when speaking about the KGB or any interactions with the Soviet authorities, the above-quoted speaker does not name them directly, but tries to use such vague words as ‘they,’ ‘their,’ ‘these’ (more about the silences in family repression stories can be found in Arkhipova, 2021).

In both of the above quotes, the informants mentioned that they believed that people involved in the crimes of the Soviet regime should have been punished earlier but that now they should not bear the punishment because it is necessary to ‘move on.’ Similarly, many Russian-speaking informants also noted that people who collaborated with the Soviet state security agencies should not be punished in any way today:

I will state only my subjective opinion that, of course, these people could not be blamed, it was such a time when they adapted, and people had a completely different mentality, they believed that they were doing this for their homeland, considering Latvia as their homeland, etc. Those who were called KGB informers can be justified to some extent. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

Already so much time has passed, there is the Statute of Limitations, they are all elderly people, and there is no point in judging someone who is 75 to 80 years old. Nowadays, there are no fewer snitches, but for some reason, no one condemns them. [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53 years old]
An analysis of commemorative and ritual practices dedicated to the victims of Soviet repressions in Latvia allows us to conclude that, since the early 1990s, two commemorative dates related to the deportations of Latvians (on 14 June 1941 and 25 March 1949; days of Remembrance for Victims of the Communist Genocide) have been placed at the centre of the official memory of Latvia policy. The basis of this commemorative tradition is the flower-laying ceremony at the Freedom Monument and at the Monument to the Deported at Torņakalns Station, with the participation of representatives of the local and state government bodies (from Riga City Council to the president of the Republic of Latvia), public organisations associated with preserving the memory of politically-repressed persons (such as the Latvian Association of Politically Repressed Persons and the Sibīrijas bērni Foundation), and religious communities (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, the Catholic Church of Latvia, the Latvian Orthodox Church and the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia).

Memorials and memorial plaques to the deportees were actively installed in the early 1990s, initiated by various clubs and societies of the politically repressed, and funded by donations. The largest number of monuments to those who were politically repressed (35) was erected in 1989; subsequently, more than ten a year were erected in Latvia (Cērmanis et al., 2006). In 2018, Latvia had 539 commemorative sites ‘dedicated to the memory of the deported, repressed, or other victims of the Soviet regime’ (Kaprāns, 2018). As a rule, commemorative signs are placed near railway stations, where people were herded into cattle wagons, as well as near places where people were forcibly brought and kept before deportation to Siberia. The most famous
is the monument in Tornakalns dedicated to the deportations of 1941, next to which there is a freight car similar to those in which Latvians were deported (Latvijas pieminekļi, 2021). The car was installed here in 1996 in memory of the repressions, and the monument was unveiled in 2001.

The tradition of commemorating the days of deportations appeared in Latvia at the end of the 1980s, during the Third Awakening (the period between 1987 and 1991 before the restoration of Latvia’s independence). On 25 March 1988, the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party, for the first time, allowed a commemorative event dedicated to the deportations. A year earlier, on 14 June, the Human Rights Defence Group ‘Helsinki-86’ held an unauthorised anti-Soviet rally and laid flowers near the Freedom Monument. At the beginning of the 1990s, the main sites for rituals commemorating the victims of the totalitarian communist regime were places from which people were expelled (railway stations), as well as rivers, along which flowers and wreaths were lowered in memory of the repressed. The tradition of riverside commemoration, in fact, resembles archaic Latvian ritual practices; these include the rite of unmarried girls throwing wreaths on the water for divination prior to marriage (this survives to the present) and that of launching a funeral boat on the water. Currently, this tradition has become much less popular than gathering at memorials (Kaprāns et al. 2012).

As noted earlier, in October 1990, 25 March and 14 June were legalised as official days for commemorating the victims of the communist genocide by the law ‘On holidays, remembrance and celebration days’ (The Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia, 1990). In 1998, the law was supplemented with another memorable date: the first Sunday in December (‘Commemoration
day for the victims of the genocide against the Latvian people by the totalitarian communist regime’). Initiated by the Eastern Latvian Society (Austrumu Latviešu biedrība), this new commemorative day was supposed to be dedicated to Latvians living in Soviet Russia, who in 1937–1938 became victims of Stalinist repressions. However, the course of this bill’s consideration in parliament shows that the deputies of the Saeima themselves had no clear understanding of the meaning of this date, and most deputies generally forgot about the original idea of this day. During the parliamentary hearings, the date’s name was changed from ‘the day of commemoration of the communist terror’ to ‘the day of commemoration of the communist genocide’ (Kaprāns et al., 2012, p. 44). According to the data of Latvian Social Memory Monitoring, 95.5% of Latvian population does not observe this day of remembrance. It can be concluded that this memorial day in December exists only in the law, and in reality, no rituals or commemorative traditions have arisen (Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). There is also no media tradition for mentioning this commemorative day: it is ignored by the Russian-language Latvian media (Saulītis, 2012).

Figure 4.1. shows data from the ‘Monitoring of Social Memory’ by the University of Latvia, indicating that from 2012 to 2017, the number of participants in commemorative rituals associated with Soviet repressions decreased and was extremely low during the period. Most often, Latvian residents commemorate the 25 March and 14 June events in proportions of 10.1% and 7.7%, respectively (as of 2017).
In addition, there was a noticeable difference between the Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents: the latter much more often identified themselves with the events of Soviet repressions and their commemoration. Thus, the share of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents who commemorated the events of 25 March was 20.9% and 2.9%, respectively, and the share of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents who commemorated the events of 14 June was 17.6% and 2.4%, respectively. It should also be noted that the Latvian state television company LTV1 and the Latvian state radio annually broadcast commemorative concerts on 25 March and 14 June. However, researchers of the Latvian media environment make the important observation that the topic of commemorative events associated with Soviet repressions receives much less attention in the Russian-language Latvian media than in the Latvian-language media, and in
some cases, one can even speak of the former’s complete disregard for the topic of repression (Kaprāns et al., 2012, p. 65).

Importantly, our primary survey data show significant differences in the answers of the Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents to the questions about the need for commemorations of the victims of Soviet repressions. Thus, 73% of the Latvian-speakers expressed the belief that the victims of communist repressions should be officially commemorated in Latvia, while this opinion was shared by only 36.8% of the Russian-speaking respondents. Among those Latvian-speaking respondents whose relatives and friends suffered from Soviet repressions, the share of those who believed that the victims of repressions should be officially commemorated was 83.3%. For those Russian-speaking respondents whose relatives and friends suffered from Soviet repressions, this indicator was 50.0%.

Even when Russian-speaking interview respondents stated that they were neutral or positive about commemorating victims of Soviet repressions, they noted that they did not take part in such events and criticised the existing commemorative practices in Latvia. The respondents mentioned that they could not support the Latvian commemorative dates, as they perceived commemorations to be alien and connected with ‘accusations against Russians in the occupation of Latvia.’ Furthermore, Russian-speaking respondents have repeatedly referred to the fact that they perceive the commemoration of the victims of Stalinist repressions as ‘political’ and ‘simulative’:

Black ribbons and all sorts of other events – for me, this is a political statement by the authorities that contributes to an even greater division of the population. Russians on this day do not feel mourning, and Latvians are trying to blame Russians for all the troubles of today’s
Latvia as if only the Soviet occupation was to blame for our problems. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

It all seems a little fake to me: our politicians just came up with mourning ribbons that day in order to simplify everything and blame the Soviet occupation for everything. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

I don’t feel that people are really grieving on this day, neither Russians nor Latvians. [...] It seems to me that these mourning days are somehow simulative. Nobody cries that day, and nothing special happens. What, then, is mourning and grief in reality? It seems to me that on this day, Latvians just want to remind us that we are invaders. [Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

I know that not only in our country but also in Russia, it is now also becoming popular to participate in commemorating the victims of Stalinist repressions, but I prefer not to participate because I feel it is something artificial; and, again, like in Latvia, I think it is too political. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

While some informants expressed dissatisfaction with the authorities ‘blaming Russians for the occupation,’ the widely held argument was also that not only Latvians but also many other peoples suffered during Stalin’s time. For example, one informant claimed:

There are many people in Latvia who remember the Stalinist repressions as a tragedy, so I support the opinion that a special date is needed to honour the victims’ memory. But I do not like that our authorities pretend this applies only to Latvians. Many Russians have suffered from repression, and the authorities say we are occupiers. I think one such day is needed when people can remember the tragedy because people have suffered in almost every family. However, it is wrong as it is now –many different dates remind us of the deportation of exclusively Latvians. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

In turn, another popular opinion was that not only Latvians were victims of Stalin’s repressions, but also among those who carried out the repressions were representatives of different nationalities:

I am not against commemorating the victims of Stalin’s repressions, but in Latvia, this is not happening correctly. Our government singles it out as a tragedy only for Latvians, but this is wrong. No fewer Russians and Jews suffered, while among those who were repressed were different
people. Many Latvians served in the NKVD’ [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]

I do not like the fact that Latvians these days translate everything into politics, talk about the occupation, and pretend that they are victims. Many Latvians served in the state security bodies. In Stalin’s time, even those who supported the Soviet regime suffered. Therefore, everything was more complicated than simply fighting the Soviet regime. [Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

It seems to me that the mourning days of Latvians are political actions, and these days Latvians talk not so much about the Soviet repressions as about the Russian occupation. And this is not true because Latvians also served in the KGB. I feel that Latvians are transferring this negative attitude regarding Soviet power to the Russian-speakers. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

Thus, we see that some Russian-speaking respondents feel that the authorities are imposing on them responsibility for the crimes of the Soviet regime. In response, they try to use the argument that Russians, alongside Latvians, could both be victims and perpetrators of Stalinist-era atrocities. Despite many Russian-speaking individuals needing commemorations, the perception that they are being held responsible for repression hinders their solidarity with official commemorations.

Furthermore, many Russian-speaking respondents criticised the officially remembered dates dedicated to the victims of the communist genocide against Latvians, claiming that there are ‘too many mourning dates in Latvia’: ‘Latvians have many more mourning dates than holidays, they have endless deportations in their calendar’ [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]; ‘The Stalinist repressions are indeed a huge tragedy, but one commemorative day would have been enough, we have too many mourning dates in Latvia associated with Soviet repressions’ [Interview 5, Russian-speaking female, 27 years old]. It is noteworthy that not only Russian-
speaking, but also Latvian-speaking interviewees indicated that there are so many mourning days in Latvia that this is even a reason for jokes:

We laugh that we have a lot of mourning days. However, on these two days, when Latvians were deported, I always lower the flag, because my ancestors suffered. Because I can’t even imagine how a person could be kicked out of the house with children. On the way, two-thirds of the deported died, and then another third did not return from Siberia or even died there. They were given no right to return to Latvia. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]

In general, the social monitoring data show that the commemoration days of communist repressions in Latvia have a very small effect on social mobilisation. The ‘unpopularity’ of Latvians’ participation in commemorative practices associated with Soviet repressions led to a discussion about reducing the number of official commemorative dates in the calendar. Indeed, the Latvian Association of the Politically Repressed suggested keeping only 14 June as an official day of commemoration while excluding 25 March from the official calendar and making it a private family commemorative day (Kaprāns et al., 2012, p. 155). In 2017, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia (2017, p. 12) proposed to unite several of Latvia’s commemorative days associated with the Soviet occupation into one commemorative day. According to the ministry, such a decision ‘would allow concentrating the resources of social memory, promoting the sustainability of the commemorative tradition, as well as focusing on such historical events that make the history of Latvia a part of the common history of Europe and the Baltic States’ (ibid.).

As can be seen from the analysis of the primary data presented above, a portion of Russian-speaking respondents generally feel the need to commemorate victims of Stalinist repression but are not satisfied with existing
official practices of commemoration. Given this, there may also be particular interest in discussing how the Russian state interprets the remembering of repressions (especially considering Russia’s potential informational influence on the part of the population of Latvia).

According to Assmann (2016, pp. 172–173), in Russia, the memory of Stalin’s crimes — despite significant efforts at de-Stalinisation — has not yet become part of the official commemorative culture and shared by the whole society, nor has it become the content of the state memorial policy. In turn, as Epple (2020, pp. 13–14) notes, the memory of the Soviet state terror in modern Russia is characterised by a striking ambivalence – although formally political repression was condemned as early as 1956, ‘the vast majority of Russians are in a paradoxical situation of the impossibility of recognising responsibility for the destruction of millions.’ On the one hand, the state pays tribute to the recognition of Soviet repression, which is confirmed, for example, by the Concept of State Policy adopted in 2015 to perpetuate the memory of victims of political repression (The Russian Government, 2019).

On the other hand, in reality, the situation is such that preserving the memory of the Stalinist terror in Russia is mainly concerned with non-governmental organisations, whose activities, in turn, are openly persecuted by the state (for example, in February 2022, Memorial, an international human rights organisation founded to study crimes committed under Joseph Stalin’s reign, was liquidated by a court ruling in Russia). The surge in research work related to the publicising of Soviet crimes in the 1990s was followed by the classification of previously declassified documents (Gabovich, 2020). Access
to archival materials remains difficult for researchers and relatives of victims of political repression and is under the control of the FSB.

In many cases, government organisations, instead of preserving the memory of victims of Soviet terror, are engaged in direct distortion of events, trying to justify repression (see, for instance, Klimenko, 2018). As Gudkov (2011) notes, the fact that the proposals of human rights defenders and some political scientists have provoked fierce resistance from the authorities is not at all surprising:

It is clear that an attempt at introspection always provokes the strongest resistance. After all, it affects not only traumatic memories or horror from the consciousness of the moral degradation of a society that is unable to resist terror and mass repression. It also touches upon quite specific political interests of the authorities, striving to prohibit any attempts by society to raise questions about the responsibility of the country’s leadership for the crimes it commits.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, there has been a rapid growth in public initiatives designed to preserve the memory of the victims of Stalin’s terror in Russia. For example, within the framework of the ‘Last Address’ project (established in 2014), a rectangular metal memorial plaque is placed on the house, which became the last lifetime address of the victim of state repression. The rectangular metal memorial sign indicates the name of the repressed person, her/his year of birth, profession, arrest dates, death and the year of rehabilitation. The key principle of the ‘Last Address’ is that the initiative to install each plaque comes from one particular person who wanted to honour the memory of a particular repressed individual – thus increasing people’s involvement in perpetuating the memory. As of 2020, more than a thousand commemorative signs have been installed on residential buildings in dozens of Russian cities (Poslednii adres, 2021).
The ‘Return of Names’ is another campaign in memory of the victims of political repression organised by Memorial, which takes place on 29 October from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., always on the eve of Political Prisoner’s Day (Memorial, 2021). Participants read the list of the repressed (the name of the repressed, age at the time of death, profession and the date of execution), and they light candles and lay flowers (ibid.). Over the 10 years since the start of the ‘Return of Names’ campaign, first held in Moscow’s park near the Solovetsky Stone in 2007, the number of its participants increased 20 times – 213 people took part in the first action, and 5286 people took part in the 2017 action in Moscow (Kvasnikov, 2017). Furthermore, since 2010, on 30 October, a public action ‘Prayer for remembrance’ (initiated by the Transfiguration Brotherhood of the Russian Orthodox Church) has also been held throughout Russia. The ‘Prayer for remembrance’ campaign is a prayer reading of the names of those killed and injured during the years of repression, but unlike the ‘Return of Names,’ the participants in the action also pray for the employees of the punitive bodies, not only the victims are remembered, but also executioners.

In general, some rare attempts to borrow the Russian tradition of commemorating victims of Stalin’s repressions receive very limited support from the Russian-speaking community in Latvia. In 2015, the organisers of the ‘Last Address’ proposed implementing this initiative in Riga (Yel’tsin Center, 2015). However, to this day, such cooperation has not taken place. In 2018, the editorial staff of the online newspaper Meduza, located in Riga, joined the ‘Return of Names’ campaign: on 29 October, Meduza employees read the names of politically repressed persons listed in the Memorial database and
posted the video on YouTube (Meduza, 2018). However, there is no organised coordination of the ‘Return of Names’ campaign in Latvia. On 30 October 2017, for the first time in Riga, the ‘Prayer for remembrance’ was organised in the so-called ‘Corner House’ in Riga, which housed the KGB headquarters in Soviet times; the participants read out the names of Latvians who had suffered from repression. There are no statistics on the number of its participants; however, in 2018, the Facebook page of the Prayer for remembrance event in Riga showed that only 19 people were interested in the event. In 2020, 46 people were interested, while the main Facebook page of the Russian Prayer for remembrance had over 1,900 followers (Molitva pamiati, 2018, 2021).

Considering the possible use of the commemorative activities of the Latvian Orthodox Church (part of the Moscow Patriarchate) in the context of Russian public diplomacy, it should be mentioned that in June 2019, the Latvian Saeima adopted amendments to the law concerning the Latvian Orthodox Church, the essence of which was an attempt ‘to protect the autonomy of the LOC from foreign influence’ (Regnum, 2019). In particular, a new article states that only those priests who are citizens of Latvia and have lived here for at least ten recent years can become the head of the church. Thus, this legislative initiative can be viewed as the Latvian state’s desire to oppose the possible advancement of Russian interests through representatives of the Orthodox Church.

To conclude the discussion on the interpretation of Stalinist repressions, it is also necessary to delve more deeply into the respondents’ attitudes towards the historical role of Joseph Stalin. Table 4.5 compares our survey participants’ answers with the data from the 2019 survey of Russia’s
residents by Levada-Center. In total, 28.5% of Russian-speaking respondents to our survey consider Stalin’s role as negative and 23.4% as positive; while among Latvian-speaking respondents, the figures are 72.1% and 8.5%, respectively. As can be seen, Russian-speaking respondents in Latvia were more likely to negatively assess Stalin’s personal character compared to respondents polled in Russia, however, their level of approval of Stalin was still higher compared to Latvian-speaking respondents. However, it is important to note that 31.4% of Russian-speaking respondents said they assess Stalin’s role in history as ‘Both negative and positive’, and another 15.4% could not decide on their answer, which supports the conclusions of the qualitative analysis of the extreme ambivalence of respondents’ evaluations of Stalin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What role in history, in your opinion, did Stalin play?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Levada-Center data (2019a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entirely negative</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather negative</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather positive</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entirely positive</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both negative and positive</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to say</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.5.** Respondents’ opinion about Stalins’ role in history.
Appendix 12 contains excerpts from our in-depth interviews demonstrating that the assessment of Stalin as a cruel tyrant responsible for the deaths of millions of people is combined with the image of a brilliant leader who ensured the forced military-industrial modernisation of the country. Furthermore, respondents often noted that only such a ruler as Joseph Stalin could ensure the country’s survival and lead it to victory in World War II. Such evaluations of Latvian respondents are consistent with characteristics of the Stalinist myth noted by researchers in the contemporary Russian context (see Dubin, 2008; Gudkov, 2012, 2018; Gudkov and Zorkaia, 2017; Barash, 2019; Volkov, 2019; Levada Center, 2019b).

According to Gudkov (2012, pp. 108-109), there are two constant themes present in all variations of the Stalinist myth: 1) the sovereignty of leadership; the completeness of power (nearly mystical) without responsibility; the passivity of the population without participation, without representation of group interests and values; a society without politics; the human being as an object of management and coercion – without rights and consciousness of their own inherent value; 2) the constancy of a policy of confrontation; the necessity of opposing enemies of all kinds. Between 2016 and 2021, in Russia, the share of those who, in one way or another, agree that Stalin was a great leader has doubled from 28% to 56% (Levada Center, 2021). Given the available dynamics of public opinion, it can be concluded that a positive attitude towards Stalin and his role in the history of Russia has been established at the level of a new social norm since 2015. In February 2015, in Yalta, in the presence of State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin, the Big Three monument (depicting Joseph Stalin, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston
Churchill) was unveiled in honour of the 70th anniversary of the Crimean conference of allies in the anti-Hitler coalition (BBC, 2015). This monument, created by sculptor Zurab Tsereteli and erected less than a year after the annexation of Crimea, was the first official monument to Stalin since Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation (Epple, 2020). These trends of strengthening the symbolic role of Stalin in Russia coincide with the intensification of the use of the myth of Victory after 2014, in particular, oriented towards achieving the Russian state's foreign policy goals, as discussed in the previous chapter of the dissertation. Similarly to the use of the myth of Victory, promoting the myth of Stalin can be advantageous to the Russian state because, like the myth of Victory, it allows to remove responsibility from the state for committed crimes while accentuating the achievements of the era. It may be assumed that for some Russian-speakers in Latvia, the Stalinist myth may be appealing due to the belief that Stalin’s defeat of Nazism to some degree absolves the Soviet Union of responsibility for crimes committed on Latvian soil during the occupation period.

Furthermore, in the Russian context, the population’s trust in Stalin may be explained by a search for justice and an idealisation of the Soviet Union as a social state amid chronic dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs; as a result, Stalin’s figure becomes mythologised and is even perceived as an alternative to the current power, which is seen as not caring for the people (see Waal et al., 2013; Gudkov, 2019, RBC, 2019). According to a study by Arkhipova (2017), from 1998 to 2017, at least 132 sculptural images of Joseph Stalin appeared in Russia, and their number in the period 2014–2017 increased by almost two and a half times compared to 2006–2009;
representatives of the city administration were usually against the installation of a monument on state territory, and in most cases, the money for the installation of the monument came from crowdfunding. Thus, we can talk about certain internal reasons, not directly related to the state propaganda, encouraging people to invest their resources in constructing monuments to Stalin. Among these reasons may be, for example, dissatisfaction with the contemporary social reality, people's need for order and their belief in the effectiveness of cruel punishment, the latter of which is personified by Stalin as a wise ruler who cares for the welfare of the people. Similarly, in our interviews, some respondents spoke about the superiority of Stalin’s time over the present and expressed dissatisfaction with the contemporary political situation:

Despite the repressions, it remains in the memory that Stalin did a lot for the country, and now there is a lack of such a leader who will do something for the country. [Interview 25, Russian-speaking female, 74 years old]

Stalin won the war, and under Stalin, as far as I know, there was no corruption, unlike everything in the modern world. [Interview 11, Russian-speaking male, 18 years old]

It is notable that the Stalinist myth, shared among a portion of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia, has its ‘analogue’ among the Latvian-speaking population, a significant portion of which associates the period of Latvia’s ‘golden age’ with the autocratic rule of Kārlis Ulmanis (Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). According to Duvold, Berglund and Ekman (2020, p. 177): In Latvia’s case, there has never been a directly elected president, but the country had a strong interwar leader in Kārlis Ulmanis, who sealed power in a couple d'état in 1934, abolished parties and parliament and merged the two positions of prime minister and president not
long after. The period between the two world wars is rated highly among many Latvians. However, apart from possible nostalgia for the alleged ‘golden age’ of the Ulmanis years, there are tangible signs of political discontent in contemporary Latvia that may help explain the strong support for strong presidentialism and even outright authoritarianism. There are, as pointed out above, very low levels of trust in parliament and parties, and perceptions of elected officials stand at critically low levels and might well have brought many people to conclude that an ‘elected strongman’ could do no worse than the current institutions and the individuals who fill them. Dissatisfaction with the current economic or political situation is one of the motivations for the population to idealise the past, whether it be the Ulmanis era or the Stalinist era. These and other causes of nostalgia for the USSR are examined in more detail in the following section of the dissertation.

4.4. The Soviet nostalgic myth in contemporary Latvia

Nostalgic feelings for the USSR in Latvian society cause concern among the authorities of Latvia, who are extremely interested in reducing regret about the collapse of the USSR among the population. This is particularly evident in the fact that in the most recent Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia Guidelines on national identity, civil society, and integration policy for the period until 2027, it is stated that the previous period of integration policy implementation should be considered successful, based on the observation of positive trends in Latvian society, particularly a reduction in nostalgia for Soviet times (Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, 2020,
The conclusions of these Guidelines are based, in particular, on data from the ‘Monitoring of Social Memory’ by the University of Latvia, according to which, in the period from 2012 to 2017, the number of Latvian residents who positively evaluate Soviet times decreased from 57.2% to 50.1% (among Russian-speaking respondents, the proportion who evaluated the Soviet period positively decreased from 73.2% to 70.6%, and among Latvian-speaking respondents, from 45.8% to 36.3%) (Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017).

From Appendix 13, one can see significant differences in the associations that arise with the word ‘Soviet’ among Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents of our primary research survey. In general, Russian-speaking respondents mostly highlighted positive features, while Latvian-speaking respondents noted negative features of the Soviet Union. Thus, among Russian-speaking respondents, the repeated associations were such words as ‘equality,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘pride,’ ‘order,’ ‘justice,’ ‘unity of peoples,’ ‘victory,’ ‘great,’ while among the answers of Latvian-speaking respondents, the most frequent were the following: ‘occupation,’ ‘oppression,’ ‘lying’ and ‘lack of freedom.’ It is symptomatic that in interviews with Russian-speaking informants, there was practically no mention of ‘lack of freedom,’ which turns out to be extremely characteristic of interviews with Latvian-speaking respondents, and, in the absolute majority, of cases comes to the fore:

Our times are better for Latvia, because we have our freedom. We can speak our language in our country, we can travel anywhere we want. We are in charge of our governments. We have freedom of speech … You can choose everything yourself, because you are free.  [Interview 3, Latvian-speaking female, 31 years old]

The minus of life in the Soviet Union is human freedom. This is the main big minus.  [Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]
Furthermore, Table 4.6 shows the distribution of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondent’s answers to the following questions: ‘Do you regret the collapse of the USSR?’, ‘Would you like the Soviet Union to be restored?’ and ‘Do you think that the era of the USSR was better or worse for Latvia?’. Thus, Latvian-speaking respondents were 2.14 times more likely not to regret the collapse of the USSR, 3.15 times more likely to think that the era of the USSR was worse for Latvia than today, and 1.80 times more likely to not want the Soviet Union to be restored compared to Russian-speaking respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Do you regret the collapse of the USSR?’</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (41%)</td>
<td>Yes (13.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (34.7%)</td>
<td>No (74.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Do you think that the era of the USSR was better or worse for Latvia?’</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worse (20.9%)</td>
<td>Worse (65.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better (46%)</td>
<td>Better (15.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Would you like the Soviet Union to be restored?’</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No (42.7%)</td>
<td>No (76.7%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, and I think that is quite realistic (6.3%)</td>
<td>Yes, and I think that is quite realistic (0.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, but this is currently unrealistic (22.2%)</td>
<td>Yes, but this is currently unrealistic (10.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. The distribution of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents’ answers to the questions about their attitudes towards the USSR.
The declaration of a positive attitude towards the Soviet era among Russian-speaking respondents does not always automatically mean real support for the communist regime. Although over 40% of Russian-speaking respondents regretted the collapse of the USSR, only 28.5% of Russian-speaking respondents stated that they would like to restore it (among Latvian-speaking respondents – 11.7% indicated they would like to restore the Soviet Union). For comparison, a 2012 sociological survey conducted by the University of Latvia showed almost the same results – 12.6% of Latvian-speaking and 27.9% of Russian-speaking respondents stated that they would like to restore the USSR (Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013, p. 29). Furthermore, as can be seen from the survey results, ‘Latvian speakers’ and ‘Russian speakers’ are not homogeneous groups, all members of which necessarily share a pro-Soviet or anti-Soviet perspective. Thus, as seen from Table 4.6, more than a third of Russian-speaking respondents in our survey do not regret the collapse of the USSR at all, while more than 13% of Latvian-speaking respondents regret it.

Analysis of the data from our survey also shows that 71.1% of Russian-speaking respondents experienced nostalgia for the Soviet Union, while among Latvian-speaking respondents, this figure was lower but far from minimal at 35.7%. The expert interviews conducted for the research also confirmed that nostalgia for the Soviet era is widespread among Latvia’s Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking populations. For instance, the political scientist Prof. Karlis Daukšts notes that nostalgia is formed mainly around positive memories of everyday life in the USSR and is typical not exclusively for Russian-speakers.
You see, no one talks about longing for the Communist Party, for Bolshevism, no one has a nostalgic mood for some rallies or May Day. However, older people have a longing for the time of their youth, when it was more fun. Also, for example, there was such a social phenomenon as blat [a form of corruption] – it created its own special social sphere, demonstrating belonging to a certain circle of the Soviet elite. In addition, there is a certain longing for collectivism in a contemporary individualistic society. These sentiments are also present among Latvian-speaking people in Latvia. [Interview E6]

This opinion is also shared by Dmitrijs Šandibins (assistant to Tatjana Ždanoka, Latvian Member of the European Parliament), who claims:

If we talk about sympathy for the Soviet past as such, then among the Latvian-speakers it, in general, surprisingly, also exists. The Soviet past is usually sympathetic to the elderly, who remember good times when things were stable and when the state took care of them. Among the Russian-speaking part of the population, nostalgia for the Soviet past is even more noticeable. For many Latvians, the Soviet period and everything connected with it, including Soviet symbols, is very painful, but such an unambiguous rejection of everything Soviet, which comes from the Latvian government, is not massively supported in everyday life. [Interview E3]

In addition, Svetlana Pogodina, an associate professor at the University of Latvia specialising in social and cultural anthropology, notes that in nostalgia for the Soviet Union, there is undoubtedly a connection with the mythological ‘golden age.’ However, this is typical for the older generation, while among young people, ‘positive assessments, for example, of Soviet style and Soviet interiors are very popular’ [Interview E10]. The expert’s opinion fully coincides with the conclusions of academic research presented in Chapter 1.2 (Dragunskii, 2003; Kustarev, 2013; Levkievskaya, 2005; Levinson, 2015) that the Soviet nostalgic myth is a variant of the myth of the golden age according to which the past is idealised and presented as a kind of ‘lost paradise.’ Furthermore, the data from our survey also confirm that nostalgia for the Soviet Union is less characteristic of Russian-speaking respondents of a young age (Table 4.7 compares the responses of Russian-speaking respondents under
35 years old and over 35 years old concerning their attitudes towards the Soviet Union; a comparison among age groups of Latvian-speaking respondents is not provided due to their smaller number in the overall sample compared to the number of Russian-speaking respondents).

| Respondents who do not feel nostalgia for the USSR | 47.5% Russian-speakers aged under 35 | 19.5% Russian-speakers aged over 35 |
| Respondents who regret the collapse of the Soviet Union | 25% Russian-speakers aged under 35 | 49% Russian-speakers aged over 35 |
| Respondents who believe that the era of the USSR was better for Latvia than today | 32.5% Russian-speakers aged under 35 | 52.8% Russian-speakers aged over 35 |
| Respondents who would like to restore the USSR | 18.8% Russian-speakers aged under 35 | 33.3% Russian-speakers aged over 35 |

Table 4.7. Russian-Speaking respondents’ attitudes towards the USSR by age group.

For comparison, data from the PEW Research Center (2017) show that not only in Latvia but also in other post-Soviet countries, older people are more likely than younger people to say that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a bad thing (22% of the respondents aged 18-34 regret the dissolution of the
USSR, comparing to 33% of the respondents aged over 35; the figures are 23% and 51%, respectively, for Georgia; 50% and 78% for Russia; 34% and 60% for Belarus; 20% and 40% for Ukraine, 14% and 27% for Lithuania; 62% and 75% for Moldova; 74% and 82% for Armenia; 13% and 15% for Estonia).

According to Pogodina, ‘People who had no experience of life in the USSR build their idea of this time based on films and often perceive Soviet visual images with sympathy’ [Interview E10]. This expert's statement was also confirmed during in-depth interviews with survey respondents. Thus, interview respondents who had little or no direct experience of life in the Soviet Union (aged under 35) sometimes expressed regret about the collapse of the Soviet Union, while they noted that their idea of the USSR is based on mediated experiences (film, television, literature, etc.). For instance, one of the informants noted:

I have only positive and warm associations with the Soviet era, although I didn't see this time myself. The first thing that comes to my mind when I think about the USSR is everything connected with culture, films of that time, some writers, and art. [Interview 10, Russian-speaking female, 18 years old]

Another interviewee stated the following:

I have a very warm attitude towards the Soviet era. I love TV shows about Soviet times and Soviet literature. I like Soviet everyday life, the relations between people at that time, and the fact that they believed in the idea of a brighter future. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

Considering the interpretation of the Soviet past by respondents aged under 35, one can pay attention to those studies that, following Marianne Hirsch (2008), use the concept of ‘postmemory’ in relation to people who are nostalgic for the Soviet times, which they never experienced personally (see, for instance, Kalinina, 2014; Barash, 2017). Although Hirsch (2008) used the
term post-memory in relation to traumatic historical experiences, as Barash (2017, p. 129) shows, this concept can also be applied to not necessarily tragic but also positive emotionally charged events of the past, while post-Soviet nostalgia is ‘transmitted’ to the young generations mainly not through family narratives, but through the mythological media narratives. According to Gudkov (2010, p. 32) the memory of young people about the Soviet Union is ‘a scattering of individual events and interpretations, myths and stereotypes of the past without any coherent interpretation and presentation.’ Sharing this view, Kalinina (2014, p. 188) claims that young people with no direct personal memories of the Soviet past ‘operate with post-memories and collective memories shared through textbooks, films and social networking sites. […] They only have a popular-culture image produced by various media.’ At the same time, Kalinina, like Gudkov, believes that in Russia, this is happening as part of a targeted policy of memory supported by the authorities (ibid.).

It is interesting, however, that many older respondents in Latvia also noted that their positive attitude towards the USSR is based on films of that time, which were heavily censored and idealised the Soviet regime. For example, one of the interviewees noted: ‘It is difficult for me to judge the Soviet repressions. In Soviet films, Stalin, for example, was not portrayed as a bloody tyrant, and in the films on which I grew up, the Soviet regime was not criticised but glorified’ [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53]. Several Russian-speaking respondents, referring to their sources of knowledge about Soviet repression, recalled the film Long Road in the Dunes (Ilgais ceļš kāpās, 1981). For example, one of the respondents noted: ‘In Soviet times, I never came across stories about the deportations of Latvians, only judged by the film Long
Road in the Dunes. This film was a great success when it came out, there was a lot of talk about it, and when I saw it, I immediately imagined that everything in life was just like in a movie’ [Interview 25, Russian-speaking female, 74 years old].

In 2016, after the popular Soviet Latvian film Long Road in the Dunes (Ilgais celš kāpās, 1981) was once again shown on Latvian television, a reader of the Latvijas avīze newspaper, Ilmārs Knaģis, demanded a ban on further broadcasting of the movie, calling it a ‘film full of lies,’ and ‘a crime against the state and people’ (Ālīte, 2016). According to Knaģis, after seeing the film, children would ask their parents who the terrible aizsargi (volunteer paramilitary organisation in Latvia during the 1918–1939 period) and legionnaires were, and this will create the impression that ‘we are still in Russia and have never got rid of it’ (ibid.). The film Long Road in the Dunes was heavily criticised by dissidents in Soviet times. Thus, in 1984 the famous dissident Eduards Berklavs (1998) signed a letter from a group of Soviet intelligentsia stating the following:

We must not participate in the slander of history of our people, which was deliberately made by the gifted filmmaker Aloīzs Brenčs in the award-winning film Long Road in the Dunes. Brenčs deliberately distorts the facts, hides the atrocities of Russians against Latvians to justify the occupation of Latvia... If he decided to make a film about the past of the Latvian people, then he should have known that in 1946–1949 the Russians forcibly expelled about 60 thousand people from the Baltic States, barefoot and in cattle cars [...] But how does Brenčs show the Latvian people in his film? As if those repressed in Latvia were only individuals who collaborated with the opponents of the Soviet regime. The forcible deportation of Martha [the film’s lead character] to Siberia is shown almost as a trip to friends. The Russians greet the deported foreigner as a dear guest... Could it be possible to make fun of our tragedy and the tragedy of other peoples exiled to the north even more?
In response to the letter from Knaģis in 2016, readers of *Latvijas avīze* made many comments, both for and against – in particular, the famous journalist Elita Veidemane supported the film. She recalled that the filming ended in 1981, when it was generally forbidden to speak publicly about deportations. Furthermore, Veidemane (2016) claimed: ‘Soon we will say that “such films” spoil our national identity and undermine patriotism. Then it’s justified to talk about how weak Latvians’ self-awareness is, if art can destroy it overnight.’ According to the director of the National Cinema Centre, Dita Rietuma, ‘If Long Road in the Dunes threatens the state, then all Latvian film classics created in Soviet times will have to be banned from showing. Before showing films that fall outside the current ideology, it is advisable to give a commentary by a specialist who can “fit” the film into the context of history’ (LTV7, 2016). The head of the Latvian Association of the Politically Repressed, Gunārs Resnais, in turn, said: The film is not a documentary, but a fictional one, therefore, deviations from historical realities can be forgiven, because the main theme is the love of the main characters. When the film was just released, it was unexpected and courageous: never before under the Soviet regime was there any talk of repression or exile. The film began it’ (ibid.). The writer of the film’s music, Raimonds Pauls, also spoke in defence of Long Road in the Dunes. Pauls noted that ‘We must leave the film alone. It was made earlier, then there was a different situation […] It is better to ask why another film that would be fair has not been shot in 20 years! (ibid.).

The discussion about the film *Long Road in the Dunes* is closely related to the issue, which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of the dissertation, regarding the dissemination of historical disinformation through
the media. Fiction films, as well as documentaries, can certainly be a tool for disseminating false historical narratives. However, it is important to note that they do not necessarily have to contain direct historical lies. We often see cases of simplified historical interpretations, which have negative consequences for society. Thus, considering Latvian and Russian documentary film accounts of World War II in the context of the situation of Latvian-Russian memory conflict, Platt (2020, p. 18) concludes that ‘the form of the popular historical documentary is itself a metaphor for the failures of national public memory, in its efforts to engineer smooth narratives, simple figures of national villainy or heroism, and closed stories in a world in which all stories are entangled, multiple, complex, and incomplete.’

As for cinema and other media productions in Latvia that utilise nostalgic sentiment, Kaprāns (2016) notes that in many cases, they ‘have imported the major ideas of Russia’s memory politics, which associate the Soviet dictatorship with social security and cultural advancements, while simultaneously downplaying the severely non-democratic nature of the regime.’ Latvian authorities, in turn, view such phenomena as a threat. For instance, in 2009, the Latvian politician Ināra Mūrniece (speaker of the Saeima since 2014) was dissatisfied with a TV series called The Best Time in Our Life, about life in the USSR, which was broadcast by television channel RTR Planeta (in particular, it showed elements of life in Soviet Latvia, such as microbuses produced in the LSSR). According to Mūrniece, ‘The nostalgia for the USSR is cultivated with the thought that maybe it would not be bad to restore it – if not quite in the form in which it existed, then ideologically, with the centre in Moscow’ (Mūrniece, 2009). Although, as noted in the previous
chapter, the legislative restriction on Russian television was recently introduced in Latvia, this does not mean that Russian television content, which has been popular with both Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking audiences for a long period, will not continue to be consumed through internet platforms (for the discussion on how Russian television actively uses nostalgia for Soviet times see Oushakine, 2000; Lipovetsky, 2004; Khinkulova, 2012; Novikova, 2012; Levinson, 2015; Kalinina, 2016).

The cinematography of the Soviet period is the subject of heated public debate in today’s Latvia (see, for instance, Inkins, 2019). From time to time, ideas are raised to discuss the possibility of banning cinema that glorifies totalitarian regimes, and proposing the corresponding legislative regulation (following the example of Ukraine, where from 2014 to 2017, it was forbidden to show about 650 films and TV series including but not limited to those glorifying Soviet law enforcement agencies) (Kogalov, 2017). However, to date, such initiatives in Latvia have not gone beyond the controversy in the media and social networks and have not been considered by the government. It should also be noted that 11 out of 12 films included in the Latvian cultural canon (the Ministry of Culture’s official list of the 99 most outstanding and famous works of artistic and cultural value in Latvia) were filmed during the Soviet occupation of Latvia, with most of them illustrating the realities of different periods of the Soviet era (National Library of Latvia, 2021). It should also be noted that, in addition to cinema, other forms of Soviet-era art (music, painting, and literature) continue to be consumed in Latvian society, and there have been no visible attempts by the Latvian government to restrict this to date (for example, the law on the prohibition of the display of Soviet symbols does
not extend to films or literature of the Soviet era in which such symbols may be depicted).

Contemporary art also reinterprets the Soviet era in its way. For instance, the film *Paradise ’89* (Directed by Madara Dislere, 2018) addresses the theme of nostalgia for the time of the so-called ‘Third Awakening’ (the movement that led to the restoration of Latvia’s independence) but, importantly, connects this theme with nostalgia for the everyday life of the late Soviet era. For example, one of the film reviews in Latvijas avīze, under the telling heading ‘When the grass was greener and the queues longer,’ stated:

For many Latvians, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a salvation from an evil nightmare, but there is no shortage of people who are immersed in nostalgic memories of the Soviet era and sincerely consider it a lost paradise: there was no unemployment, there was free access to education and health care, housing was provided for free, the food consisted mainly of natural ingredients with no flavour enhancers and preservatives. (Kasparāns, 2018)

As seen from this example, contemporary art in Latvia not only accentuates the repressive nature of the Soviet regime but also focuses on everyday life in the USSR, often in an ironic rather than condemning key. As an example confirming this thesis in the context of theatrical art, one can mention the play *Sonya* (directed by Hermanis and based on the story of Tatiana Tolstaya, which tells about life in Soviet communal apartments) that was staged for many consecutive seasons at the New Riga Theatre, since 2006. The performance has been a great success and testifies to the constant public interest in the ironic interpretation of the Soviet past, with an emphasis on everyday life. Contemporary Latvian literature, more often than filmmaking, addresses the problem of comprehending the Soviet past. Most frequently, Latvian writers focus on traumatic experiences; however, there are also
numerous examples of positive assessments of the Soviet time within the framework of the (auto)biographical genre (for more detailed analysis of representations of the Soviet period in Latvian biographical discourse, see Kaprāns, 2011). Although it is difficult to overestimate the influence that art can have on the formation of a positive or negative attitude towards the Soviet era, it must be taken into account that this is far from the only factor that participates in the formation of nostalgic feelings. Thus, among the most important reasons why regret about the collapse of the USSR is popular today in Latvia are economic ones.

For instance, the ‘successful economic development and no unemployment’ was the most popular answer of Russian-speaking respondents to the question ‘What features do you think are most characteristic of the USSR?’ (among other common answers were ‘Free, high-quality education and medicine, free housing’; ‘Stability and confidence in the future’; ‘Advanced science and culture’; ‘The absence of interethnic conflicts, the friendship of people’). The ‘successful economic development and no unemployment in the USSR’ was also the second most popular choice among Latvian-speaking respondents. However, unlike Russian-speaking respondents, the most important feature of the USSR, the majority of Latvian-speaking respondents called ‘Mass repressions,’ and among other most popular responses were also mentioned mainly disadvantages: ‘Queues, shortage of goods,’ ‘Persecution of dissenters, control by the KGB, lack of freedom,’ ‘Absolute power of the party and state officials, bureaucracy.’ According to our survey data, the most popular reasons for nostalgia for the USSR were as follows: 1) Free and high-quality education and medicine were
available in the USSR. 2) There was a unity of people in the USSR; ethnic conflicts arose after it collapsed. 3) People were provided with work in the USSR. 4) People were better and kinder in the USSR; mutual bitterness and distrust increased after the collapse. 5) There was stability in the USSR and confidence in the future.

Narratives about Latvia’s successful economic development were encountered in interviews with respondents in various variations; in particular, as discussed in Chapter 4.3, the motive ‘the Soviet government did a lot to improve the infrastructure of Latvia’ was mentioned by some Russian-speaking respondents along with the rapid industrial development of Latvia as a justification for why it is ‘incorrect to speak of the Soviet occupation of Latvia’. In turn, according to Krūmiņš (2017), an analysis of the USSR’s budget from 1946 to 1960 reveals that 13 billion rubles more of the income obtained in Latvia were transferred to the USSR than invested in Latvia, including military expenses: ‘Calculations refute the myth, perpetuated during the USSR and still upheld today, of Soviet investments in Latvia and the Baltics as a whole and provide evidence to the contrary – that Latvia, as well as the Baltics as a whole, were economic donors to the USSR. In the post-war years, the priorities of the USSR were not investments in production, but rather the suppression of national resistance movements and militarisation of the territory’ (see also Pazdere and Cīrulis, 2015 for an analysis of investments in Soviet Latvia). Previously, the commission on the calculation of losses from the USSR’s occupation also claimed that Soviet investments were in reality small and exaggerated by Soviet propaganda (Pazdere, 2016). In 2020, the minister of justice, Jānis Bordāns, stated that Latvia was a ‘donor to the Soviet Union,’
which elicited a sharply negative response in pro-Kremlin media (Latviesi, 2020; Baltnews, 2020a). The exact amount of Soviet investments in Latvia is a question that historians and other interested parties are still seeking to answer. However, there is little doubt that the narrative of investments was convenient for the Soviet Union to justify its presence in the Baltic states. It is this narrative that contemporary Russia continues to use in its interests.

Furthermore, during in-depth interviews, almost all Russian-speaking respondents noted that the Soviet social protection system was among the most important positive features of life in the USSR. Below are some excerpts from in-depth interviews with Latvian-speaking respondents, which demonstrate a sense of nostalgia among them concerning free healthcare and housing as well as no unemployment in the USSR:

Sometimes I regret that we have not retained some of the good features of the Soviet era today. For example, in the USSR, all people knew that they could always find a job. Now work is much harder to find, many people have neither jobs nor homes. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]

I don’t regret the collapse of the USSR in general, but I would like to return some benefits of living in the USSR. People had a job. Nowadays, you need to work hard. There are so many homeless people. [Interview 6, Latvian-speaking male, 32 years old]

The level of education, medicine, equal rights for different people, the availability of the same medicine, the availability of the same education. All these are the positive qualities of the Soviet Union that very often make me want to return to the past. [Interview 13, Latvian-speaking male, 60 years old]

In the Soviet Union, there was free medicine. Now it is not there and not many can afford insurance. This is what I regret when I think about the Soviet era, and it cannot be returned. [Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]

In the USSR, many people had good jobs and salaries, free healthcare, and there were no homeless people. Many of my friends regret the collapse of the USSR, not only Russian-speakers, who felt good not to have to learn Latvian, but many Latvians also remember the positive
features of this time. [Interview 30, Latvian-speaking female, 37 years old]

Overall, it can be concluded that an analysis of our primary data supports the findings of several studies that identify dissatisfaction with current economic conditions as the basis for Soviet nostalgia in contemporary societies (Bernhard and Kubik, 2014; Barash, 2017; Gudkov, 2021a; Ponomarev, 2021). The study ‘Participation of ethnic minorities in democratic processes in Latvia’ by the University of Latvia Institute of Philosophy and Sociology (2017, p. 25) also concludes, based on data from a population survey, that ‘economic reasons lie at the base of nostalgia for the USSR in contemporary Latvia,’ since ‘representatives of ethnic minorities with higher incomes less frequently positively evaluated the Soviet period, and more frequently – the period of Latvia’s independence’ (unfortunately, the survey data showing the distribution of responses from respondents based on income level is not available). In turn, our survey data show a similar correlation: 25.23% of Russian-speaking respondents with incomes up to 800 euros per month did not experience nostalgia for the USSR, while the figure for Russian-speaking respondents with incomes over 800 euros per month was 38.3%.

Importantly, Russian-speaking respondents, unlike Latvian-speaking respondents, often mentioned the absence of social tension between various ethnic and linguistic groups in Soviet Latvia. Here are just a few examples from the in-depth interviews:

In Soviet times, by the way, Latvians could study in Latvian, Russians in Russian. Nobody Russified them. [Interview 5, Russian-speaking female, 27 years old]

Judging by the stories of relatives and the documentaries that I watched, people lived well, there were no conflicts, everyone
communicated amicably. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

It seemed subjectively that the friendship of peoples really existed, according to my childhood memories. VDNKh, for example, the Fountain of Friendship, 15 republics, the Union is indestructible; yes, I had such thoughts, I believed in it. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

All peoples were friends, and it was possible to travel over such a large territory. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

Only one Russian-speaking respondent mentioned that in Soviet times she observed a few cases of domestic quarrels between Latvians and Russians: ‘In our building, there was only one family like that, a girl; it was felt there how they hate Russians, because she opened the door, shouted: “Russians are pigs!”, and quickly slammed the door. And in the same building there was another Latvian family, completely normal, the children were all friendly, there was no such feeling’ [Interview 25, Russian-speaking female, 74 years old]. However, Latvian-speaking respondents often pointed out that the Soviet society was not endowed with high ethnic tolerance: ‘There was no freedom to use the Latvian language. Practically in 90 per cent of state institutions, everything was in Russian. I was always called a German because my maiden name was Hans, it was always used pejoratively: “gansikha, gansikha” [an ethnophaulism, a contemptuous nickname for Latvians]’ [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old].

According to Yakovenko (2019, p. 28), ‘the era of Perestroika, the collapse of the USSR and the post-Soviet reality revealed the fictitious nature of the myth of the “unbreakable friendship of the Soviet people”’. There are several studies that examine in more detail the existence of this myth in the Soviet Union (Sahadeo, 2008; Lurye, 2011; Bassin and Kelly, 2012; Prina,
A significant element of this myth was the image of the ‘elder brother,’ i.e. the Russian people, which found reflection, for example, in the first stanza of the Soviet anthem: ‘Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics / Great Russia has welded forever to stand.’ The quotes above confirm that Russian-speaking respondents are more likely to share this myth of Soviet times compared to Latvian-speaking respondents, who, on the contrary, challenge it.

As noted in the previous chapter, inter-ethnic confrontation in Latvia is a topic that can be intentionally used by various political actors (for example, as part of promoting the Kremlin’s narrative of so-called Russophobia in the Baltic states). The results of our primary research conducted in 2020 also showed that for Russian-speaking respondents, the topic of conflict with Latvian-speakers is very important. During in-depth interviews, Russian-speaking respondents repeatedly stated that there is a conflict between Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers in Latvia, which is ‘intentionally created.’ They claimed that this is ‘a political conflict, not a conflict in everyday life,’ and that ‘this conflict exists and spreads mainly in the media.’ At the same time, many Russian-speaking respondents emphasised their feeling that interethnic tension in modern Latvia has increased significantly in comparison with Soviet times:

Firstly, in the Soviet Union, everyone was equal, without differences, Latvian, Russian, Jew, Ukrainian. Everyone lived in harmony. Latvians also worked in Siberia, Russians worked in Moldova, there was no such thing as quarrelling, like now in Latvia... Everyone lived very well, everyone was friendly. [Interview 21, Russian-speaking male, 56 years old]

Unfortunately, Latvia has not done anything to ensure that we live in harmony as peoples. [Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]
I remember my childhood, we Latvians, Russians, we were all friends. It began later, in the 90s, when politicians began to convince the population that Latvians were almost the greatest nation in the world... There were no national conflicts under the Soviet system... We lived peacefully, we took care of each other. Then there was no such thing that Russians hated Latvians or vice versa. [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]

In turn, Latvian-speaking respondents, with very rare exceptions, noted that they do not observe any interethnic disagreements in modern Latvia. Those Latvian-speaking respondents, who recognised the existence of an ethnolinguistic conflict, noted that they fear aggression from Russia and its attempts to influence Latvia, including through the media:

There is a clear conflict between Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers. I can see it today. But it's getting better than 20 years ago. The conflict is still there but it's fading out. [...] I have 50% of Russian friends and 50% of Latvian friends. My best friend is Russian-speaking, but we speak in Latvian with each other, and she is a big fan of Vladimir Putin, but as long as she doesn't want to convince me to love him – I don't care. I have a very huge fear about what happens in politics when Russia is involved. When the war in Ukraine started, I was very concerned and very scared that Russia may attack Latvia again for no reason, or for some reason, or try to take some land back. But I think that NATO and the European Union will protect us. I am sure that Russia tries to affect Latvia today by media. [Interview 3, Latvian-speaking female, 31 years old]

I fear Russian aggression in a way. Because Russia is very powerful and huge. They have capacity to rule the world. There is a conflict between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking populations in Latvia. Russian-speakers are feeling pity about themselves, especially non-citizens, because if they want to get citizenship they need to pass the test, even if they are born here. So they feel upset and self-pity. Russians are with Russians in Latvia and Latvians are with Latvians. They are not mixing. Russians are living like in the ghetto – they are a very separate group. I do have Russian friends, but they are like me, because they are speaking Latvian. And we can understand each other. And even if they are speaking Russian it’s ok, unless they are saying that the minority rights are not respected in Latvia, and things like that. [Interview 6, Latvian-speaking male, 32 years old]
The motive of self-pity on the part of Russian-speakers, mentioned by the informant in the above quote, was also noted by a representative of the Latvian Russian Union Dmitrijs Šandibins: ‘In fact, Russia practically does not support the Russian community in Latvia and, although the absolute majority of Russian-speaking people in Latvia have a positive attitude towards Russia and, moreover, are loyal to the Russian authorities, very many Russians in Latvia have a feeling of abandonment and resentment towards Russia. They feel abandoned, not fully belonging to Latvia and neither to Russia’ [Interview E3]. According to Duvold and Ekman (2016), Soviet nostalgia among the Russian-speakers in the Baltic states ‘is also a question of collective identity: to receive a sense of belonging; to mark the distance to the majority population; and to justify the presence in the region.’ Given that a majority of Russian-speaking Latvia have a relatively low level of symbolic belonging to the Russian Federation, it is likely that some of them have a positive sentiment towards the Soviet era as a result of their lack of clear belonging to Russia and their inability to fully identify with the historical memory of Latvians. For them, a (post-)Soviet identity could be regarded as a ‘convenient’, simplified allegorical conception of identity that allows both to separate oneself from Russians from the Russian Federation and to postulate a common historical past with them (far from always sharing the desire to return this past). Additionally, while the positive sentiment towards the Soviet Union shown by respondents may align with pro-Soviet narratives promoted through Russian propaganda, it does not necessarily mean that they fully accept the historical ideologies of the current Russian state.
It is also necessary to consider how the non-citizen population of Latvia (the absolute majority of whom are Russian-speaking) interprets Soviet times. Since only 35 people taking part in our survey were non-citizens, no reliable conclusions can be drawn from such a small sample (even so, 22 of the non-citizens surveyed indicated that they regret the collapse of the USSR).

According to the 2017 sociological survey conducted by the University of Latvia (Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017, p. 35), it showed that non-citizens are the group of the Latvian population that most of all would like the restoration of the Soviet Union (30.1% of non-citizens would like the restoration of the USSR, compared to 15.9% among all respondents). This can be explained by the fact that non-citizens of Latvia are a group of the population who, after the collapse of the USSR, were largely affected in terms of their civil rights (unlike citizens of Latvia, they cannot vote in municipal and parliamentary elections; there are also restrictions on their social and economic rights (Latvian Human Rights Committee, 2013)). Experts interviewed for this research study also share the opinion that, among the Latvian population, the group of non-citizens has the strongest level of sympathy for the Soviet Union:

Many non-citizens voted for the independence of Latvia in 1991, which led to disappointment in the Latvian state, they consider themselves deceived and deprived of their rights. This makes them regret the collapse of the USSR and want to return to the past. [Interview E6, Prof. Karlis Daukšts, political scientist]

Non-citizens of Latvia are probably the most likely to regret the collapse of the USSR, even more than other Russian-speakers in Latvia. Resentment pushes them towards nostalgia for the Soviet era. [Interview E10, Dr. Svetlana Pogodina, assistant professor, University of Latvia]

Non-citizens of Latvia mostly regret the collapse of the USSR because, in their opinion, they were deprived of the right to be citizens of the country in which many of them were born. These people have the opportunity to obtain Latvian citizenship, or obtain citizenship of the
Russian Federation, but they do neither. Many non-citizens live with a sense of resentment towards the Latvian state. [Interview E3, Dmitrijs Šandibins, Riga City Council deputy (Latvian Russian Union), assistant to the MEP Tatjana Ždanoka]

It can be surmised that for non-citizens of Latvia who are nostalgic for the Soviet era, as is the case with some of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia whose nostalgic feelings towards the USSR were discussed earlier, such an issue as the search for identity may be a significant cause for regret at the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, for this group of the population, the factor of discontent with their social status (significant restriction in participation in public life) is undoubtedly exacerbated.

It is noteworthy that research on Soviet nostalgia in the Lithuanian context comes to similar conclusions regarding the cause of the spread of such sentiments among a portion of the population being dissatisfaction with their social status and a feeling of inability to actively participate in public life. For instance, Neringa Klumbyte’s interviews with rural and urban residents of Lithuania reveal:

Positive memories of the Soviet period are shared by many people. Yet they remain mostly silent, even secret, as they stand in stark contrast to the national (and also international) narrative of the ‘oppressive,’ ‘immoral’ and even ‘criminal’ Soviet regime... Nostalgia is a social and political commentary on post-Soviet marginalisation and exclusion. ‘Soviet nostalgics’ constitute a group of people... united only by their sense of ‘lost dignity and respect’ due to the post-Soviet transition and by their nostalgic memory of the ‘good’ Soviet past... Their nostalgia is ‘a way to reclaim recognition and inclusion in a post-Soviet political community.’ The level of ‘action’ in this case remains low, surfacing only in the form of nostalgic recollections by which these memory actors only indirectly voice their dissatisfaction with the current social and political realities... Remaining largely in the societal world of memory generation, these actors’ only hope for political impact is for someone from the political world (elected representatives or populists seeking support) to ‘come down to them’ and listen. (Onken, 2010, p. 286)
Chapter 3 of this dissertation noted that attitudes towards the Soviet past correlate with ideological positions. An analysis of the laws and policies of memory allowed us to conclude that liberal and conservative political elites in Latvia share an anti-nostalgic attitude towards the Soviet past and seek to restrict the spread of mythologised narratives that glorify that time. Representatives of nationalist ideologies, such as the National Alliance, who held between 7-16% of the vote in the last five parliamentary elections and were part of the government coalition, express the most uncompromising position towards Soviet history and consistently promote legislative initiatives limiting and condemning its presence in the present. In turn, opposition social democratic parties, mainly relying on the Russian-speaking electorate – the Harmony Centre and the Latvian Russian Union – take a much more friendly position towards the Soviet era and, in particular, oppose the prohibition of Soviet symbols and similar restrictive measures. Our primary research data does not allow us to assess to what extent the ideological views of Latvian residents influence their attitudes towards the Soviet era. However, to demonstrate this dependence, we can refer to secondary data, such as Gaidys' (2005) study, which shows that in Lithuania, voters' political preferences correlate with their level of approval of the Soviet era, and people who are inclined to evaluate the Soviet era positively are more likely to vote for social democrats than for nationalists, liberals, or conservatives.

Another important point to mention is that analysis of primary data suggests that the nostalgia reasons vary depending on the age of the survey participants. Thus, in the age group under 35 – that is, among people who had little or no direct experience of life in the Soviet Union – most often, the
nostalgia reasons were economic: 1) In the USSR, people were provided with free housing. 2) Free and high-quality education and medicine were available in the USSR. 3) People were provided with work in the USSR. 4) The standard of living has decreased, and people have become impoverished. These findings are in line with the opinion expressed by Dmitrijs Šandibins in an interview:

Today’s youth, younger than 25–30 years of age, both among Russian-speakers and among Latvian-speakers, is becoming more and more de-ideologised, any kind of ideology is becoming less and less interesting for them, and among Latvian youth this process is expressed slightly more strongly... Young people are becoming less and less interested in historical events and are concerned about pressing problems: taxes, emigration, the economy, the opportunity to study [Interview E3]

By contrast, for older respondents, completely different reasons for nostalgia come to the fore. Thus, respondents over 35 believe the following: 1) There was a unity of people in the USSR; ethnic conflicts arose after it collapsed. 2) People were better and kinder in the USSR; mutual bitterness and distrust increased after the collapse. 3) There was stability in the USSR and confidence in the future. The idea that relations between people in the USSR were warmer and that ‘people were better and kinder,’ is mentioned by the majority of older respondents who have a positive attitude towards Soviet times (both Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking). Here are just a few examples of this perception of the ‘Soviet man’:

People had a lot of openness, in short, we were good people... More cordial, more sensitive to someone else’s misfortune; that is, both young people and adults had a lot of good human qualities, we helped each other, without looking at the position we occupied; that is, we helped each other. We didn’t close the doors... We were not afraid of theft, we trusted each other. [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]
It seems to me that there was some kind of solidarity among people, everything was much simpler; it was, perhaps, somehow more joyful, more friendly. These are positive features, positive aspects, the fact that people had more mutual understanding, more mutual assistance. [Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]

People were more friendly, everything was different. [Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]

People were more friendly. Now everyone thinks about themselves, there is more capitalism. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

As can be seen, in contrast to respondents of a younger age who highlight social guarantees provided by the state as the main positive aspects of the Soviet era, for respondents of older age, ‘warm’ human relationships are an important aspect of nostalgia for the USSR. It is also notable that in the last quote from the respondents above, the mention of ‘warm’ relations between people is connected to criticism of capitalist society as selfish. According to Levinson (2015, pp. 43-46), ‘during the Soviet era, “capitalism” itself was a myth that served the crucial function of designating a political opponent and, more broadly, a reality that was opposed in many ways, primarily ethical, to what was considered “one's own”.’ Furthermore, it is significant that Levinson notes that ‘capitalism’ in this context is synonymous with ‘the West’ (ibid.). In this context, it can also be mentioned that in the contemporary Russian context, Levkievskaya (2005, p. 179) identifies ‘the portrayal of the West as the main planetary evil’ as a key element of the Soviet nostalgic myth.

Analysis of our primary data did not reveal any particularly noticeable ‘anti-Western’ sentiment within their nostalgic assessments of the Soviet era. This is all the more notable as it cannot be said that anti-Western sentiment is rare among Russian-speakers in Latvia. For instance, secondary data from a 2020 survey of Russian-speakers in Latvia indicate that 55.9% do not approve
of Latvia’s membership in NATO, while 31.9% approve of it (SPEKTR, 2020).

It can be assumed that for some Russian-speaking respondents, within the context of Soviet nostalgia mythology, the role of ‘main evil’ is not so much played by ‘the West’ as by ‘the elites of Latvia interested in inter-ethnic conflicts.’

It is also interesting that the aforementioned secondary data show that the attitude towards the European Union is positive among most respondents – 70.1% support that Latvia is a member of the EU, and 21.9% do not support it (ibid.). It is likely that visa-free border crossing, which membership in the EU affords Latvian residents, plays a significant role in this positive attitude. In turn, it is noteworthy that, among both Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents of our survey, the ability to travel abroad was named as the most important advantage of the present compared to Soviet times (a common other mention of advantages of contemporary Latvia was the lack of a shortage of goods during Soviet times). Here are some examples:

I would not want to go back to the USSR, because we were absolutely restricted from travelling abroad. We were not allowed to travel because almost all my mother’s relatives lived abroad, and my grandfather was German, my father was German. We were generally not allowed to go anywhere further than Russia, but now we can. [Interview 1, Latvian-speaking female, 38 years old]

Among the bad features – there was no variety, you couldn’t travel the world, unless in very rare cases; that is, athletes and some other ambassadors could perhaps travel around the world and bring something from outside. There were few imported products, that is, there were practically no products, there was little variety in general, in food, in products, in clothes. [Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

Among the negatives at that time, you could not travel freely; goods, services were not available to you. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]
The fact that it was impossible to buy anything in stores is a negative trait, I remember how much I hated it, my grandmother took me to the store to stand in line so that you could buy one piece of sausage. [Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]

As for the goods of Soviet times, it is necessary to note that, in addition to the motive of a shortage of goods, many Russian-speaking respondents, on the contrary, mentioned the high quality of Soviet goods (see Appx. 12 for the associations that arise with the word ‘Soviet’ among Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents; the Russian-speaking respondents assessed the ‘Soviet quality’ of goods both extremely positively and extremely negatively, while among the answers of the Latvian-speaking respondents, ‘quality’ does not appear at all).

Notably, in Russia since 2014, some food products have received a ‘quality mark,’ similar to the one in the USSR from 1967 to 1991. Until 2020, the average sales growth of goods with this mark amounted to 31% (Kommersant, 2020). According to the VTsIOM poll, 30.1% of the people surveyed believe that ‘Soviet’ trademarks are of high quality; and for another 24.3%, the branding ‘Soviet’ means ‘tasty’ (Russian Public Opinion Research Centre, 2014). In 2017, researchers at the Higher School of Economics studied the consumption of food products with Soviet connotations and concluded that in the vast majority of cases, goods made in the Soviet-style are a priori approved by consumers (Kusimova and Shmidt, 2017). The authors of the study explain the steady growth in demand for such goods by the fact that consumers buying ‘Soviet’ goods come into symbolic contact with the past (cleansed of negativity and therefore pleasant); in addition, a surge of interest in Soviet products may be seen as a result of the annexation of Crimea and an increase in patriotic sentiments in Russian society (Zheleznova, 2017).
studying Soviet symbolism in contemporary Russian branding, Goralik (2007) provides an example of the use of the ‘Soviet quality mark’ in the promotion of goods and services, and notes that the commercial sector actively uses the mechanism of ‘Soviet retroisation,’ which ‘makes the past accessible to perception, creates a positive image of it, removes anxiety, and makes a person’s self-perception regarding the past – the past of the family, the country, the people, the world – stable and bearable.’

In Latvia, in turn, one can also observe certain popularity of goods with Soviet nostalgic connotations, and often nostalgic consumption takes the form characterised by Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2004, p. 74) as ‘Proustiana,’ implying that ‘the objects of memory are not relics of the former regime’s ideology, but rather the detritus of the previous era’s everyday life, and they conjure up a humour based not on mockery, but rather ironic affection’ (for comparison, the previously cited example of the use of the ‘quality mark’ in Russia, as Goralik (2007) notes, does not at all assume an ironic attitude). An illustrative example of such nostalgic consumption in Latvia can be the ‘Nostalgia’ project in 2017, during which the ‘Laima’ confectionery factory invited customers to choose sweets from the Soviet past in order to resume their production (Laima, 2017). The largest number of votes was cast for the Soviet candy ‘Kara-Kum,’ named after the construction of the Turkmen Karakum Canal in the Stalin era. At present, some sweets from the Latvian factory ‘Laima’ coincide with the classic sweets of the Russian factories – for example, the ‘Clubfooted Bear’ sweets, whose wrapper refers to Ivan Shishkin’s painting *Morning in a Pine Forest* (although these sweets appeared in pre-revolutionary times, they gained immense popularity in the Soviet period
and are certainly associated with that era). The Latvian company Latvijas Balzams still produces the so-called ‘Soviet champagne’ (Sovetskoje Igristoje), which, according to the manufacturer, ‘is one of the most popular sparkling wine varieties in Latvia’ (Latvijas Balzams, 2021). It can be concluded that in most cases, the popularity of ‘Soviet’ products is due to the fact that many of their consumers in Soviet times treated these goods as purchased for a ‘special occasion’ (family celebrations, anniversaries, etc.). In individual memory, they are preserved as symbols of private life; they do not carry an ideological burden, nor do they cause negative emotions, as evident from interviews with Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents who remember the Soviet era:

I remember the ‘Soviet champagne’ from when I was a child, and it was considered a special treat because it was not always available. It was often only consumed on special occasions or holidays. So when people see those foods being sold again, it brings back memories of those special moments and times with their loved ones. I do buy it from time to time. It brings back memories of my childhood, and it’s a nice way to connect with the past. I also like to share it with my friends and family, especially the younger ones who never got to experience the Soviet Union. Well, there are a few other Soviet-era food products that I enjoy buying and eating. For example, I really like old-fashioned Soviet chocolates and candies. They have a very distinct flavour and are hard to find in regular stores these days, so it’s a treat when I come across them. They taste quite different from the ones we have now and remind me of my childhood. [Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]

When I now purchase ‘Soviet Champagne,’ it is nostalgic for me – to buy a doctor’s sausage, slice it, make an ‘Olivier’ salad, and place this bottle in reminisce of times past. But these times are also connected with the fact that those people were young then, and they simply reminisce youth as it was. Green peas in Soviet times were not as easily obtained, and if one made a salad, it meant it was some sort of holiday. Before holidays in Soviet times, one should always obtain what could not be bought in a store (a doctor’s sausage, green peas or even toilet paper). Now everything is available, but green peas are still somehow connected to holidays for me. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]
When I see champagne with the label 'Soviet' in the store, I more often experience positive feelings, although I do not buy it myself due to its low quality. I have very warm memories of the time when we greeted the New Year with glasses of Soviet champagne. There was definitely no ideology in this. It was just as much a symbol of the holiday as a New Year’s concert on TV. Now there is a choice, in any supermarket, you can buy real French champagne, Italian prosecco, or our Riga champagne, but in Soviet times you had to make an effort to get a bottle of Soviet champagne, and what is hard to get is always valued more. Maybe I will still buy a bottle with this label until it is finally prohibited. It will be stored as a pleasant memory. [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53]

Nostalgia for Soviet times in modern Latvia is actively used in business, even though the state does not welcome this. It should be noted that in 2013, a legislative ban on using Soviet symbols in public events came into force in Latvia (Saeima, 1997). Under this law, during meetings, processions and pickets, it is prohibited to use flags, emblems, anthems and symbols of the USSR; it is also prohibited to keep these items in cars located within 500 metres of the event venue. However, such use is prohibited only during meetings, processions and pickets and not daily in public places. Recently, a petition has been posted on the internet portal manabalss.lv (2019b), demanding a change in the law and the introduction of a ban on the use of Soviet symbols (including on and inside vehicles, as well as on clothes) in everyday life in public places. The petition’s authors refer to the successful experience in Lithuania, where a similar law has existed since 2008. However, the petition did not receive much public support: from 2017 to 2021, it collected only 460 signatures (10,000 signatures are required to submit the petition to parliament for consideration). At the suggestion of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, in 2020, the Saeima introduced amendments to the law so that compliance is now the responsibility of not only the organisers of the event but also the participants and spectators. The ban applies to the use of the flag,
coat of arms and anthem of the Soviet Union, as well as the corresponding symbols of the Latvian SSR, i.e. the Soviet sickle and hammer and the five-pointed star. The fine for violation of the law for individuals is 350 euros; for legal entities, 2,900 euros (Saeima, 2005b). Our survey data show that among Russian-speaking respondents, only 9.6% support the law, while 81.3% regard it negatively. On the other hand, 59.7% of Latvian-speaking respondents support the law, and 24.8% do not (the respondents’ more detailed opinion on the law is discussed in Chapter 5.4).

Nevertheless, from the side of the state and individual politicians, the use of Soviet symbols in the trade and production of goods is met with criticism and prohibitions. For example, in 2018, deputies representing Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the European Parliament sent a letter to Walmart Stores Inc., the largest retailer in the United States and worldwide, urging the company to stop selling T-shirts with the USSR logo. ‘Walmart sells T-shirts with the symbols of a totalitarian regime that killed millions of people,’ explained Sandra Kalniete, MEP for Latvia (Delfi, 2018). Later, Latvian MEP Inese Vaidere received a letter from representatives of Walmart, in which they announced that they had stopped the sale of T-shirts with the symbols of the USSR. However, Walmart removed only the T-shirts mentioned in the complaint it received but left other goods with Soviet symbols. In 2019, the Lithuanian politician Vytautas Landsbergis requested that Amazon withdraw goods with Soviet symbols. In the same year, the deputies of the Lithuanian Seimas demanded that the German clothing manufacturer Adidas stop selling products with Soviet symbols (Lenta.ru, 2019). Earlier, in 2018, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry had already protested against the use of Soviet symbols by
Adidas; then, representatives of Ukraine and Latvia also expressed discontent, and as a result, clothes with Soviet symbols were removed from the Adidas online store (Jauns, 2018). Thus, this example again shows how the Latvian authorities and political elites are trying to prevent businesses from using Soviet symbols.

However, to date, the use of Soviet symbols – for example, in the design of cafe interiors – is not legally prohibited in Latvia. A notable example is the case of the ‘Leningrad’ cafe in Riga. The design of the cafe, which opened in 2009, uses elements of Soviet symbolics. The founder of the cafe, Sergejs Bižāns, notes:

For us, this is more of an irony about the Soviet era rather than nostalgia for it. I was born in 1983, and I have no terrible memories of those times. I think the same is true for most people because we usually remember our childhood with a bright side. Yes, there were difficulties then. There were long queues in stores for food, and people had low wages, but even now, it is not easy to earn a lot for many people. But now we have completely different requirements for life and our level of comfort because technology has progressed. (Kasparāns, 2018)

In the summer of 2016, a politician from the National Alliance, Imants Paradnieks, complained to the State Language Centre about the sign of the ‘Leningrad’ cafe (the sign was written in Russian, whereas by law, all signs in Latvia must be in Latvian). On his Twitter account, Parādnieks (2016) called the cafe ‘a burp of communism in a free Latvia.’ In response to this, the owners of the cafe said that the claims were unexpected by them:

Leningrad is already nine years old. […] Latvian and foreign music groups regularly perform here, and members of the National Alliance are frequent guests here. The name is nothing more than a tribute to the memory of the Soviet cafe ‘Leningrad.’… Despite the name, the ‘Leningrad’ cafe is a 100% Latvian institution. The cafe’s visitors are Latvian intelligentsia, musicians, artists, writers and other creative people. (Gerasimov, 2016)
The ‘Leningrad’ cafe is not the only example of a design in the grotesque Soviet style. For instance, in 2015, the ‘Bufete 9 Gradi’ bar was opened in Riga, which had the atmosphere of a Soviet buffet and offered a nostalgic assortment of spirits and snacks. Before the reconstruction of the New Riga Theatre began in 2019, its cafe also actively used the style of the Soviet buffet. However, as in the case of the ‘Leningrad’ cafe, a playful, ironic attitude to the Soviet era can be found here, which is a characteristic feature of ‘post-socialist nostalgia’ (see Lipovetsky, 2004; Todorova and Gille, 2010; Platt, 2013; Kalinina, 2014 for the discussion on post-socialist nostalgia).

A playful comprehension of the Soviet past has become the basis for commercial business projects and the entertainment industry. For example, in 2015, the Aldaris Brewery Museum was opened in Riga. Within the framework of the exhibition, visitors are invited to visit the Soviet bunker, which was built in the 1980s as a bomb shelter for the workers of the Aldaris brewery; it retains the original furnishings and equipment, as well as Soviet propaganda posters on the walls (Delfi, 2016). On the territory of the Ligatne Rehabilitation Centre, there is a popular Soviet tourist bunker, which was built in the 1980s for the needs of the political and state elite in case of an atomic war, and its label of secrecy was removed only in 2003 (Ligatne, 2021). The official description of the bunker tour notes:

All authentic underground furnishings have been retained (plans and projections in regard to what would happen if, because of a war, dams of all hydropower stations were destroyed, which territories would be under water and how that would affect the largest towns; a special telecommunication unit that secured direct communication with Moscow Kremlin and autonomous communication with the key services in the entire country; books by Marx, Lenin, Brezhnev and other Soviet-era politicians; materials of the XXII Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; a canteen with a typical Soviet menu; various Soviet memorabilia, household and daily items). (ibid.)
Here are a few more examples of the utilisation of Soviet history in the tourism industry, although this list could be continued. 'Soviet' themed tours with a visit to a bunker of the Soviet era are popular in the city of Daugavpils – participants, among other things, visit the retro cafe ‘Stolovaya No. 1,’ which offers dishes of the Soviet era and learn about the history of the aviation engineering school, which was founded in 1948 on the territory of the Daugavpils fortress (Delfi, 2018a). In 2009, the ‘Brezhnev Dacha’ (a cottage by the sea where the highest party elite used to rest in the 1970s) was opened for tourists in Jurmala (ibid.). Tourist excursions to the Soviet Army Missile Base in Zeltiņi are also popular among both local and foreign tourists (Alūksnes novada pašvaldība, 2022). In 2018, the Aizkraukle Museum of History and Art opened a permanent exhibition entitled ‘Soviet Period Years’ (A dedicated exhibition room displays the everyday life of Soviet times, with interiors from the 1950s-1980s; the museum features typical objects of Soviet household, a party functionary’s bar with authentic contents – cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, as well as a collection of cars) (Aizkraukles muzejs, 2021). Collections of Soviet cars are also displayed at the Riga Motor Museum (and its branch in Bauska), where, for example, the emergency service vehicle or luxurious cars that party functionaries used to ride can be found (Motormuzejs, 2022).

Along with the symbolism of the Soviet era and elements of everyday life, the tourism industry also uses memories of the Soviet repressive. For instance, recently, in Liepaja, a museum was opened on the site of Karosta prison (the prison was built in 1900 and existed until 1997; it was where military personnel served sentences for violations of military discipline in Soviet times).
Today, this museum offers guided tours and an entertaining game ‘Escape from the USSR,’ which ‘allows participants to go back to the past and to remember the recent history of Latvia – the period of Soviet occupation’ (Karosta Prison, 2021). As the authors of this game note, it was inspired by the escape from Liepaja, which took place in 1984 under the leadership of Raimonds Bitenieks, who later founded the Human Rights Defence Group ‘Helsinki-86.’ In addition, participants are invited to spend the night in prison in the conditions of a Soviet prisoner. There is also a buffet in Karosta prison, where ‘a real Soviet collective farm barmaid takes care of the guests’ comfort.’

Recently, tourist excursions dedicated to stories about the Soviet era and escape rooms with a Soviet theme have also gained popularity in Latvia (Rigas Ekskursijas, 2020). For example, the largest escape room in Latvia, ACTION QUEST, takes place in the Soviet-era bunker ‘Poligon-1’ in Sigulda. The description for another popular escape room ‘The Soviet Story’ reads as follows:

Riga. It is 1980. The KGB deals with all people who are not loyal to the Soviet power in a cruel way. You are apprehended for anti-government activity, and you are aware of what threats you are facing. […] Nevertheless, during your interrogation, an opportunity to escape presents itself to you. Will you be man enough to take it? (Poligon-1, 2015)

Such use of Soviet repressions experience can have ambivalent consequences. On the one hand, it can create dissatisfaction among the people who associate trauma memories with the Soviet past. On the other hand, by reaching a larger audience and making the past more accessible, it is more likely that people will have knowledge of and understand Soviet history. Such a playful approach may also aid in easing the overbearing traumatic nature of the memory. Furthermore, it provides various economic
benefits, helps to develop infrastructure, and promotes tourism (see Levy and Sznaider, 2002, 2006; Caton and Santos 2007; Lehrer, 2013; Lehrer and Meng, 2015).

For comparison, in Russia, businesses are increasingly using the topic of Stalinist repressions as part of their advertising and marketing strategies. Thus, for example, in December 2020, in Moscow, the Stal'in doner snack bar was opened – a portrait of Stalin was placed on the sign of the establishment, and the seller of the outlet was dressed in a suit of an NKVD officer (Kolesnikov and Podrez, 2021). In 2018, the Bandarlog Brewery from Kazan named its new beer ‘Gulag’ – in honour of the Chief administration of the camps (Sekret Firmi, 2018). A search in the SPARK-Interfax database reveals dozens of companies whose names use the words ‘NKVD,’ ‘Chekist,’ ‘Stalin’ and the like. This commercial use of the symbols of Stalinism may mean that they are no longer perceived in society as sacred, and business is orientated towards fulfilling consumer demand for these symbols. In Russia, the formation of a positive image of the Chekist began in the 2000s – the glorious past and present of the power structures become a source for a positive collective identity and once again actualise the theme of the fight against external and internal enemies (see, for instance, Kopolov, 2011, p. 151; Fedor, 2013; Weiss-Wendt and Adler, 2021). This increased attention paid to law enforcement agencies also manifests in the inclusion of the Day of the Employee of the Security Organs of the Russian Federation (20 December, so-called Chekist’s Day) in the Russian official state calendar. According to Fedor (2013, p. 131), ‘We can track the increasing hallmarks of high chekism through the ever-growing scale of official celebrations of Chekist’s Day from this point onwards, a development
which was paralleled by the rising career of Vladimir Putin.’ Putin himself served as a KGB foreign intelligence officer for 16 years, and it was Putin who, in 2000, became the first Russian President ever to attend the Chekist’s Day celebrations personally. Since then, the celebrations have received huge media coverage.

It is worth noting that in Latvia, the glorification of the Cheka (a Soviet secret police agency) has not gained widespread popularity, unlike in Russia during Vladimir Putin’s rule. This can be explained by many reasons, including Latvia’s state memory policy, as well as a more negative attitude of Latvian society towards Soviet repressions compared to the situation in Russia. Only one of the participants in our interviews expressed a positive attitude towards the KGB:

An organisation like the KGB – it was, is, and will always exist in any country. Should those who report wrongdoing to the police be punished? It is the same thing. On the contrary, in many cases, it is necessary to reward them. These files, if they were to be declassified, should have been declassified immediately and not after 30 years... Why were they not declassified for 30 years, but only now? Because they cleaned them, they removed the necessary names of modern politicians, which should not be in these files; I do not see any other reason. [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]

Interestingly, in Latvia, where the active glorification of the Cheka is practically invisible, a specific conspiratorial narrative related to the KGB has become widespread, which is expressed not only in the above quote but also repeatedly mentioned in interviews with other respondents. According to this narrative, the names of Latvian politicians who occupy high state posts today were deliberately removed from the KGB files before publication (the publication of the KGB archive was already mentioned in Chapter 3.2):

A lot of people then collaborated with the KGB, and our politicians for a very long time did not want these files to be published at all because, I
think, their names are there too. They said that things were bad in Soviet times, but in fact, they themselves cooperated with the KGB and wrote slanders against each other. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

This plot, in particular, was popularised by pro-Kremlin media (Sputnik, 2018a, Izvestia, 2018). In turn, Indulis Zālīte, the director of the Center for the Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism, categorically refutes the information that high-ranking Latvian officials could have extracted data from the archive (Oshkaia, 2006). The artistic interpretation of the public debate around the publication of the KGB archives was presented within the framework of Alvis Hermanis' play History Research Commission (Vēstures izpētes komisija), which premiered at the New Riga Theatre in 2019. The performance conveys a clearly ironic attitude, and, in general, the production concept carries the main idea: to part with the past laughing (Shavrej, 2019). Alvis Hermanis claims:

It is quite impossible to make a show about the 'KGB files,' because every person's case is too different there; therefore, it is useless to make any generalisations. Each of them should then have a separate show. We will never find out the stories of many of those found in the 'KGB files.' Either because they have passed away, or because in many cases their stories are too intimate and personal to share them in public. Likewise, for a variety of reasons, we will no longer learn the stories of many victims of the KGB reporters. In the published lists, I found dozens of people I knew personally. And I know enough about the private life of many of them to imagine the basis on which they got there or were blackmailed. Putting them all in one pile is a pretty satanic plan, and with this show we wouldn’t want to take part in it... This show is about how people can be manipulated and how history can be manipulated. Both then and now. (New Riga Theatre, 2019)

Alvis Hermanis’s comment is indicative in that it demonstrates that in the intellectual discourse of contemporary Latvia, there is also an ironic view of the totalitarian past, which can provide a convincing alternative to the dominant official narrative of the criminality of the Soviet regime (this official
Latvian narrative, which was more thoroughly described in Chapter 3.2, can be characterised as ‘anti-nostalgia’; for comparison, see for example Matonyte (2013, p. 86) on the official memory policy in Lithuania: ‘The analysis of the adopted laws and public policies, alongside a study on the attitudes of political elites make it possible to conclude that anti-nostalgia, the negative assessment of the Soviet lifestyle, criticism of it and attempts to keep the former Soviet decision makers out of Lithuania’s public administration are key ways of treating the past in Lithuania’). Not only examples of artistic interpretation of traumatic past, such as the play by Alvis Hermanis, but also the overall analysis of primary data presented in this chapter demonstrates that within the relationships between anti-nostalgic and nostalgic representations of the Soviet past, there is always a segment that lies beyond the bounds of either representation.

4.5. Conclusions

In this chapter, the widely prevalent perception in Latvia’s public discourse of a memory conflict between Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, characterised by their purported opposed attitudes towards the Soviet past, was discussed. The results of the primary data analysis confirm the provisions on which Latvia’s state integration policy is based, according to which representatives of the Russian-speaking community are more inclined to feel nostalgia for the USSR and regret the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, a generalisation of the survey and interview data shows that, in general,
anti-nostalgic feelings prevail among Latvian-speaking respondents, while Soviet nostalgic sentiment features among Russian-speaking respondents.

However, an important conclusion that the primary data analysis allows us to draw is that Russian-speakers’ and Latvian-speakers’ memories frequently demonstrate not only conflicts and opposition but also internal heterogeneity as well as mutual reinforcement and interdependency. From the way the respondents describe their attitude towards the Soviet Union, it is clear that the oppositional logic of contraposing the memory of Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers operates with too simplified interpretations that do not allow us to see the larger structures that form the entangled memory landscape. The interdependency of these memories is clearly seen from interviews in which respondents, speaking about their attitudes towards the Soviet times, articulate their own ethnolinguistic identity by referring to the supposed ‘mirror’ position of another ethnolinguistic group.

On the one hand, Soviet nostalgia can serve as a means of resolving an identity crisis and the trauma of a ‘lost fatherland,’ particularly among non-citizens in Latvia, where such feelings may be intensified by dissatisfaction with their social status and restricted participation in public life. However, on the other hand, as our analysis illustrates, the Latvian Russian-speaking community is internally divided, comprising individuals with a wide range of ideological and national identities, not all of whom necessarily share a pro-Soviet perspective or the historical narrative put forth by contemporary Russia. It follows from the primary research data that not everyone within the group of Russian-speakers regrets the collapse of the USSR, and there is a significant discrepancy in the answers of Russian-speaking respondents in different age
groups. Thus, nostalgia for the Soviet Union is less characteristic of Russian-speaking respondents of a young age.

Our analysis has revealed the significant role that media narratives play in shaping a nostalgic sentiment towards the Soviet Union. These narratives strongly idealise the Soviet regime and offer simplified interpretations and mythologised representations of the past. Responses from Russian-speaking respondents in Latvia often included elements of Soviet nostalgic myth, as identified by researchers in the Russian context (Levkievskaya, 2005; Kustarev 2013; Barash, 2017, 2019) such as the embodiment of ‘social guarantees provided by the state’ and ‘warm human relationships in the Soviet Union’, whereas, in contrast, the anti-Western sentiment characteristic of Soviet nostalgic myth in Russia was hardly perceptible in the responses of our respondents. A characteristic feature of Soviet nostalgia in Latvia is the widespread perception among Russian-speaking respondents of the ‘friendship of peoples’ during the Soviet period and the absence of ethnic conflicts in the USSR. The experience of the Latvian-speaking respondents, contrarily, testifies to inter-ethnic enmity and the suppression of the Latvian population’s use of their native language during the Soviet period. The absence of freedom and the repressive nature of the Soviet system are key characteristics of Soviet times in the assessments of Latvian-speaking respondents.

Based on the respondents’ answers to the survey and interview questions, we can also conclude the importance of personal family memory in relation to the respondents’ opinions about the Soviet repressions. Within the analysis of the primary data, it was concluded that the low level of support for
the commemoration of victims of the communist genocide among the Russian-speaking population of Latvia could be explained by the fact that the respondents perceive these dates as not personally related to them and referring only to ethnic Latvians deported to Russia. At the same time, according to the survey results, among those Russian-speaking respondents whose relatives and friends suffered from Soviet repressions, the share of those who believe that the victims of repressions should be officially commemorated is significantly higher compared to Russian-speaking respondents in general. Some Russian-speaking respondents feel the need to commemorate the victims of the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s, but they are not satisfied with the existing commemoration dates in Latvia, in which they do not feel involved.

Finally, our primary research data confirm the paramount importance of the memory of World War II in the evaluation of the Soviet period as a whole for Russian-speaking respondents. For instance, the majority of Russian-speaking respondents are unable to reconcile with the commemoration of 23 August since they expressed rejection of the concept of portraying the Latvian people as only victims, along with the idea of ‘equating Stalinism and Nazism.’ The respondents explained that the victory in the Great Patriotic War, in which their ancestors fought, as well as the memory of the positive aspects of the late Soviet era, did not allow them to share the idea that the totalitarian Stalinist regime could be compared with the crimes of Nazism. This aspect of the collective and personal memory of the respondents is explored in further detail in the next chapter, which is dedicated to examining commemorative and ritual practices associated with the Soviet Victory myth.
CHAPTER 5: THE SOVIET VICTORY MYTH AND RELATED COMMEMORATIVE PRACTICES IN LATVIA

5.1. Introduction

In academic research on commemorative dates and related rituals in contemporary Latvia, a special place is occupied by the discussion about Victory Day (9 May) commemoration, which allegedly creates symbolic conflict between Latvia and Russia, as well as between the Latvian and Russian-speaking communities in Latvia (Bucur, 2010; Ardava, 2011; Ločmele, 2011; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Cheskin, 2013). 9 May is not considered a public holiday in Latvia, and for many Latvians, this date seems to be ‘a painful reminder of Soviet occupation and imperialism’ (Bucur, 2010, p. 251). At the same time, Victory Day is unofficially celebrated, mainly by representatives of the Russian-speaking community who, every year on 9 May, gather near the monument of Victory in Riga to lay flowers (see Figure 5.1).

The 9 May commemoration, which reinforces the myth of victory in the Great Patriotic War, as noted by scholars such as Gudkov (2005), Mijnssen (2009), Koposov (2011, 2021, 2021a), Zhurzhenko (2011), Wood (2011), Khapaeva (2016), Polegkyi (2016), Kolesnikov (2016), Manilova (2017), Barash (2017), Hicks (2017), Koposov (2017), Kurilla (2018), Domańska (2019), Gabovich (2020), and Epple (2020), has been leveraged by Russia to promote its influence in the former Soviet Union republics. By encouraging these countries to celebrate Victory Day on the same day as Russia and participate in the same traditions, Russia can create a sense of shared history...
and identity that draws these countries closer to Russia and strengthens their ties to the country, as Gee (2018) argues. The fact that the contemporary cult of Soviet Victory has permeated outside of Russia and been delivered to Latvia causes serious concern among Latvian authorities. For instance, in the report by the Latvian State Security Service (2020), it was noted that ‘celebrating Victory Day in Latvia is a convenient tool for the Russian state to consolidate its own vision of history and marginalise the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact’.

![Flower laying at Victory Day celebration in Riga](image)

**Figure 5.1.** The 9 May (Victory Day) Celebration in Riga – flower laying. Photographed by the author, 9 May 2019, the Victory Square in Riga.

Inside Latvia, 9 May is considered by researchers to possess the potential for conflict between Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers (Hanov and Vinnika, 2005; Apine and Volkov, 2007; Ločmele, Procevska, and Zelče, 2011a; 2011b). In particular, in the studies mentioned above, it is noted that
through participation in the 9 May commemoration, Russian-speakers demonstrate a tendency towards self-isolation from Latvians’ historical memory and exhibit cultural and political ties to the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation. One of the reasons the Russian-speaking Latvian community continues to commemorate Victory Day, according to Apine and Volkov (2007, quoted in Ločmele, Procevska, and Zelče, 2011b, p. 124), is that many Russians in Latvia find it psychologically difficult to accept the fact of Latvia’s occupation, as recognition also implies a degree of responsibility for Soviet crimes. Taking into account such possible motivations, this dissertation chapter nonetheless examines not only the conflict potential of Victory Day in Latvia but also delves deeper into other possible reasons for commemoration, in particular, relying on the notion that the memory of the dead is ‘among the basic, universal structures of human life; [and] is, in fact, a paradigmatic way of establishing the community, because the link with them consolidates identity’ (Assmann, 2011, p. 45).

Sub-chapter 5.2 describes the development of Victory Day commemorations in Latvia, which have undergone significant changes from spontaneous and unorganised ritual practices in the first half of the 1990s to becoming a large-scale and well-organised event, which various social (political) actors use for their own purposes. The section investigates the political dimension of these practices through an analysis of secondary data. The next sub-chapter examines in more detail how the Victory Monument in Riga (and its dismantling) can be used for transforming selective historical memory and political narratives, as well as the perceptions of different groups of the population of Latvia towards these processes. Sub-chapter 5.4
synthesises and interprets the quantitative and qualitative data analysis results to uncover the central elements of Victory Day commemoration and its impact on Latvian society. It discusses the correlation between personal/family memories and participation in commemorative rituals with mythological narratives about the Soviet Victory and related symbols, particularly those used for the interests of the Russian state. This section also highlights the intricate interaction between 9 May and 16 March (Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires). Overall, this chapter seeks to understand the meaning and significance of Victory Day commemorations for Latvian residents by situating these commemorative practices within a broader perspective of studying Soviet mythologies.

5.2. The development of Victory Day commemorative rituals in Latvia

Researchers of rituals (Eliade, 1954; Jensen, 1963; Toporov, 1988; Bayburin, 1993) note that rituals always appeal to a specific plot that took place in the past, and when reproduced in rituals, it becomes sacred. Through rituals, norms, values, and the established order are reaffirmed, which were set during the initial period. In the case of the Victory Day ritual, the plot revolves around the idea of the heroic feat of ancestors who sacrificed their lives for their homeland and future generations. The Victory Day ritual’s social significance lies in recognising ancestors’ self-sacrifice as the foundation for the consolidation and unity of the ritual participants. By visiting soldiers’ graves, laying flowers at monuments dedicated to the war, and performing other symbolic acts, the ritual participants demonstrate their involvement and
feel like part of the collective. For this reason, the ritual is a powerful emotional collective experience. Adonyeva (2007) notes that participation in such action demonstrates belonging to a group, regardless of whether it is a family, organisation, political party, or ethnic group. Performing such rituals is essential for the group as it helps to maintain its integrity. Repeating a relatively formal sequence of actions generates collective excitement, fosters a sense of belonging, reinforces collective memory and identity, and brings to life such fundamental binary oppositions as Self/Other (Ardava, 2011, p. 349).

For the first time, 9 May was declared a holiday by the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR dated 8 May 1945: ‘In commemoration of the victorious end of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against the Nazi invaders and the historical victories of the Red Army, crowned with the complete defeat of Nazi Germany, which announced unconditional surrender, establish that 9 May is a day of national celebration – a holiday of victory’ (Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 1945). In the newspaper ‘Krasnaya Zvezda’ of 9 May 1945, comments by the leaders of party organisations of republics and regions of the USSR were published, dedicated to the celebration of Victory; in particular, the following comment of the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, Jānis Kalnbērziņš, was given: ‘There are no words to convey the joy of the working people of Latvia, who learned that fascist Germany had capitulated unconditionally. Meetings began in the night shifts of Riga’s metal, bicycle, and other factories. Free Latvia is celebrating the day of the All-National Holiday. Together with the whole Soviet people, Latvians send warm
greetings to their leader and teacher, the great Stalin’ (*Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1945). In honour of the victory over Germany at 10:00 PM on 9 May, a grandiose salute was held in Moscow with thirty artillery salvos from a thousand guns, and it became an annual tradition after that (since 1946, fireworks on 9 May have been held annually in the capitals of all union republics, including Riga). In the postwar Stalinist era, the most widespread forms of celebratory events on 9 May included rallies, exhibitions, lectures, excursions, sports competitions and military shows; great attention was paid to Victory Day on the pages of Soviet newspapers (see Plamper, 2012).

From 1945 to 1947, 9 May was declared a holiday. However, subsequently, under Stalin, 9 May became a working day. The lack of holiday status may be partly explained by the fact that in the first post-war years, the personality cult of Stalin prevailed over the cult of Victory. For instance, Overy (1998, p. 298) points out that: ‘He [Stalin] wished after the war to restore his personal power, after several years of depending upon the loyalty and competence of others.’ As noted by the researcher of late Stalinism, Dobrenko (2020, p. 73), this goal was to silence those who directly or indirectly contradicted his favourite narrative of himself as the ‘architect of victory.’ On the one hand, the myth of victory led by Stalin was intentionally shaped by Soviet propaganda for the benefit of the authorities (see Tumarkin, 1994), but on the other hand, the Great Patriotic War was a very important personal transformative experience for the Soviet people, and in the later Stalinist era, the myth of the Great Patriotic War became the foundation of national self-conception (see Brooks, 2001; Weiner, 2002; Uldricks, 2009).
The coming to power of Nikita Khrushchev was marked by the end of the myth about the dominant and leading role of Stalin in the victory. In a report at the XX Congress of the CPSU on February 25, 1956, Khrushchev stated:

When we look at many of our novels, films and historical-scientific studies, the role of Stalin in the Patriotic War appears to be entirely improbable. Stalin had foreseen everything. [...] Not Stalin, but the Party as a whole, the Soviet Government, our heroic Army, its talented leaders and brave soldiers, the whole Soviet nation – these are the ones who assured victory in the Great Patriotic War. (Khrushchev 1956)

The end of the cult of Stalin was followed by the weakening of the army (an unprecedented reduction in the number of the Armed Forces) and the resignation of the most popular military leader, Marshal Georgy Zhukov. Although the 9 May celebrations were limited, the era of the creation of military monuments, including those of an epic nature, has begun – the construction of a monument-ensemble ‘To the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad’ on the Mamayev Kurgan took place, a memorial stone was laid on the site of the future Victory complex on Poklonnaya Gora in Moscow, and mass graves were formed at the battle sites. In general, the Khrushchev decade can be characterised by a decrease in militarisation, the development of socially oriented sectors of the economy, an emphasis on outer space and the peaceful atomic policy. Against this background, the theme of victory was inferior. As Artemyev (2014) notes, ‘it was assumed that the Soviet people were orienting themselves towards a “bright future”, creating a communist society of universal abundance, and the trauma of the war that they experienced did not fit into this optimistic construction.’ As in other Soviet republics, in the Latvian SSR, the main celebratory events on 9 May during the Khrushchev era consisted of
solemn concerts and rallies, in which lead workers played the key role. For example, in the newspaper ‘Padomju Jaunatne’ of 10 May 1955, the celebration of Victory Day in Riga was described as follows:

Together with all the peoples of the Soviet Union, Latvian workers joyfully and ceremoniously celebrated the tenth anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War against Hitler’s Germany. On the eve of the holiday, on 8 May, a solemn meeting was held at the House of Officers, attended by Riga representatives of the party, public organisations, Soviet Army servicemen and lead workers – innovators, workers of culture, science, and art. [...] After the festive meeting, a grand celebratory concert took place (Padomju Jaunatne, 1955).

The twentieth anniversary of the Victory and the coming to power of Leonid Brezhnev marked a new era of commemoration of the Great Patriotic War. According to Tumarkin (2015), 'It was then that the victory won in May 1945, and the whole history of the war, became the subject of an organised cult. One can say that they became a legitimising myth that began suppressing the old, fading myth – about the revolution and Lenin.' In general, under Brezhnev, the concept of war, as noted by Koposov (2011, pp. 103–105), significantly repeated its Stalinist version, while reliance on the myth of war became especially relevant due to the weakening of other ideological pillars: 'the myth of war has become a symbol of the era of stagnation in Soviet historical politics.

The attitude of the new leadership of the country to such figures as Stalin and Zhukov changed – the disgraced marshal was invited to the Presidium for a solemn meeting at the Palace of Congresses, and the chairman of the State Defence Committee, Joseph Stalin, was respectfully mentioned in Brezhnev’s report. The attitude towards former front-line soldiers in general also changed: they were actively invited to speak at schools and at enterprises, and songs, films, books were dedicated to them, and it was they
who became the ideological support of the authorities. In 1965, the first jubilee award associated with Victory Day was established – the medal ‘20 years of Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945’ – and received by all war veterans, partisans and military personnel. Since then, commemorative medals have been issued every 10 years. By a decree of the Presidium of the USSR Armed Forces of 26 April 1965, 9 May was declared a festive holiday, and the second victory parade after the end of the war was held on Red Square (the Victory Parade on Red Square was first held on 24 June 1945), and this ritual was later assigned a canonical character. Also, on 9 May 1965, the tradition of annually broadcasting the Minute of Silence on television and radio was established.

In the Latvian SSR, 9 May had been an official public holiday since 1965, and this day was celebrated with a military parade and fireworks on the Riga embankment. Although there were some specific distinguishing features in the traditions of the celebration of the Victory Day in Latvia since a significant part of the population during the war fought on the side of the losing army (see, for instance, Zelče, 2010; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c, pp. 13-14), at the official level, the holiday was held just like in any other part of the USSR – parades and concerts were organised, while flowers were laid at the monuments and military cemeteries. In total, there were 344 cemeteries in Latvia with burials of soldiers of the Second World War during the 1980s (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, p. 120). Among the most significant sites of commemoration, the Cemetery of the Brethren in Riga and the Salaspils Memorial can be noted (the Salaspils Memorial was established in 1967 and located on the site of the Salaspils concentration camp operated
between 1941 and 1944 during the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany; for more information on the history of the Salaspils camp see Ezergailis, 1999; Neiburgs, 2015). However, many other varied local sites of commemoration existed where inhabitants of small settlements gathered on 9 May. After the Victory Monument was established in the Victory Park in 1985, it became the most important site of commemoration on 9 May (the monument’s history will be discussed in the following section of the dissertation).

1990 was the last year that the celebration of 9 May was still held according to official Soviet traditions. In 1991, for the first time in Latvia, 9 May was celebrated without a traditional military parade and fireworks. However, still, more than 10,000 people gathered at Victory Square in Riga near the monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from Nazi Invaders (the Victory Monument), with the Latvian Communist Party leadership and the Baltic Military District of the Soviet armed forces still participating in the ceremony (Ločmele, 2010).

Since Latvia gained independence, Victory Day’s meaning has become truly ambiguous. An essential part of the process of regaining Latvian independence was the restoration of the symbols and celebrations of pre-Soviet Latvia, the introduction of practices of commemoration of the victims of the Soviet occupation regime, and the discontinuation of rituals associated with the Soviet time (Stradiņš, 1992). Nevertheless, the Russian-speaking part of the population continued to celebrate 9 May.

During the early 1990s, there was a gradual transition in how the celebration of 9 May was observed. It moved from being primarily an official, government-led event to becoming more of a private, individual celebration.
By 1992, the period of political uncertainty had been overcome, and it became clear that the Soviet government would not return. Very little information is available regarding the 9 May commemoration at this time; the press wrote almost nothing about it. It is known that in Riga, people still gathered on 9 May at the Victory Square and laid flowers (for example, in 1993, approximately 15,000 to 20,000 people attended the celebration) (Procevska, 2010). However, political leaders during this period stopped participating in celebrations on Victory Day (Ločmele, 2010). The exception was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Victory Day, when the leader of the Latvian Socialist Party Alfrēds Rubiks (who was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Latvia during the period 1990-1991) took an active part in organising the festivities (which were organised without the support of the Latvian authorities) (Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011).

On the whole, during these years, at the centre of the 9 May commemoration were veterans and their relatives; the celebration was mainly based on citizens’ own initiative. Festivities at this time included many spontaneous/unorganised ritualised practices (such as dancing to the accordion and laying flowers); to a lesser extent, it was possible to observe elements of official events involving coordination from the top, such as fireworks or a festive concert (Procevska, 2010; Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011, p. 390). It is noteworthy that the newspaper ‘Neatkarīgā Cīņa’ (1993, p. 1) wrote that on 9 May, there were people in Victory Square with posters depicting not only Joseph Stalin and Marshal George Zhukov, but also the Russian Tsar Peter the Great (this would be impossible in Soviet times).
In the second half of the 1990s, Victory Day finally lost its official status in Latvia. In 1995, a law was adopted under which 8 May became the official commemoration day for victims of World War II. This clearly demonstrated Latvia’s integration into the European commemorative culture, where 8 May rather than 9 May is the date for World War II commemoration. On 18 December 1996, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia adopted amendments to the Law ‘On Holidays and Remembrance’ (Saeima, 1996b) and set 9 May as ‘Europe Day.’ Official commemoration rituals are held on 8 May every year. The President of Latvia, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Saeima, ministers, members of the army, foreign diplomats and other official persons lay flowers at the Riga Brethren Cemetery – a memorial site of national importance, where approximately 2,000 soldiers of the First World War and the Second World War, who fought on different sides, are buried (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c, p. 253). Commemoration of the victims of the war with Latvian state officials present also take place on 8 May at other cemeteries, such as the New Jewish Cemetery in Smerlis (Schmerl), the German War Cemetery in Beberbeki, and the Pokrov Cemetery in Riga (Ločmele, 2011, p. 310). However, 8 May commemorations are not popular among the Latvian population. In a 2010 survey (SKDS, 2010) 83.9% of respondents admitted that they had not celebrated the day of the fall of Nazism nor the commemoration day of World War II victims on 8 May (Europe Day) during the last five years.

In the second half of the 1990s, Victory Day acquired clear political connotations – pro-Russian Latvian politicians appeared increasingly often at commemorations at the Victory Monument in Riga. 1998 was the year of
parliamentary elections, and thus the Victory Day, for the first time, was used for political campaigning (Procevska, 2010). The Socialist Party organised a rally in which Alfrēds Rubiks, the leader of the party, who had just been released from prison (in 1991, he was arrested and then sentenced to 8 years in prison for attempting a coup d’état, and after 6 years freed ahead of schedule), spoke in support of left-wing parties (Lebedeva, 1998). The Socialist Party of Latvia and the Latvian Russian Union began to use 9 May in their election campaigns, urging people to celebrate Victory Day and to remember the lessons of World War II (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c, p. 22). At the same time, the traditions of popular culture – singing songs of the war years, dancing accompanied by an accordion, and the like – still constituted the basis for celebrating Victory Day.

Since 2000, the 9 May commemoration has been transformed from a solely commemorative practice into an organised political entertainment event – the spontaneous initiative ‘from below’ has been replaced by top-down campaigns (Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013, p. 23; Ločmele, 2010). Since 1998, the celebration of 9 May at the Victory Monument in Riga has been organised by the ‘For Human Rights in a United Latvia’ party (In 2014, ForHRUL changed its name to the Latvian Russian Union), known for its efforts in representing the interests of Russians in Latvia. From this point on, the celebration of 9 May has been accompanied by political speeches and agitation, the signing of petitions and resolutions on issues relevant to the Russian community, such as ‘non-citizen’ discrimination laws and changes in the education system related to the Russian as a language of instruction. In 2004, the reform of ethnic minority schools began, and all Russian schools started the transition
to bilingual education (in 2004, the mandatory proportions of lessons taught in the Latvian language was set at 60% of the total number of lessons in secondary schools, while in 2021 it was 80%) (Center for Public Policy PROVIDUS, 2004; Cheskin, 2013, p. 232). According to Hanovs and Vinnika, as a result of the reform and the protests that it provoked, the Victory Monument in Riga became a ‘symbolic focus for the institutionalisation of the political activities of the Russian community’ (Hanovs and Vinnika, 2005, quoted in Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011b, p. 124). It is noteworthy that the struggle for the rights of Russian-speaking schoolchildren was driven by the slogan ‘Russian schools are our Stalingrad,’ thereby exploiting the mythology of the Great Patriotic War.

At that time, the number of participants in the celebration of Victory Day in Riga was rapidly growing. According to media estimates, if in 1999 events from Victory Square were visited by 2,000 to 5,000 people, then in 2001, the number of participants was estimated at 100,000, and in 2003 at 150,000 (see Table 6.1). The ambassadors of Russia, Belarus and Tajikistan laid flowers at the Victory Monument, while a major political rally of the Latvian Russian Union took place in 2003 (Delfi, 2013a). Simultaneously, the commercialisation of Victory Day began – starting in 2003 on 9 May at Victory Square, trade stalls were established that sold food, flowers, books and other goods.

The move to the next phase of the Victory Day celebration is marked by the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in 2005. The number of participants in the celebration increased significantly. According to media estimates, up to 260,000 people gathered at Victory Square, which was the highest rate ever recorded (see Table 5.1). A significant increase in the
number of participants in the celebration that year was observed not only in Riga but also in other cities of Latvia with large Russian-speaking communities (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c, p. 263).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The number of participants in Victory Day in Riga in the Russian-language press</th>
<th>The number of participants in Victory Day in Riga in the Latvian-language press</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15,000–20,000</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Up to 8,000</td>
<td>Up to 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>10,000–15,000</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2,000–5,000</td>
<td>Up to 1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>‘Several thousand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>‘Several thousand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>Up to 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>260,000</td>
<td>Up to 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>‘Several thousand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>‘Several thousand’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50,000–200,000</td>
<td>Over 10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>Over 10,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.1.** Comparison of estimates of the number of participants in the celebration of Victory Day (at Victory Square in Riga) based on a quantitative analysis of the Russian-language and Latvian-language press newspaper publications for 1993–2009 (Data Source: Ločmele, 2010; Procevska, 2010; Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011, pp. 384–396).

While in the 1990s, the celebration of 9 May did not attract the attention of the press, since the 2000s, Victory Day has become a genuine media event. Importantly, studies of the Latvian media show that there are significant
differences in the coverage of Victory Day celebrations by Latvian-language and Russian-language media (see Ločmele, 2010; Ločmele, 2011; Procevska, 2010). For instance, Table 6.1 shows a significant difference in the number of participants of 9 May commemoration stated by the Russian-language press and the Latvian-language press. If in 1998, the estimated number of participants in the Russian-language press was 3 times higher compared to the Latvian-language press, then in 2004, it was 10 times higher. Furthermore, in 2005, according to Russian-language media estimates, 260,000 people gathered in Victory Square, and the Latvian-language newspapers claimed no more than 10,000 participants (see Table 6.1). An analysis of photographs from the events of 9 May makes it possible to suggest that the number of participants in the Latvian press was underestimated, but, at the same time, it would also seem likely that the Russian-language press was overestimating the numbers (Procevska, 2010; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, p. 329). Based on an analysis of Latvian media, Ločmele (2011, p. 318) concludes that the Victory Day commemorations at Victory Park in Riga create an atmosphere of social unity and construct a shared identity; however, this solidarity and unification within the Russian community is seen by the Latvian-language press as a threat to Latvian identity and state stability.

Further differences in the coverage of the Victory Day celebration in the Latvian and Russian-language press are found within the thematic analysis of publications devoted to the 9 May commemoration (see Appendix 10). For example, in the Latvian media, since 2002, the ‘picnic atmosphere’ has been mentioned every year, which is uncharacteristic of the Russian-language media. Here are just some examples of Latvian media headlines in 2005 –
‘Victory Day celebrated by singing and drinking’ (latv. ‘Uzvaras dienu svin dziedot un dzerot’) (Diena, 10.05.2005); ‘Clinking medals and the smell of shashlik’ (latv. ‘Šķind ordeņi, smaržo šašliks’) (Diena, 11.05.2006); ‘Picnic at the foot of the monument’ (latv. ‘Pikniks pieminekļa pakājē’) (Diena, 10.05.2006). Later, the ‘picnic’ in the headings was combined with politics, for example, in 2009 headings – ‘Imperial Russian picnic in Riga’ (latv. ‘Impēriska krievu pikniks Rīgā’) (Latvijas Avīze, 11.05.2009); and ‘9 May turns into a Russian-language solidarity picnic’ (latv. ‘9. maijs izvēršas par krievvalodīgo solidaritātes pikniku’) (Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze, 10.05.2009).

The focus on the ‘picnic atmosphere’ on 9 May in Latvian-language media is a reflection of the famous statement made by President Vaira Vike-Freiberga on the LNT television channel on 1 February 2005: ‘Of course, we won’t change the conscience of those old Russians who on 9 May will wrap their vobla [smoked roach eaten in Russia as a delicacy and enjoyed with beer] in newspaper, drink vodka and sing chastushki [humorous folk songs] while remembering how they heroically conquered the Baltics’ (Regnum, 2013a). Latvian Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks commented on the President of Latvia’s statements: ‘These words should not be interpreted as some kind of humiliation or insult. What the president said about vodka, vobla and chastushki was due to what she saw in television coverage of the previous 9 May celebrations’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, 2005). The memory of these words, nevertheless, did not subside for many years. In 2013, the ex-head of the Office of the President Mārtiņš Bondars claimed that ‘the infamous phrase of the former president was not previously agreed with the team’ (Delfi, 2013b).
In 2005, the Victory Day commemorative ritual was accompanied by festive elements that required significant financial investment – the rock and pop music concert lasted 12 hours and was followed by 20 minutes of fireworks. At that time, protests against the Victory Day festivities have become just as important as the celebration itself. The police presence increased, and the most severe clashes occurred in 2007 when the National Power Unity, a far-right nationalist party founded in 2003, protested at the Victory Monument during the commemoration. This led to a clash with the participants of the 9 May rituals (Delfi, 2012a). As a result, Victory Park became a site of confrontation between representatives of different ideologies, especially marginalised ones such as radical nationalism and communism. Political parties that supported organising events near the Victory Monument, including For Human Rights in a United Latvia (the Latvian Russian Union) and the Harmony Centre, represented a social-democratic ideology and utilised the location for pre-election activities and to attract voters. Participants of the 9 May event received flags and other campaign souvenirs with logos of the ‘For Human Rights in a United Latvia’ political party. Furthermore, after 2005, the St. George’s ribbon campaign (supported by Russian state officials as well as by government loyalist and nationalist groups) gained wide popularity in Latvia – wearing a ribbon on clothes and bags, and putting it on cars was perceived by some part of the population as a provocation.

The St. George’s ribbon appeared in Russia in 2005, becoming a generalised symbol of Russian patriotism. This initiative was proposed by the journalists of RIA Novosti, who suggested putting on the St. George’s ribbon
on Victory Day. The organisers of the first action explained their initiative as follows:

The idea of the St. George’s Ribbon campaign grew naturally from another project of the RIA Novosti agency – ‘Our Victory. Day after day.’ This site was created a year ago so that young people, the second or third post-war generation, could send stories about their grandparents – front-line soldiers. Over the year, several hundred such stories, photographs, and letters have accumulated. At some point, we wanted to go offline with our promotion. The St. George’s Ribbon campaign is to some extent our ‘social work,’ a personal impulse. (RIA Novosti, 2005)

The official RIA Novosti report stated:

In 2006, within the framework of the campaign, over 4 million St. George ribbons were distributed in more than 900 cities of Russia, in the countries of near and far abroad – Israel, the USA, Canada, the countries of the Persian Gulf and many cities in Europe joined the St. George’s Ribbon campaign. Spacecraft Progress M-57 delivered the symbol of Victory Day to the International Space Station. (RIA Novosti, 2007)

With the appearance of the white ribbon in the winter of 2011–2012 as a symbol of protest, a symbolic opposition of the ‘patriotic’ St. George and the ‘liberal’ white ribbons was formed. Later, the St. George’s ribbon was used during the Russo-Ukrainian War as a distinctive sign of pro-Russian forces. Thus, the St. George’s ribbon was conceived as an expression of the memory of, and gratitude towards, those who died and fought during the Great Patriotic War, but it has begun to be used for propaganda purposes, quickly turned into a symbol of Russian national pride, and then degenerated into a means of distinguishing between friends and foes, often without any connection with the memory of veterans.

Since 2010 (the year of the 65th anniversary of Victory Day), it has been possible to talk about the beginning of the next period of development of the Victory Day celebration in Latvia. Changes in the attitudes of the Riga City
Council first and foremost mark this stage. In 2010, for the first time since 1991, flowers were laid at the Victory Monument in Riga on 9 May by the Riga Mayor (Nils Ušakovs elected from the ‘Harmony Centre’ alliance in July 2009, becoming the first Riga Mayor of Russian descent). In his speech dedicated to war veterans, he said, ‘Forgive us for having spent 20 years living in a country where authorities have treated you as strangers’ (Orlov, 2010). At the same time, at Victory Square in Riga, large screens were set for broadcasting the parade from Moscow (for many people in Latvia, watching the TV broadcast of the Victory Day parade from Moscow at home was an important element of the 9 May ritual; Russian TV channels carried out broadcasting until they were banned in Latvia in 2022).

It is noteworthy that in 2010, by invitation of the Russian leadership, President Valdis Zatlers participated in celebrations in Moscow on Victory Day. In the same year, the representative of the US embassy (military attaché) also attended Victory Day celebrations at Victory Square in Riga for the first time (Mixnews, 2013). Later, in 2012, Andris Bērziņš became the first president in the history of Latvia to congratulate Soviet veterans on 9 May, although he did not visit the Victory Monument in Riga (Sputnik, 2019a). This more ‘friendly’ attitude towards the Victory Day celebration on the part of Valdis Zatlers and Andris Berzinš coincides with a period of ‘warming’ in relations between Russia and Latvia in the period from 2008 until the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

Starting from 2010, the influence of the ‘For Human Rights in a United Latvia’ party began to diminish, and the role of the ‘Harmony Centre’ (social-democratic political alliance aimed to represent the interests of Russians in Latvia, founded in 2005 and lead by Nils Ušakovs) increased in the
organisation of the Victory Day celebrations (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, p. 22). The ‘Harmony Centre’ alliance has delegated the coordination of certain public actions to related non-governmental organisations rather than organising them directly. Among these organisations, two stand out especially – the youth organisation ‘Mums pa ceļam’ (‘We’re going the same way’) and the social organisation ‘9.maijs.lv.’ Both organisations are non-commercial and exist through donations, while they are associated with the ‘Harmony Centre’ alliance. According to Latvian journalistic investigations discovered, the bulk of ‘9.maijs.lv’ donations comes from the Russian Embassy in Latvia (Barisa-Sermule, 2015). On its official website, ‘9.maijs.lv’ declares its main aims ‘to help veterans who live in Latvia’ and ‘to maintain and preserve memories of Victory Day in Latvia’ (9may.lv, 2020a). ‘9.maijs.lv’ became the main organiser of 9 May celebrations at Victory square in Riga. The head of 9may.lv, Vadims Baraņņiks, is a member of the ‘Harmony Centre’ and an elected member of the Riga municipal government (Cheskin, 2013, p. 228). The ‘Mums pa ceļam’ organisation is also affiliated with the ‘Harmony Centre,’ despite its claims of being a non-political youth organisation ‘helping pupils in Russian-language schools to find their place in life and achieve success…With our help we want young people to become successful members of Latvian society’ (Cheskin, 2013, p. 228). ‘Mums pa ceļam’ is a constant organisational partner of celebrations on Victory Day, and they are the largest distributor of St. George ribbons (the Latvian Russian Union, by the way, also regularly distributed St. George ribbons in their offices on the eve of 9 May up until 2021) (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011c, p. 238; Regnum 2021).
Below is a diagram (Figure 5.2) representing the dynamics of the number of participants of 9 May celebrations in Victory Park, organised by 9may.lv between 2013 and 2019.

**Figure 5.2.** The number of participants in the celebrations on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga, according to the events’ organisers (Source: 9may.lv 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

As can be seen from the diagram, the number of participants over 2013-2019 has ranged from 120,000 to 220,000 (according to the event organisers; however, these figures differ from the Latvian-language media’s data and might be exaggerated). The largest were the celebrations of 2015 (on the 70th anniversary of Victory Day). It should be recalled that the 70th anniversary of the Victory coincided with the first year after the annexation of Crimea by Russia, largely accompanied by a sense of patriotic euphoria and revenge for the collapse of the Soviet Union from the points of view of different segments of the population in Russia (Levada Center, 2019). Presumably, this may also be considered one of the factors of growing interest celebrating Victory Day in
In 2015 the first ‘Immortal Regiment’ march (a procession during which participants pass a column through the streets of cities with photographs of their dead relatives) on Victory Day took place in Riga. According to one of the organisers of the campaign, Margarita Dragile:

This action has no legal status; it is organised by a grassroots group using funds obtained from donations. Initially, the Russian community of Latvia collected the donations, and then the organisation ‘Memorial of Our Memory’ (‘Mūsu atmiņas memoriāls,’ founded in 2016, among the co-founders Elizabete Krivcova (the ‘Harmony Centre’); Aleksejs Vasiljevs (Latvian Russian Union); Vladimirs Sokolovs (Latvian Russian Union)] took over. According to estimates by the Latvian State Security Service, the cost of organising the action is 300,000 euros. However, this is not true. In reality, the total amount of donations did not typically exceed 2,000 euros; in one year we collected around 15,000 euros. [Interview E2]

If in 2015, only 500 people took part in the action, then in subsequent years, the number of participants increased rapidly, reaching 20,000 in 2019 (see Figure 5.3). The procession in Riga was the largest outside Russia (Sputnik, 2016). In addition to Riga, where the rally was held near Victory Park, the Immortal Regiment marches were also held in four other cities of Latvia, namely Jurmala, Liepaja, Daugavpils and Rezekne.
Tracing the roots of the ‘Immortal Regiment’ ritual, one can notice that it evolves from Soviet rallies, which structurally correspond to the religious practice of the Orthodox Easter Cross Procession (Glebkin, 1998; Krongauz, 2013; Lisina, 2017). Just as after the revolution, the substantive content of certain rituals changed while maintaining their external structure, Soviet social practices, having undergone changes in their content, can continue to function in contemporary society, performing the same function of indicating belonging to a group and a particular social community. The ‘Immortal Regiment’ is a prime example of how Russia’s mythology of the Second World War spreads beyond its borders. Initially, the action started in Tomsk, Russia, in 2012; by 2019, there were similar actions in 110 countries (Sputnik, 2019d). In 2019, with the participation of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first international conference ‘Memory of the Victors’ was held in Serbia, which

Figure 5.3. The number of participants in ‘Immortal Regiment’ Marches on Victory Day in Riga between 2015 and 2019, according to the events’ organisers (Source: Sputnik, 2018, 2019f; Polk, 2016).
brought together more than 100 coordinators of the ‘Immortal Regiment’ campaign from 55 countries around the world. (RIA Novosti, 2019). Margarita Dragile, notes that representatives of the Latvian ‘Immortal Regiment,’ who participated in this conference, joined the signing of the collective ‘resolution of the Immortal Regiment’ [Interview E2].

As Gabovich (2020) notes, ‘at first, [Russian] officials were very critical about the very idea of the Immortal Regiment, but the popularity of the movement forced them to stick the label of state patriotism on it’ (on the history of the development of the Immortal Regiment from a grassroots social initiative to a state-supported practice, see Kurilla, 2018; Chirin, 2019; Gabovich 2020). The symbol of the unconditional success of the Immortal Regiment and the final absorption of the grassroots initiative to the conduct of state propaganda was the participation of Vladimir Putin – in 2015, on 9 May, the president led the procession on Red Square (RIA Novosti, 2015). The following year, on 9 May 2016, Crimean prosecutor Natalya Poklonskaya went to the Immortal Regiment rally not with a photograph of a veteran relative but with an icon of Nicholas II (RIA Novosti, 2016b). In 2017, a fair number of people with icons instead of portraits of veterans were noticed in the ranks of the Immortal Regiment (Varlamov, 2017). In Chapter 3 (3.3), it was already mentioned that eclecticism is one of the key characteristics of uses of the Soviet mythologies in contemporary Russia – elements of Soviet symbolism are combined here with elements of monarchist imperial ideology and the Orthodox religion; this example can also be considered in the context of the Putin’s historical concept to place the achievements of the Soviet era and especially the victory in the 1941-1945 war in a wider Russian historical context and demonstrate
continuity with the Russian imperial past. It is worth noting that, in contrast to Russia, the use of Orthodox symbolism or Russian imperial symbolism on 9 May is highly unpopular in Latvia.

At the same time, one can note another key characteristic of the commemorative practices of contemporary Russia, which is often observed in Latvia as well – the strengthening of the militarisation of World War II commemoration. For example, Grushka (2019) noted: ‘In some memorial spaces [in Russia] one gets the impression that part of the public is not so much interested in the memory of this event, but rather admires the displayed military equipment, which children can climb onto, which is eagerly photographed by parents. There is something like a cult of weapons that goes far beyond the mere display of historical artifacts.’ This phenomenon is especially noticeable in the context of state encouragement of military-patriotic education. As striking examples, one can cite, in particular, reports of a parade of ‘baby troops’ from kindergarten pupils on 9 May in the Tver region (Lenta, 2021) and the opening of a copy of a children’s concentration camp in Karelia, with the plan being to take schoolchildren there on excursions (RBK, 2021). Notably, the use of military uniforms on 9 May, including among children, is a phenomenon that has often been observed in recent years in Latvia.

Analysis of the 9 May commemoration in Latvia shows that, up to 2020, there have been five stages of its development. The stages are summarised in Table 6.2, and the data from the thematic analysis of the media (Appendix 10) correlate with these stages. For example, the stage of the commercialisation and festivalisation of Victory Day (2000–2005) coincides with the time when the media began to mention concerts, as well as food and
drink in Victory Square; the protest and clashes stage (2005–2010) also directly corresponds with media analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage/Period</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990–1995</td>
<td>9 May does not attract media attention. Interethnic confrontation is absent. The main focus is on veterans and the commemoration of the victims of World War II. Ritual practices (dancing to the accordion and laying flowers) are spontaneous and unorganised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–2000</td>
<td>The political potential of Victory Day is revealed. Officials of the CIS countries and pro-Russian Latvian politicians are increasingly appearing. Victory Day is starting to be used for political campaigning. Singing songs from the war years and dancing accompanied by an accordion still constitute the basis for Victory Day celebration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000–2005</td>
<td>Political campaigning becomes an integral part of 9 May and includes the collection of signatures for various petitions aimed at protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia, while Victory Square in Riga becomes a symbolic space for the political activities of the Russian community. The commercialisation and festivalisation of Victory Day have begun. 9 May is gradually becoming a genuine media event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005–2010</td>
<td>The Victory Day celebration is accompanied by those festive elements that require significant financial investment (e.g. rock concerts and fireworks). The Latvian Russian Union is the main organiser of the events. Protests and clashes between representatives of different ideologies have increased significantly, as have festivalisation and commercialisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010–2019</td>
<td>9 May celebrations are supported by Riga’s local authorities. The ‘Harmony Centre’ alliance actively backs foundations which organise public events on Victory Day (‘Mums pa celjam’ and ‘9may.lv’). The celebration is gaining unprecedented scale, with around 120,000–220,000 attendees at Victory Square. ‘Immortal Regiment’ Marches take place yearly in Riga.</td>
</tr>
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**Table 5.2.** Stages of Victory Day celebration in Latvia.

In 2020 and 2021, the mass celebrations at the Victory Monument in Riga were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. In 2020, when the state
of emergency was in force in Latvia, representatives of the ‘9.maijs.lv’ organisation proposed to hold all festive events online. Thus, concerts of previous years were broadcast on the society’s website, Facebook and YouTube pages, and the Immortal Regiment event was held virtually on the pages of social networks. Instead of the traditional fireworks, which in previous years attracted tens of thousands of spectators, the organisers of the festivities called for the launch of fireworks individually in courtyards. Nils Ušakovs (who in 2019 was removed from his post of mayor of Riga and became a member of the European Parliament) urged Latvians to join the all-Russian state-supported campaign ‘Candle in the Window’: this involved putting photographs of the participants of the Great Patriotic War in the window, and lighting a candle at 7:00 PM, when the ‘minute of silence’ took place (TASS, 2021).

However, a significant number of Latvian residents celebrating this day did not limit themselves to an online celebration and went to the Victory Monument to lay flowers. On 9 May 2021, more than sixty thousand people visited the Victory Monument, according to the ‘9.maijs.lv’ organisation (9may.lv, 2020b). In previous years, usually by noon, a giant carpet of flowers was spread in front of the Victory Monument, which by evening covered the entire area adjacent to the monument. In 2021, the volunteers of the ‘9.maijs.lv’ organisation decided to give the square a traditional festive image and laid out flowers in the form of a giant five-pointed star on a white and yellow background. Photos with the red star instantly spread on social networks, and the next day, 10 May, a huge number of people came to be photographed against its background. This quickly caused a flurry of indignation in the Latvian-speaking segments of Facebook and Twitter. However, in general,
according to the chief of the country’s police, Normunds Kraps, the celebration of 9 May 2021 passed more calmly than in previous years, as there were only a few cases of arrests of people gathering together, as well as the use of Soviet symbols (Regnum, 2021).

By contrast, Victory Day turned into a public controversy in Latvia. In the circumstances of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Latvian state took several measures to prevent the mass celebration of 9 May. Thus, on 31 March 2022, the Saeima of Latvia urgently approved amendments to the legislation to ban holding public events closer than 200 metres from any monument to the Soviet army (Saeima, 2022e). Commenting on these amendments to the legislation, the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, stated in April 2022:

Putin and his regime have created their own imperial narrative around World War II victory... Russia used this imperial narrative as an excuse for invading Ukraine... 9 May is a day when Russian imperial aspirations are glorified... As a democratic country, Latvia must ban celebrations that justify or glorify regimes and ideologies that have committed crimes against peace, humanity and other countries with whom they are at war. (President of the Republic of Latvia, 2022)

On 7 April 2022, the Latvian Parliament decided that 9 May should be recognised as a day of remembrance for the victims of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Saeima, 2022a). On 2 May, at the Victory Monument, Riga City Council opened a photo exhibition ‘Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes!,’ instigated by Latvian residents, which recorded the events of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 show exhibition stands with stylised bullet holes and photographs of the devastation of war and anti-war protests. Part of the territory of the Victory Square before 9 May was blocked by barriers, while Ukrainian and Latvian flags were stretched on the police fences that fenced the monument (see Figure 5.6).
Figures 5.4 and 5.5. An exhibition of photographs ‘Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!’. Photographed by the author, 9 May 2022, the Victory Square in Riga.

Figure 5.6. The 9 May (Victory Day) Celebration in Riga – flower laying in 2022. Photographed by the author, 9 May 2022, the Victory Square in Riga.
Furthermore, on 6 May 2022, the Latvian State Security Service released an official statement:

Considering the horrific war crimes committed by Russia’s armed forces in Ukraine, VDD calls not to visit the so-called ‘victory’ monument and other monuments glorifying the occupation of Latvia on 9 May... Gathering and ceremonial laying of flowers at the monuments glorifying the occupation of Latvia, according to VDD’s point of view, is considered to be an act of disrespect towards millions of people, including Latvian population, which have been killed or severely suffered because of the Soviet Union’s communist regime. Individual laying of flowers at the monuments glorifying the occupation of Latvia, as well as other public activity in support of Russia are also considered to be blatant disrespect. At the same time, these activities are also an indirect acquittal of Russia’s current crimes against humanity and peace and war crimes. (Latvian State Security Service, 2022)

Despite these calls and the official ban on holding mass events, laying flowers at the Victory Monument on an individual basis was not prohibited on 9 May; the Latvian media reported that several thousand people visited the monument that day (TV3, 2022). Throughout the day, activists of the Latvian nationalist organisation ‘Tēvijas sargi’ were on duty near the monument, holding Ukrainian flags and mourning ribbons in their hands; it was evident that some people who brought flowers to the monument entered into disputes with them – in particular, trying to prove that the 9 May commemoration did not mean support for the war in Ukraine. Radio Liberty correspondents’ interviews with participants in the commemoration confirm that many people who laid flowers at the Victory Monument sharply and emotionally criticised the ‘merging’ of the memory of World War II with contemporary events of the war in Ukraine (Svoboda, 2022). Some additional findings about the change in Latvian residents’ attitude to 9 May as a result of the Russian military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are presented in Chapter 5 (5.4). In general, we can conclude that the Victory Day passed in a relatively calm atmosphere.
The aggravation of the situation occurred in the early morning of 10 May, when the flowers in front of the Victory Monument were removed with a bulldozer by the municipal services of Riga; this had never happened in previous years and caused an extremely emotional response from many people who stood in solidarity with the Victory Day commemoration (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2022c). During the day, the people of Latvia brought even more flowers to the monument than on the previous day; there were up to 500 people at the same time near the monument, some of whom sang Russian songs and shouted anti-Latvian slogans (Latvijas Avīze, 2022a). Commenting on these events, the National Alliance stated ‘What every loyal person in Latvia was forced to experience in their country on 9 May and on 10 May is unacceptable,’ and demanded the dismissal of the Minister of the Interior, Marija Golubeva, who ‘had failed to ensure proper order in a difficult situation’ (Nacionālā apvienība, 2022). A week later, Golubeva was dismissed (Golubeva, 2022).

On 11 May, the police completely blocked access to the Victory Monument to ‘prevent a threat to public safety’ (The State Police of Latvia, 2022). After this, a decision was quickly made in the Latvian Parliament to dismantle the monument, which had been debated for many years, and in August 2022, the Victory Monument was demolished. The further development of commemorative and ritual practices on 9 May will be drastically affected by dismantling the Victory Monument. The next sub-chapter analyses the monument’s role in the ritual practices associated with the commemoration of 9 May.
5.3. The Victory Memorial in Riga and the dynamics of ritual space

The Victory Memorial is a commemorative complex in Victory Park in Riga; it was erected in 1985 in memory of the Soviet Army’s victory over Nazi Germany in World War II (see Figures 5.7 – 5.9). Its initial name was ‘Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders’ (Riga Municipal Monument Agency, 2020). The compositional centre of the monument is a 79-meter pillar with three golden five-pointed stars at the top; it is adjoined by two groups of sculptures – a band of three soldiers and the Soviet Motherland monument (a sculpture of a female figure).

Figure 5.7. The Victory Monument in Riga – three soldiers. Photographed by the author, 6 February 2019.
The Victory Park, in which the Victory Monument was erected, was founded in 1909 on the eve of the large-scale celebration of the bicentennial anniversary of the actual accession of Riga as the capital of Livonia to the Russian Empire. When the park was opened, it was called Riga Peter’s Park (‘Petrovsky park’) in honour of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great. The park was renamed Victory Park in 1923 (during the time of independent Latvia) in honour of the victory in 1919 over the West Russian Volunteer Army under the command of Colonel Bermondt-Avalov. Thus, its name was in no way associated with World War II. However, later historical events introduced new
semantics associated with the Victory Park. For example, on 3 February 1946, a death sentence was executed in the park against SS Obergruppenführer Friedrich Eckeln, an SS Police General in the Reichskommissariat Ostland (in the occupied Baltic territories), and four Nazi administration leaders in Latvia. All were convicted of war crimes and the massacre of civilians, including of the Jewish population (Mintaurs; 2020).

In 1961, the park was renamed after the XXII Congress of the CPSU (at which Nikita Khrushchev promised to build communism) (ibid.). On 31 October 1974, a decree of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia and the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR on the construction of the Victory Monument was published (Sputnik, 2019b). A year later, on May 8, 1975 (on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Victory), a solemn laying of the foundation stone took place. Funds for the monument were collected through public donations – the workers were asked to donate one ruble from their salary for the monument’s construction (Pīra-Rezovska and Tooma, 2017, pp. 153-161). In 1976, a competition for the best monument project was announced (Mintaurs, 2020). Paradoxically, the sculptor Ģevis Bukovskis, who eventually created the Victory monument, fought on the side of the Latvian SS Legion during World War II (Institute of Russian Cultural Heritage of Latvia, 2010, 2010a). The construction of the monument began in December 1982. On 5 November 1985, the monument to the soldiers of the Soviet Army – the liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from Nazi invaders (the Victory Monument) was opened. At that time, the city executive committee decided to rename the park Victory Park (Sputnik, 2019c). In this instance, ‘victory’ evidently meant the victory of the Red Army in World War II.
Since Latvia gained independence in 1990, discussions regarding the need to dismantle the monument have been ongoing. In April 1996, the 9th congress of The Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) adopted a resolution to demolish the Victory Monument (Latvijas Avīze, 2019a). According to party deputy chairman Aristides Lambergs: ‘The monument is a symbol of communist rule, and those who support this rule gather there. In the park, there is a place for another monument, ‘more acceptable’ for the Latvian state. When the Soviet army entered Berlin, it destroyed all the Nazi symbols’ (Sputnik, 2019b). The mayor of Riga Māris Purgailis (The Latvian National Independence Movement member) was supposed to adopt this resolution, but this did not happen. Furthermore, on 6 June 1997, at night, as a result of a bomb explosion carried out by members of the Latvian ultra-nationalist organisation ‘Pērkonkrusts,’ the Victory Monument was severely damaged. Both organisers, including Pērkonkrusts’ leader Valdis Raups, died in the explosion. The head of the organisation, Igor Shishkins, served two years and eight months in prison (Subbota, 2013). After the explosion, the Riga City Council allocated 10,500 Latvian lats (15,440 euros) for the repair of the monument and another 18,000 lats (26,470 euros) for the landscaping (Sputnik, 2019b).

Hence, the discontent of a significant part of Latvian society who supported demolishing the monument intensified significantly. On 9 May 2002, the head of the Riga City Council cultural affairs committee, Dainis Īvāns, accompanied by several colleagues, organised a deliberately provocative fishing trip near the Victory Monument as a protest against the celebration (Delfi, 2002). On 28 October 2006, at night, unknown attackers threw paint on
the monument (Sputnik, 2019a). On 9 May 2007, members of the National Power Unity and activists of the Latvian National Front (the extreme-right group founded by Aivars Garda) intended to lay a wreath made of barbed wire at the Victory Monument. In order for them to approach the monument, the police had to form a cordon around Garda’s activists, but one of the representatives of the ‘anti-fascists’ managed to take away and tear up a protest poster of the Latvian National Front (Delfi, 2012a). On 28 April 2009, Latvian public figures sent an open letter to the President of Latvia Valdis Zatlers with a request to prevent the restoration of the historical inscription ‘Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga’ on the monument. The document was signed by 232 people (Latvietis, 2009).

In 2012, on the Manabalss.lv website (platform for online petitions), Roberts Krastiņš, Emīls Gailis and Māris Ruks began collecting signatures for the reconstruction of Victory Square in Riga under the project approved by Latvian President Kārlis Ulmanis in 1938. The petition authors claimed that ‘the current Victory Square often creates unnecessary confrontation and cultivates anti-state actions, [therefore] the Latvian Parliament must take appropriate actions to restore historical justice. [...] It is necessary to receive compensation from Russia for the dismantling of the USSR Army Memorial and the change in the infrastructure of Victory Square, guided by the initial project’ (Manabalss.lv, 2012). The proposed petition gained over 12,000 signatures. The initiative was supported by the parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Defence Veiko Spolītis, as well as by Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns. Bordāns, in particular, stated that the monument to the ‘occupation rule’ should not be located near the National Library (Latvijas Avīze, 2013).
However, the initiative was not, in fact, implemented. On the one hand, the demolition of the monument would violate the international treaty with Russia adopted in 1994 (‘On the Social Protection of Military Pensioners of the Russian Federation and Members of Their Families Residing in the Territory of the Republic of Latvia’; Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Latvia, 2021). On the other hand, the Latvian authorities probably recalled the bad example of the events of the ‘Bronze Night’ of 2007 in Tallinn, when the actions of the Estonian authorities to transfer a similar monument to Soviet soldiers turned into major civil unrest (one person died and many others were injured by the police) (for more details on this case, see, for instance, Poleschuk, 2007; Davydo, 2008; Torsti, 2008; Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipila, 2008; Ehala, 2009; Kaiser; 2012; Selg; 2013; Martinez, 2018). Thus, in May 2013, President Andris Bērziņš called the demolition of the monument in Riga unacceptable (Mamikinstv, 2013). In October of that year, Riga Mayor Nils Ušakovs claimed: ‘10,000 signatures were collected for the demolition of the Victory Monument. This is a provocation of extremists, which can exist only due to national hatred since they do not know how to do anything else. […] But for my part, as mayor, I can guarantee that not a single monument will be demolished in Riga’ (Regnum, 2013b). Ushakov also cited data from a survey of residents of Riga on May 7, 2013: 13.6% supported the demolition of the Victory Monument and 78.9% opposed it. Concurrently, 54.0% of ethnic Latvians opposed the demolition of the monument (ibid.).

On 29 September 2017, another petition for the demolition of the monument appeared on the Manabalss.lv website. Its author Uģis Polis stated:
The so-called Victory Monument... was installed in 1985, that is, during the illegal occupation of the Republic of Latvia, which lasted from 1944 to 1991. As a result of the violation of international law by the Soviet Union, Latvia was occupied and included in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) against the will of its citizens. The monument was erected as a symbol of the liberation of Latvia from Nazi Germany, and Soviet soldiers were called 'liberators,' despite the well-known fact that the Soviet regime was responsible for mass deportations to Siberia, countless killings of civilians, rape, robberies, and imprisonment in concentration camps... Nowadays, the Victory Monument has not been a place of memory for Soviet veterans-liberators for a long time – it has become a place for exclusively political events on 9 May, which are sponsored by the Kremlin and are organised in the interests of the Kremlin, thereby realising its vast propaganda. (Manabalss.lv 2017)

As of January 2020, the petition to demolish the Victory Monument had gathered more than 11,800 votes. After 10,000 signatures had been collected, the petition for dismantling the monument was submitted to the Latvian parliament for consideration. On 13 June 2019, deputies of the Latvian Saeima supported the petition with 45 votes in favour and 30 against (Saeima, 2019).

Concurrently, an opposing initiative was considered by the Latvian Saeima’s Mandate, Ethics and Submissions Committee – namely, the petition for protection of the Victory Monument, which was proposed by the leader of the Latvian Russian Union, Tatjana Ždanoka (Latvijas Avīze, 2019b). As of January 2020, the petition was signed by over 23,000 people (i.e. twice as many as the petition for the demolition of the monument) (Manabalss.lv, 2019).

The text of the petition reads:

Now in public space, calls for demolishing monuments to fighters against Nazism are becoming louder. These calls contribute to a split in society and threaten the unity of Europe in its celebration of fighters against Nazism. Latvia should be united with the rest of Europe and guarantee by law the preservation of monuments to the victors of Nazism. [...] The protection and maintenance of the monuments erected in all corners of Latvia for the victors of Nazism will contribute to the unity of society. (ibid.)
Tatjana Ždanoka’s petition was rejected by the Committee (66 deputies voted for the rejection of the petition and 20 supported the petition).

In April 2019, the mayor of Riga Nils Ušakovs claimed that the city council would not allow the monument to be demolished since the object is in its possession (RIA Novosti, 2019a). As part of the research, an official request was sent to the Riga City Council with a question regarding the Victory monument, to which the following response was received in February 2021:

It is not planned by the Riga City Council to promote or otherwise support the initiative on the dismantling of the monument. At the same time, the idea of placing explanatory plates in the Victory Park around the monument is worth discussing. The history of World War II in the territory of Latvia would be explained on the plates in different languages. There will also be explanations about the occupation regimes and the fact that the Soviet occupation of Latvia continued long after the end of the war. [see Appendix 15]

Our survey of the inhabitants of Latvia conducted in 2020 helps to reveal respondents’ attitudes towards the monuments of the Soviet period. Thus, Figure 5.10 shows the answers of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents to the question: ‘Do you think that Soviet monuments dedicated to the war should be preserved?’ The most popular answer of Russian-speaking respondents was ‘Yes, the memory of victory in the war must be preserved’ (59%), while Latvian-speakers most often said that monuments should be preserved ‘only if they are cemeteries or contain the remains of fallen soldiers,’ or they noted that ‘they must be accompanied by information that these are monuments of the occupation regime.’
Figure 5.10. ‘Do you agree that Soviet monuments dedicated to the war should be preserved?’ Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents’ answers.

This survey demonstrates that although the Soviet occupation period caused painful memories for a significant number of Latvian-speaking respondents, the attitude towards Soviet monuments was not unambiguously negative. Interestingly, in general, the idea of demolishing Soviet monuments was supported by a much smaller number of Latvian-speaking respondents, compared to those who wanted to demolish the Victory Memorial to the Soviet Army in Riga specifically. Thus, 51.9% of Latvian-speakers supported the initiative to demolish the monument, and 28.7% did not. The answers of the Russian-speaking respondents were in the proportions of 5.9% and 68.2%, respectively. It can be hypothesised that respondents’ more negative attitude towards the Victory Monument compared to other Soviet-era monuments is explained by its function as a ritual space and an important location associated with the commemoration of 9 May.
In the context of our research, Latvian-speaking respondents provided their arguments in favour of the demolition of the Victory Monument. In general, these arguments repeat the statements formulated in the petition by Uģis Polis and are closely related to the 9 May commemoration:

The honour and dignity of the Latvian Republic and the Latvian people will be restored [after the demolition of the monument]. In the long term, this will unite society, as 9 May events divide it. The level of crime and hooliganism in Riga will significantly decrease on 9 May. After the celebration of 9 May, giant piles of garbage will not accumulate in the Victory Park, its surroundings, and on other streets of Riga. The work of the police on 9 May will be facilitated, and ordinary residents will feel safe on streets that are not crowded with drunk and aggressive people. (Manabalss.lv 2017)

As one of the participants of in-depth interviews notes, her reason for regarding the Victory Monument more negatively than other monuments of the Soviet era is that they were forced to donate money for this project:

This monument was built in the early 80s. Money was collected from all of us at work. The Russians did not build it with their own money. I had to go to work on Saturday, and all that day’s earnings had to be written off voluntarily to the monument, and it was impossible to say: ‘no, I will not do this.’ I remember, we were forced to go out on Saturday to work, and it was necessary to write that we refused our salary in order to pay for the creation of this monument, I still remember that. It was not voluntary, we were forced to do it. And I do not like this. By comparison, we voluntarily donated money for Milda [the Freedom Monument], and in this case, politicians forced everyone to hand over money. And that is why I feel especially negative about this monument. I would have kept the rest of the Soviet monuments, but I would have demolished this monument. And I would particularly not touch the monuments where there are burials of people from the First World War and the Second World War, because these are still people, they fought, they died. They did not want this war themselves. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]

Other respondents, on the contrary, stated that the fact that the population had donated money for the monument is the main reason why the monument should not be demolished, but preserved:

I also gave money then for the construction of this monument, when they were collecting money. I’ll be sorry if it is demolished. I believe
there is an international agreement between the governments, and therefore, of course, the monument cannot be demolished. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

I have a negative attitude to the demolition of the monument, because it was built on residents' taxes. It does not bother me, so to speak. [Interview 21, Russian-speaking male, 56 years old]

The monument cannot be demolished, it was built with public money. There was one nationalist who wanted to blow up the monument, but blew himself up. I think this represents the memory of the people. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

In the course of in-depth interviews, respondents named other reasons why they believe that the monument should not be demolished. The most widespread opinion is that the monument is a part of history (see Appx. 14):

Firstly, this monument is connected with the fact that people died in order to liberate Riga. That is, this monument does not represent the occupation. Monuments are a mark of history, of what happened, and people should remember. If we erase our memory, then we will have nothing left. What will be the meaning? What should we tell our children? What to teach them?... Therefore, I consider the demolition of the monument a negative action. I think this is wrong. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

We should keep the monument. It's a part of history. The same as in ancient Egypt. Egyptians died many years ago, but we still have those amazing pyramids, right? Why should we destroy it? It's good that this history is still with us, but we should move on to the future. [Interview 14, Latvian-speaking male, 20 years old]

Among the main reasons why they do not want the demolition of the monument, the respondents also noted aesthetic considerations:

I don't want the monument to be demolished, because it is beautiful, in my opinion, and it does not bother anyone. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

A monument is, first of all, a cultural heritage. A monument is a sculptural art form, and I have a very negative attitude to the demolition of monuments. Let the victory monument remain. It has no propaganda meaning. First of all, it is a monument of art. [Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]
On several occasions, respondents also expressed concerns that the demolition of the monument could provoke an interethnic conflict in Latvia, and they explained the demolition by pointing to the ‘anti-Russian policy’ of the Latvian authorities:

Unfortunately, our politicians, who are nationally opposed to everything Russian, have been discussing such an initiative as the demolition of this monument for several years now. And many people are against it; we even now have a special group on Facebook where people gather, participate and very actively advocate not to demolish the monument. But this is also a political act, because if Latvia demolishes the monument, it will completely ruin our relations with Russia. Due to politics, Latvia has already lost a lot of money, because Russians no longer come to Latvia. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

I think that this initiative to demolish the monument, as usual, is political; politicians want people to stop following what is happening with the economy and get angry with each other, simply because they speak different languages at home. Because, in my opinion, this is not the first time they have wanted to demolish this monument. [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]

I am against the demolition of the monument, of course. Firstly, in this case, it will only spoil the attitude of Russians towards Latvians, which are not very good anyway. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

As can be seen from the above quotations, some respondents perceive the demolition of the monument in terms of a political conflict, affecting not only relations within Latvian society but also relations between Latvia and the Russian Federation.

After Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the question of the need to demolish the Victory Monument became even more acute. On the night of 24–25 February, unidentified people poured paint over the monument in the colours of the Ukrainian flag and left the inscription ‘Slava Ukraini’ on it (Sputnik, 2022a). The next night, police officers arrested a man who was hitting the monument with a hammer and filming it for Facebook and
TikTok (Sputnik, 2022b). This protest vandalism was followed by statements from the Latvian authorities about the need to demolish the monument. Thus, Latvia’s Minister of Justice, Jānis Bordāns, expressed the opinion that the Victory Monument is a ‘threat to the national security of the state’ (Konservatīvie, 2022). In turn, the Speaker of the Latvian Saeima, Ināra Mūrniece, noted that the dismantling of the monument should be assessed in the context of the current military situation in Ukraine: ‘We see what the occupying forces in Ukraine are doing before our eyes. Exactly the same “liberation”, which was actually an occupation, took place in Latvia: with all the atrocities, deportations, murders, and war crimes’ (Rus.Delfi, 2022a). This opinion was also shared by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, who stated that he expected the Latvian Russian-speakers to join with the entire people of Latvia in favour of demolishing the Victory monument: ‘The monument symbolises the army of Russia or the Soviet Union, which previously brought suffering to Latvians, and now to Ukrainians. This is an unacceptable symbol in a democratic society’ (Rus.Delfi, 2022b).

On 10 April, the deputies of the Saeima instructed the Latvian Ministry of Justice to find legal grounds for bypassing the agreement signed with Russia in 1994 and to demolish the monument (Latvijas Sabiedriskie Mediji, 2022d). The next day, the memorial was fenced off – although this, as described in the previous section of this dissertation, did not prevent anyone from laying flowers at the monument on Victory Day. On 12 May, after the controversy concerning the commemoration of Victory Day and the laying of flowers at the monument on 9 May and 10 May, the Latvian Parliament suspended the 1994 bilateral agreement with Russia (Saeima, 2022c).
suspension gave legal grounds for dismantling the Victory Monument in Riga, and the very next day, on 13 May, the Riga City Council voted to do so (Riga City Council, 2022). At the same time, a fundraiser was announced on the Ziedot.lv crowdfunding site ‘for the demolition of the occupation monument,’ and on June 27, the fundraising was completed; during this period, 268,385.60 euros were collected, while the remaining necessary funds for dismantling the monument will be allocated from the budget of the state and the Riga municipality (Ziedot.lv, 2022). The total cost of dismantling the monument was 2.1 million euros (Delfi, 2022).

Moreover, the Latvian population’s support for demolishing the Victory Monument was not limited to donations. For instance, on 20 May 2022, a procession ‘For liberation from the Soviet legacy’ was held in Riga, along the route from the Freedom Monument to the Victory Monument (Diena, 2022). The initiators of the procession demanded immediately record the data on all the monuments of the Soviet occupation era and then dismantle them. More than 5,000 people participated in the procession (Current Time, 2022). Journalists conducted interviews in which many protest participants admitted that their opinion had been radically changed by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine (ibid.).

According to a survey conducted by the SKDS research centre, in June 2022, only 9% of Russian-speaking residents of Latvia supported the removal of the Victory Monument in Riga, while 76% opposed it (LSM, 2022a). In turn, among the Latvian-speaking respondents, 72% were in favour of demolishing the monument, and 10% were against it (ibid.). As can be seen, the proportion of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents who supported the
demolition in 2022 was higher than in the data of our survey conducted in 2020 (5.9% of Russian-speakers and 51.9% of Latvian speakers who took part in our research supported the demolition of the Victory Monument). In addition, the SKDS survey investigated the attitude of Latvian residents to Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine: of the Russian-speaking respondents who condemned it, 22% supported the idea of demolishing the monument in Victory Park, and 60% were against it (ibid.). Thus, most Russian-speaking respondents expressed a negative opinion on demolishing the Victory Monument, regardless of their attitude towards Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine. However, there is notably a higher level of support for the demolition among Russian-speaking respondents who condemn the invasion of Ukraine, compared with the average value in this group. Hence, these data again indirectly confirm the conclusion discussed in Chapter 4 (4.2) regarding the heterogeneity and fragmentation of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia.

On 16 June 2022, the Parliament of Latvia adopted a bill which provides that local governments must dismantle objects glorifying the Soviet and Nazi regimes, including the Victory Monument in Riga (Saeima, 2022b). A month later, a complete list of objects glorifying the Soviet regime, which needed to be demolished, was approved (a total of 69 monuments) (The State Chancellery of Latvia, 2022). Officially, the number of Soviet monuments on the territory of Latvia has not been counted, and they are not included in the lists of the National Cultural Heritage. On behalf of the Ministry of Defence, they are supervised by the Committee for Fraternal Burials (Brāļu kapu komiteja), the head of which, historian Arnis Āboltiņš, compiled his own list of
313 objects (Āboltīņš, 2020). In turn, on the website of the project ‘Russian Memorials in Latvia,’ founded by the Russian Society of Latvia in 2006, 474 monuments of the Soviet era associated with the events of the Great Patriotic War are listed, as well as 79 obelisks, 29 memorial complexes, 28 memorial plaques, 19 memorial stones and 9 memorial walls. However, the commentary on the list notes that ‘unfortunately, many of the monuments named in this list have been dismantled over the past 15 years’ (Russian Memorials in Latvia, 2021). According to the Committee for Fraternal Burials, from 1990 to 2017, four tanks were dismantled (in Daugavpils, Dobele, Klapkalnciems and Ergli); 49 figures of Lenin; about 30 monuments to prominent Soviet figures (for example, Sudmalis, Stučka and Kirov), as well as 10 memorial signs to Soviet sailors and pilots who were on the territory of former military units (PRESS, 2020).

At the same time, the issue of the demolition of the monument exacerbated Russian-Latvian diplomatic relations. The Latvian Saeima’s decision to demolish the monument provoked a strong response from the official representatives of the Russian Federation. For instance, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called the deputies of the Saeima ‘ghouls’ (Zakharova, 2022). Moreover, Andrey Klimov, Deputy Chair of the Federation Council Committee on Foreign Affairs, said: ‘I do not want to announce all possible measures, but we have a lot of opportunities, including those of an administrative and economic nature, which should now be directed towards Latvia. These non-humans understand only force, our neighbouring country needs to be taught a lesson’ (RIA Novosti, 2022). Previously, Russian diplomatic representatives had also sharply responded when vandals wrote
the word ‘occupiers’ in Latvian on the Victory Monument in Riga in October 2019, while in November, the monument to the Soviet heroes-submariners of the Baltic was dismantled in Riga (RIA Novosti, 2019b; Baltnews, 2020). On 8 November 2019, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova commented on the dismantling of a monument to Soviet submariners in Riga:

Almost every week we receive news from Latvia about acts of vandalism towards monuments to Soviet soldiers who died fighting Nazism. These acts are proof that radical representatives of the Latvian governing coalition plan to destroy the Soviet memorials once and for all. [...] It is clear that if such barbarity goes unpunished, it will aggravate the difficult relations between Russia and Latvia even more. (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2019)

In turn, the Deputy Speaker of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Petr Tolstoy stated that Russia should respond by expelling Latvian diplomats (Sputnik, 2020). However, no real action was taken following these threats.

The demolition of the Victory Monument in Riga took place from August 22nd to 25th. During this period, the police arrested 27 people in the vicinity of the monument in Victory Park who came to express their disagreement with the demolition of the monument (Delfi, 2022). The Latvian Russian Union planned to rally against the demolition on August 22nd, but the authorities in Riga prohibited it (RIA Novosti, 2022a). The absence of mass protests has surprised journalists of Latvian media and many political experts, particularly in the wake of previous statements by security agencies about the expected likelihood of provocations prior to the demolition of the monument (LSM, 2022b). For example, Mārtiņš Kaprāns, a senior researcher at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia, identifies five probable reasons for the absence of protests among the Russian-speaking population of Latvia: 1) Fragmentation of the Russian-speaking community and the
inability to mobilise; 2) Unwillingness to engage in violent protest action; 3) Increased risk of being arrested in the wake of stricter legislation after February 2022; 4) Passivity of pro-Russian political forces in Latvia; 5) Regional background (ibid.).

Under the last point, Kaprāns implies, in particular, the absence of protests by Russian speakers in Estonia when the demolition of a Soviet tank in Narva in August 2022 did not repeat the 'Bronze Night' in Tallinn and passed relatively peacefully (ibid). It should also be taken into account that the demolition and damage of Soviet monuments in Latvia is taking place in the context of similar actions throughout Europe. After 24 February 2022, Soviet monuments were demolished in Finland (in the cities of Turku and Kotka); in April, the Polish authorities announced plans to demolish 60 Soviet monuments; in Lithuania, in June, Vilnius City Council voted to dismantle the monument to Soviet soldiers at the Antakalnis cemetery; and a discussion on the demolition of Soviet monuments was also initiated in Germany (BBC, 2022, Kommersant, 2022). Numerous cases of vandalism of Soviet monuments were also recorded in Europe in the spring of 2022; particularly, in Slovakia, Lithuania, Poland, Greece, Germany, Estonia, Bulgaria and Romania (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 2022). From 24 February to 24 June 2022, at least 80 monuments of the Soviet period were demolished in Ukraine (many Soviet monuments had been demolished in previous years, after the 2014 Maidan Revolution) (BBC, 2022). By contrast, in the territories occupied by Russia (for example, in Kherson Oblast and Luhansk Oblast), Soviet monuments were erected (ibid.). Such a sharpening of attention to Soviet monuments against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war is not coincidental. A monument is
a powerful symbolic entity containing political semantics related to the state system and its historical milestones. In turn, demolishing monuments is a strong ideological gesture that acts as an element of symbolic fighting against the past. For this reason, interest in monuments and memorials increases significantly during periods of regime changes and ideological paradigm shifts (see Hershkovitz, 1993; Dwyer, 2002; Till, 2003; Hay, Andrew and Tutton, 2004; Caves, 2005, p. 318; Tamm, 2013; Bellentani and Panico, 2016).

Importantly, demolishing the monument may affect the development of the memory conflict between Latvia and the Russian Federation and aggravate the inter-ethnic conflict within Latvia. Thus, according to Kaprāns, ‘the demolition in no way solves the problem that there are different social memories in Latvia, that there are different historical ideas in Latvia, there will be consequences for our interethnic relations’ (Grani, 2022). This view is also shared by cultural researcher Denis Hanovs, who believes that the demolition of the monument does not solve the problem of the divided memory of the Russian-speaking and Latvian populations and the lack of consolidation of society: ‘To think that everything went well because there were no protests is an illusion. We have freed up the space, but the monument, symbolically, continues to stand there. Demolished, it is present there twice, and weighs heavily on memory... I am sure that next year, whatever they build there – a square, a market, a rink – there will still be flowers.’

The change in interpretations of the Soviet legacy, including the Victory monument in Riga, under the influence of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, requires a more detailed discussion and is not possible within the framework of this thesis, the primary data for which were collected and
analysed during the period 2020–2021. However, as it will be shown within the analysis of the secondary data in the next section of the thesis, there are reasons to believe that at least a part of the Latvian Russian-speakers changed their attitude to the Victory day commemorations immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, while the other segment opposes the ‘merging’ of the memory of the Second World War with the current events of the war in Ukraine. We can therefore assume the existence of conflicting attitudes towards the demolition of the monument, not only between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking people but also within the Russian-speaking community in Latvia.

In conclusion, from the analysis presented above, we see that the Victory monument in Riga was a deeply significant symbol for the residents of Latvia, which could be perceived in very different ways – in particular, not only as a memory of the victory in World War II but also as a memory of the Soviet occupation or a symbol of Soviet-Russian imperialism. The latter interpretation was especially strengthened in 2022 against the background of the aggravation of the military-political situation. Discussions relating to the demolition of the Victory Monument in Riga confirm that heritage is a powerful vehicle that can accelerate social conflicts. At the same time, the demolition of the Victory Monument, which for a long time was the central part of 9 May commemorative and ritual practices, will inevitably cause a radical change in the memorial culture associated with the Soviet legacy. As has been shown, rituals related to the Victory Day commemoration have evolved during the 30 years of Latvian independence. However, throughout this time, these commemorations demonstrate the existence of contested memories in Latvia,
which have been used as a powerful tool for constructing the identity of the Russian community. To date, the Victory Monument in Riga has exemplified how a site-specific connection to the ritualised practices and commemorative events of 9 May is used to promote selective historical narratives and political agendas. The next chapter explores respondents’ views of the Victory Day commemorations in more detail and examines the role that respondents’ family memory plays in their views.

5.4. Victory Day in Latvia: Understanding the mythology and commemorations through the eyes of its residents

In order to analyse how Latvian residents interpret commemoration practices on Victory Day, they were first asked questions about their ancestors’ participation in World War II. It should be mentioned that in 1944 the Latvian Legion comprised 87,550 men, while the total Latvian population at that time was 1,756,000; it is estimated that between 70,000 and 85,000 Latvians served in the Soviet Red Army (Mangulis, 1983, p. 142). Overall, 60.5% of Latvian-speaking survey participants confirmed that their family included combatants in World War II, as did 71.5% of Russian-speaking respondents. Furthermore, 49.2% of the respondents indicated that they had relatives who died during World War II (48.1% of Latvian-speaking respondents and 49.8% of Russian-speaking respondents indicated that they had relatives who died during World War II). Figure 5.11 shows the distribution of respondents’ answers when asked to specify which side their ancestors fought for.
Figure 5.11. ‘Which side your ancestors fought for during World War II?’ Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents’ answers.

The survey data indicate that the victory in World War II is a very significant element in the historical memory of Latvia’s Russian-speaking population. Thus, 55.6% of Russian-speaking respondents consider 9 May to be the most important commemorative date for them personally (among the Russian-speaking respondents who indicated that their relatives had participated in World War II by fighting on the side of the Soviet Red Army this figure was 74%). By comparison, only 10.9% of Latvian-speaking respondents named 9 May the most significant memorable day. The most popular answer of Latvian-speaking respondents (chosen by 45.7%) was Lāčplēsis Day (11 November); this memorable date was named in honour of the hero of the Latvian national epic Lāčplēsis, who is the personification of the Latvian people’s struggle to free their native land from foreign invaders. In 1919, on
this day, the Armed Forces of Latvia defeated the West Russian Volunteer Army in Pardaugava. It should also be noted that among the respondents who indicated that their relatives had participated in World War II by fighting on the side of the Soviet Red Army, 68.1% named 9 May their most important memorable date.

The survey data also confirmed that Victory Day (9 May) has a significant potential for conflict, as stated in studies of the difference between the historical memory of the Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking population (Procevska, 2010; Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011; Kaprāns and Procevska, 2013; Kaprāns and Saulītis, 2017). Thus, the overwhelming majority of Latvian-speaking respondents (72.9%) forwarded the belief that 9 May should not be included in Latvia’s official calendar of anniversaries, while almost half of the Russian-speaking respondents (46%) stated that they would like to see the official status of Victory Day (importantly, there was no significant difference between the answers of Russian-speaking respondents under 35 and over 35, where 45% and 50.9% would like to see the official status of Victory Day, respectively). To the question ‘On what day, in your opinion, should the memory of the victims of World War II be celebrated?,’ 32.6% of Latvian-speaking respondents answered on 8 May, and 14.7% said on 9 May. The answers of the Russian-speaking respondents were 12.6% and 49%, respectively.

To clarify potential disparities in sentiment regarding 9 May among Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents, they were asked, ‘What is the date of 9 May associated with for you?’ (Table 5.3 illustrates the distribution of responses).
Table 5.3. ‘What is the date of 9 May associated with for you?’ (Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the date of 9 May associated with for you?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of the Soviet people over Nazi Germany</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of Russia over Germany</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of the anti-Hitler coalition over Nazi Germany</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Day of relatives and friends who died in the war</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of remembrance for the victims of Nazism</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of remembrance and mourning for those killed in the war</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day related to the Soviet occupation</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday of a foreign state</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As evident, among Latvian-speaking respondents, 9 May was most commonly associated with Soviet occupation or as a foreign holiday (holiday of the Russian Federation), while more than 40% of Russian-speaking respondents stated that for them, the day symbolises the victory of the Soviet people over Nazi Germany (among Latvian-speaking respondents, this response was the third most popular, at 14%). Interestingly, the phrasing ‘Victory Day of Russia over Germany’ was also prevalent among Russian-speaking respondents (11.7%). These answers can be compared to the Russian survey data of the Levada-Center from 2013-2018, as presented in Table 5.4.
What is the date of 9 May associated with for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of the Soviet people over Nazi Germany</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of Russia over Germany</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorial Day for relatives and friends who died in the war</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of remembrance and mourning for those killed in the war</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victory Day of the anti-Hitler coalition over Nazi Germany</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of remembrance for the victims of Nazism</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5.4.** 'What is the date of 9 May associated with for you?' Source: Levada Center, 2019.

As it can be seen from comparing our survey data with the Levada-Center survey, the answers of Russian-speaking respondents in our interview were very similar to the answers of Russian citizens – in both cases, the respondents most commonly used the formula ‘Victory of the Soviet people over Nazism’ that has remained from the Soviet times to characterise 9 May. It is noteworthy that the Levada-Center survey illustrates a sharp increase in the popularity of this answer between 2013 and 2015, while at the same time, there was a decrease in the popularity of answers like ‘Memorial Day for relatives and friends who died in the war’ / ‘Day of remembrance and mourning.’ It is logical to assume that, in Russia, such a dynamic could have
been caused by the strengthening of state patriotism following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (as discussed in more detail in chapter 3).

The distribution of answers to the question of what feelings Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents experienced on 9 May is presented in Table 5.5. It is interesting to compare these answers with the data from the survey by the Russian Levada-Center for 2010–2019, which are presented in Table 5.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What feelings do you have on 9 May (Victory Day)?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The joy of the victory over Nazism</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning for the millions of deaths in this war</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrow and joy equally</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative feelings in connection with the subsequent occupation of Latvia</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have any special feelings</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5. ‘What feelings do you have on Victory Day?’ (Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What feelings do you have on Victory Day? (Levada-Centre survey data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The joy of the victory over Nazism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning for the millions of deaths in this war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrow and joy equally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.6. ‘What feelings do you have on Victory Day?’ Source: Levada Center, 2019.
As seen from the data presented above from our survey, almost half of the Latvian-speaking respondents stated negative feelings towards 9 May associated with Soviet occupation. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the most popular answer to the question ‘What feelings do you have on Victory Day?’ was ‘Sorrow and joy equally.’ This combination of opposite feelings is a typical characteristic of 9 May, established since the Soviet era. As per Tumarkin (2015), the myth of Victory in the Soviet era had fully formed by 1975, and it had become symbolised by a ‘holiday with tears in the eyes.’ ‘A celebration with tears in our eyes’ is a line from the famous 1975 Soviet song ‘Victory Day’ (‘Den Pobedy’), composed by David Tukhmanov and written by Vladimir Kharitonov specifically for a contest celebrating the 30th anniversary of the war’s end. As ‘holiday with tears in the eyes,’ 9 May became a crucial component of Soviet ideology (ibid.). In contemporary Russia, state ideology has also adopted the formula ‘holiday with tears in the eyes’. For example, in his speech on the 56th anniversary of Victory in 2001, Vladimir Putin stated: ‘9 May is truly a time of celebration with “tears in our eyes”. It is a celebration in which grandeur and sorrow, national pride and national memory, the bright glint of medals and the tears of veterans are forever bound together’ (Kremlin, 2001).

As it can be seen from the data presented from the Russian survey of the Levada Center, in 2010, every third surveyed Russian claimed that on 9 May, they felt sorrow and joy equally, which is consistent with the figures among Russian-speaking respondents of our survey. Notably, by 2015, there was a sharp increase in the proportion of Russian respondents who reported that their primary feeling associated with Victory Day was ‘joy in the victory
over fascism’ (59% compared to 39% in 2010). Again, the changes in the
official government patriotism policy after 2014 may have played a role in this
shift in how Victory Day is perceived among the Russian population. Other
factors, such as media coverage and public discourse around the holiday could
also influence this.

Compared to data from the Levada Center’s Russian survey, ‘joy in the
victory over fascism’ was a far less popular response among Russian-
speaking respondents in our 2020 survey. The quantitative data of our
research do not permit tracking the dynamics of change in the perception of
Latvian respondents. However, perhaps the most noteworthy observation from
our interviews is that most respondents state that the meaning of 9 May has
evolved, and the day is now perceived not as a celebration but as a day of
commemoration and mourning. Here are some examples:

I would not call it a celebration. I would like it to really be more of a day
of remembrance, just so that people understand that this should never
happen again. Therefore, it is difficult to say that this is a celebration,
but for me, this is more of a day of remembrance. [Interview 8, Russian-
speaking female, 34 years old]

For me, it’s a celebration with tears in my eyes, and I don’t have much
fun. For me, over the past five years, this celebration has moved to a
commemoration event. You know, there is a wedding and a funeral. If
earlier, this day was like a wedding for me, now this holiday has become
a commemoration for me. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34
years old]

This is a significant day, as well as for all people who survived, who
undoubtedly participated in World War II; but I do not treat it as
celebration, rather as a mourning, because a lot of people died. War is
bad, people die – that’s bad. This is mourning for me, not a celebration.
[Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

In fact, in recent years, it is rather a memorable day, and more for me it
is not so much a celebration as a reason to think about sad things. That
is, I do not perceive it precisely as a celebration with festivities. [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]
Importantly, the organisers of events in Victory Park also talk about certain changes that are taking place. In particular, Svetlana Savicka, a member of the board of the public organisation 9maya.lv, commented as follows:

The moment the coronavirus emergency hit this year, it was essentially an impetus for us to start talking about reformatting the event itself. Because for several years in a row it seems to me that I would like this event to be more lyrical, more meaningful, more deeply felt... How and whether it will be possible at all this year to organise something on 9 May, I do not know, because no one can predict what will happen in the world, but now we are thinking about trying to look at this date differently. And one of the key points on the agenda in our organisation is, of course, trade in the square, a barbecue, etc... It seems to me that the same trading places, food stalls, barbecue, etc. – this is not exactly what should happen at the monument. [Interview E9]

Furthermore, Savicka adds that she sees a certain difference between the perception of 9 May by Russian speakers in Latvia and people living in Russia:

I talked with my colleague from Russia, whose relatives all grew up during the war, and some of them were in besieged Leningrad. She said: ‘I remember the traditions in my family, and there was no more important celebration than Victory Day. It is a really joyful celebration.’ And I realised that my attitude is different, and that we need to find a balance between the celebration and sorrow. [Interview E9]

Thus, it can be concluded that in Latvia, we are witnessing a certain transformation of the Soviet concept of celebrating Victory Day towards commemorative practices characteristic of the memorial cultures of Western Europe. Savicka’s ideas are confirmed not only by the opinions of the respondents cited above (who claim that Victory Day has recently become associated not with celebrations but with grief) but also by the judgment of Svetlana Pogodina, who has studied the ritual culture of Latvia. In particular, Pogodina states:
For Latvians, funerals and visits to the cemetery are a very important part of life. Latvians often go to the cemetery, and for them, for example, lighting mourning candles is a very familiar and common practice. It is clear that the Latvian commemorative culture, largely associated with funeral rituals, affects to some extent the Russian-speaking population, which is also gradually abandoning the concept of celebration in favour of mourning. Long-term media criticism of alcohol and food consumption on 9 May might also have an impact on participants in Victory Day commemorative practices, who may begin to feel that their behaviour is not encouraged in society and is unacceptable. However, it should be borne in mind that for the Slavic traditional culture, food is an integral part of funeral rituals. If, in modern Russian practice, the custom of eating food in the cemetery itself is still preserved, then among Latvians, it is rare and completely unacceptable. This difference, probably, can influence the commemorative culture among the Russian-speakers in Latvia, and there can be a certain shift in meanings. [Interview E10]

Pogodina’s assertion regarding the impact of various cultural customs on the commemorative and ritual practices surrounding 9 May in Latvia can be further reinforced by the fact that historically, the observance of Victory Day in Latvia possessed its own distinct characteristics. For example, Ryzhakova’s (2013) analysis of ethnographic records from the 1960s illustrates that the practice of visiting cemeteries on 9 May in Latvia aligned with the traditional Latvian rite of ‘Kapu svētki’ (Latvian commemorative cemetery rituals that take place on Sundays during the summer, which is among the most significant folk traditions in the Latvian cultural canon). During Soviet times, Kapu svētki was not banned but, in essence, served the purpose of introducing new Soviet traditions in the course of combating religion; elements of Soviet ideology were incorporated, for example, by involving the Pioneers and Komsomol members in the organisation of the commemoration, mentioning the feats of Soviet soldiers in the Second World War in mandatory speeches by representatives of the Soviet administration; on the other hand, for instance, the religious practice of lighting candles was banned (see Eglīte, 2010 and Ryzhakova,
2013 for further details on how cemetery visits are a crucial aspect of Latvian and Lithuanian traditional culture and how Soviet rule attempted to alter Baltic traditions to suit its own interests).

It should also be noted that in independent Latvia during the interwar period, the national tradition of commemorating fallen soldiers was preserved. During the period from 1924 to 1936, the Riga Cemetery of the Brethren was designed, where soldiers who fell in World War I and the Latvian War of Independence were buried (Rīgas pieminekļu aģentūra, 2018). In 1958, the soldiers who fell in World War II were reburied in the Cemetery of the Brethren. The Soviet central government began to implement the ideological task of ‘Sovietising’ the commemoration in Latvia. Already in 1959, collective gatherings organised by former soldiers of the 130th Latvian Riflemen’s Corps to commemorate, were prohibited and publicly condemned by the Soviet authorities for promoting ‘bourgeois nationalism.’ The majority of 130th Latvian Riflemen’s Corps was ethnically Latvian soldiers who fought in the Red Army during World War II, and 9 May, as the end of the war day, was a personally significant day for them) (Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, p. 16). Measures to impede the national culture of commemoration were undertaken due to ‘fear in Moscow about the efforts of the Soviet republics to seek greater autonomy’ (ibid., pp. 119-120). Makhotina (2020, p. 271) asserts that a struggle against national memory accompanied the implementation of Soviet commemorative rituals in the Baltic countries. As early as the post-war years, the Soviet authorities destroyed monuments to national heroes and religious symbols. For example, in the 1950s, at the Brotherly Cemetery in Riga,
symbols of the independent Republic of Latvia and images of Christian crosses were removed (Rīgas pieminekļu aģentūra, 2018).

In 1965, 9 May was declared an official day of celebration throughout the Soviet Union, thus elevating its cultural significance within Latvia and causing commemorations associated with it to become more ubiquitous. According to Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče (2011a, p. 120):

On the one hand, a commemoration of the work of the 130th Latvian Riflemen’s Corps became a part of the overall commemoration of the Soviet victory in World War II, but on the other hand, certain national specifics were maintained – discourse about battles related to returning to one’s fatherland, the special solidarity that was based on the Latvian language, memories about pre-Soviet Latvia, experiences in the Soviet Union (including repression of Latvians in Russia in the latter half of the 1930s), and the motivation and origins of collaboration with the Soviet regime.

Cemeteries, including the Cemetery of the Brethren in Riga, were of paramount importance for commemoration in Latvia until, in 1985, Victory Monument was established in Riga. During the period 1965-1985, monuments related to the Second World War were actively established in cemeteries in Latvia. In turn, visiting cemeteries on Victory Day by schoolchildren and members of labour collectives became an annual tradition. For example, interviewees thus characterise visiting cemeteries on 9 May during Soviet times:

I remember going to the cemetery on 9 May during my school years. It was a mandatory event for all pupils, and we would all lay wreaths and flowers. It was a very solemn and respectful occasion, and it was a way for us to pay our respects to those who had fought and died for our victory. I think it’s important to remember and honour their sacrifice, and that’s why I still go to the cemetery on 9 May today. Of course, many more people today come to the Victory Monument on 9 May than go to cemeteries. I know that Victory monument is new and that in Soviet times and even in the 1990s, my parents used to go to the cemetery on 9 May. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]
My grandfather served in the 130th Infantry Corps. When he was alive, he used to go to the Cemetery of the Brethren every year on Victory Day. He and his comrades would lay flowers on the graves of Red Latvians. I don't know how many of them are still alive now, but a few years ago, there were only a few dozen left. They are very old and hardly go to any events. There are also graves there for those who fought on the German side. I know that representatives of our government now come to the cemetery on 8 May. But for me, this official celebration is foreign. The last time I was at the Cemetery of the Brethren, I was struck by how many flowers there were on the graves of German soldiers. After my grandfather’s death, I went to the Victory Monument and his grave on 9 May, but I didn't go to the Cemetery of the brethren. [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]

As evident from the quotes above, respondents note that visiting cemeteries was the most characteristic aspect of the 9 May commemoration before establishing the Victory Monument. It is noteworthy that the respondents mention the diversity of commemorative traditions related to World War II, including visiting the graves of Red Army soldiers, laying flowers at the graves of German soldiers, or visiting the graves of one’s relatives. The main distinctive feature of Latvian commemorative tradition is not only the significant importance placed on visiting cemeteries (in comparison, for example, with Russia), but also the heterogeneity of the commemorative space, due in part to the fact that residents fought on both sides of World War II. For one part of the population (usually, people who moved to Latvia from other Soviet republics), 9 May was a real holiday, but many residents of Soviet Latvia (in particular those who themselves or whose relatives fought on the opposite side) were forced to hide their genuine attitude to this day because the refusal to celebrate Victory Day was perceived as a protest and could lead to dangerous consequences. For this reason, ‘celebration’ (including participation in parades and processions) often took place formally, and it was perceived as a necessary routine or even coercion (see for more details
Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011, p. 364). At the same time, according to Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče (2011a, p. 120), while several hundred thousand Latvian residents experienced the war as a personal tragedy, during Soviet times for some residents of Latvia, the war was perceived as a battlefield of other states, and they did not perceive the war as personally significant to them:

It is presumable that many people in Soviet Latvia enjoyed 9 May simply because it was a day off in the springtime. Many people, particularly those who lived in the countryside, did not take part in any official Victory Day events [...] If it was sunny outside on 9 May, people in the Soviet Latvian countryside planted potatoes in their gardens. This process was associated with the sense of a job well done, with people knowing that they would have their ‘own potatoes’ for the winter in spite of the food shortage that prevailed in the Soviet Union.

Despite the fact that the lack of unity characteristic of the 9 May commemoration during Soviet times remains in contemporary Latvia, the majority of respondents in our interviews noted that since Latvia’s independence, a trend towards increasing unification of commemoration of Victory Day in the Russian-speaking community has gradually developed. By the end of the 1990s, 9 May came to be strongly associated primarily with well-organised large-scale events near the Victory Monument in Victory Park (this corresponds with the analysis presented in Chapter 5.2 of how gradually, in several stages, spontaneous grassroots commemorative practices were replaced by regulated events organised by political actors.) This is how the respondents themselves characterise these changes:

Well, as I mentioned, in the 1990s, 9 May was not as widely celebrated as it is now. It was only in the 2000s that people really started to come together and visit the Victory Monument. As time has passed, more and more people have come to understand the importance of 9 May and what it represents. [Interview 7, Russian-speaking male, 55 years old]

Every year on 9 May, my friends and I meet near the Victory Monument. There are always a lot of people, flowers, and concerts there. Although, now that I think about it, it wasn't always like this. It seems to me that
there were no concerts in the 1990s, and people would just meet at the monument with flowers and give them to the veterans. There were still a lot of living veterans at that time, around 1990-93. The concert and fireworks came later and were specifically organised, and a lot of money was spent on them. Although it feels like it’s always been that way because it’s been happening for so many years in a row. [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53 years old]

I remember that [in the 1990s] 9 May was an important day, but I’m not sure how we celebrated it. I think we may have had some small gatherings with friends and family, but I can't say for certain. It wasn't until recently that 9 May became a widely celebrated day, so it's possible that our celebrations in the 1990s were more low-key. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

Respondents generally noted a wider variety of commemorative places during Soviet times and described the current less widespread forms of commemoration, such as an eternal flame. An eternal flame, as a monument to fallen soldiers, gained widespread popularity in the Soviet Union starting in the 1960s, tracing their origins to the fire tombs of the Unknown Soldier in Europe after World War I, as well as the secularisation of ancient and religious fire rituals during Soviet times (see Petrova-Averkieva, 1980). The tradition of laying flowers at the eternal flame remains very popular in Russia today (see Iudkina, 2015). However, in contemporary Latvia, the practice of eternal flame at monuments to WWII soldiers has practically disappeared. If, during Soviet times, an eternal flame was established in nearly every city of Latvia, then following the restoration of Latvia’s independence, Latvian authorities ceased to maintain this tradition (Čunka, 2017). In 1958 an eternal flame was brought to the Cemetery of the Brethren in Riga from the Field of Mars in Leningrad (the flame on the Field of Mars is considered the first eternal flame in the USSR, which was lit on November 6, 1957, 40 years after the October Revolution; such a practice of transferring the flame from the Field of Mars to
places of commemoration of soldiers fallen in battle during World War II was widespread in many other parts of the Soviet Union) (Iudkina, 2015). In 1991, this Soviet flame at the Cemetery of the Brethren was extinguished, and in its place was established a ‘sacred flame’ (*Svētā uguns*) in memory of the soldiers of Latvia and the flame that was lit on this site as early as 1924 during independent Latvia (Čunka, 2017). In turn, Daugavpils, the city with the highest percentage of ethnic Russians in Latvia, is the only place where the eternal flame has been preserved since Soviet times (Latvijas Sabiedrisko organizāciju padome, 2020). In the 1990s, the eternal flame in Daugavpils was ignited only on 9 May, by the initiative of residents. However, in 2014, it underwent a full restoration with the participation of representatives from the Russian Union of Latvia and now burns incessantly (Grani, 2019).

Respondents of our interview remember the tradition of the eternal flame in the following manner:

As a schoolchild, I remember visiting the Eternal Flame on 9 May as part of our annual commemorations. We would typically have a moment of silence at the monument and then lay flowers or wreaths to honour the fallen soldiers. It was a sombre but important tradition, and one that I think helped to instil a sense of appreciation for the sacrifices made by those who fought in the war. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

The ‘Eternal Flame’ tradition in Soviet Latvia was a way to honour and remember the fallen soldiers of World War II. The flame was typically housed in a special memorial or monument, and people would visit to pay their respects and lay flowers or wreaths. In Riga and other cities in Latvia, it was common for schoolchildren to visit the Eternal Flame on 9 May as a way to learn about the Soviet Victory. It is not something that has continued in post-Soviet Latvia. Instead, people in Latvia tend to visit the Victory Monument in Riga to pay their respects and remember the fallen soldiers on 9 May. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

In my memories, the eternal flame is inextricably linked to 9 May. During my childhood and youth, memorials with eternal flames were present in all cities, and we would inevitably stop by such places during school
excursions. I was even inducted into the pioneers at Salaspils, at the site of a former concentration camp, by the eternal flame. I even have photographs. Nowadays, I only see the eternal flame on television when they show Moscow. I also remembered that the eternal flame was often visited during wedding ceremonies. At the Salaspils’ eternal flame in the winter of 1975, our newlywed relatives laid flowers. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

Interestingly, the tradition of visiting the eternal flame or other WWII memorials on one’s wedding day, mentioned by the last respondent, was quite prevalent during Soviet times. Other respondents also note this:

I do remember that during Soviet times it was common for newlyweds to visit the eternal flame and other places associated with the war as part of their wedding celebrations. It was seen as a necessary tradition. However, this tradition is not something that is still practised in Latvia today. With the end of the Soviet Union, many of the old Soviet traditions and practices have fallen out of favour. Today, it is more common for newlyweds in Latvia to focus on their own personal interests and preferences when planning their wedding celebrations rather than following patriotic traditions. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

Nowadays, flowers are mostly laid at memorials only on 9 May, whereas in Soviet times, there were many more occasions for this. For example, it was mandatory to visit a memorial after registering a marriage, such as the Lenin Memorial, the Salaspils Memorial or the Victory Memorial, to leave flowers and take photographs. In Russia, I know that people still do this. Even my acquaintances, I know, did this, though their wedding was quite a while ago, 10 years ago. In Latvia, this is certainly not done anymore. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

Ethnographer Igor Morozov characterises the widespread practice of visiting sites associated with World War II within the context of contemporary wedding rituals in Russia in the following manner:

The ritualistic visitation of various sites, such as the eternal flame or monuments in honour of fallen heroes, is widespread in many cities throughout Russia. This is linked to the traditional ritual of visiting cemeteries. In the past, sometimes before the wedding day, the bride or sometimes the couple would visit cemeteries after the wedding. That is, as we can see, traditional elements are incorporated in the contemporary wedding ritual and are reinterpreted. They live in new versions. But if we perform a structural analysis of the contemporary wedding, it turns out that it is actually composed of quite traditional bricks. (Fanailova, 2010)
In turn, Svetlana Pogodina comments on this practice in relation to the Latvian context as follows:

The practice of newlyweds visiting and placing flowers at monuments and memorials, specifically those of fallen soldiers during the war, was widely accepted during Soviet times. In Latvia, this tradition also existed but is now much less common. This tradition of visiting monuments was more prevalent among Russian-speaking people than Latvian-speaking people. This ritual emerged during Soviet times in the 60s and 70s in the USSR. The origins of this practice are linked to funeral rites. Newlyweds would visit and leave flowers at the graves of unknown soldiers and also remember their relatives who died. Similar rituals existed in ancient times and are characteristic of traditional Slavic culture: after the wedding ceremony in the church, newlyweds would go to the cemetery and also leave flowers for their ancestors, especially if the parents were no longer alive. So here we see a certain continuity. This tradition is specifically associated with respect for ancestors. [Interview E10]

As seen from the above interviews of the respondents, today, the tradition of combining wedding rituals with the memory of World War II is almost lost in Latvia, although it continues to remain widespread in Russia (Fanailova, 2010; Gromov, 2013; For more information on the close connection between wedding and funeral rituals among southern and eastern Slavs, also see Sedakova, 2004). Many sites related to World War II have lost their significance not only within the context of wedding rituals but also on 9 May, giving way to the Victory Monument as the main and most important commemorative site. Given that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicate the primary significance of the Victory Park as a commemorative space, it would be interesting to examine in more detail the respondents’ attitudes towards commemorative events in this place.

When asked how they felt about the celebration of 9 May in the Riga Victory Park, about 70% of the Latvian-speaking respondents stated their negative attitude. Only 14% of Latvian-speaking respondents have a positive
attitude to festivities on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga, while 9.3% participate in commemorative events. Of Russian-speaking respondents, 54.8% indicated a positive attitude towards festivities on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga, while 34.3% noted that they participated in commemorative events. A complete comparison of the answers of the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents is presented in Table 5.7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your attitude towards the festivities on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative, this is a glorification of the Soviet occupation, which should be prohibited</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not support it, but I believe that commemorative events should not be prohibited for those who wish to participate in them</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive, I participate in commemorative events</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive, but I personally do not participate in commemorative events</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.7. ‘What is your attitude towards the festivities on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga?’

As seen from the survey data presented above, in relation to the commemoration of 9 May in Victory Park, Latvian and Russian-speaking respondents have demonstrated the same polarised attitudes regarding the question of the demolition of the Victory Monument, which was discussed in more detail in the previous section of the dissertation. While a large percentage
of Russian-speaking respondents have a positive attitude towards the commemoration of 9 May in Victory Park, it is important to note that there was no consensus within the ‘Russian-speaking’ and ‘Latvian-speaking’ groups. Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents have reported on their experiences of participating in the commemoration near the Victory Monument:

Each year on 9 May, I begin by visiting the memorial in my city, Salaspils, where there is a monument to the fallen. I go there to lay flowers. However, in recent years, fewer people have been visiting the memorial in Salaspils. That is why in recent years, after visiting the memorial in Salaspils, I started going to Riga. I do the same thing there as I do in Salaspils, I go and lay flowers. But at the Victory Monument in Riga, there are many more people. I immediately feel the significance and grandeur of the day. Nowadays, it is rare to encounter veterans, and before, I used to give them flowers and greet them. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

When I visit the monument on this day, I see people of all ages coming together to pay their respects and remember the Victory. It is an emotional moment. People lay flowers at the base of the monument as a sign of respect. Some people may choose to lay a single flower, while others may bring larger bouquets. As a result, it is common to see a large number of flowers at the monument on this day. There is also often live music played, with bands performing songs that were popular during the war years. Each time people later discuss how many flowers were brought to the monument. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

My family and I usually come to the monument after watching the parade on Red Square on television. At this time, there are many people at the monument. We have to leave the car far away and walk through the whole park. In recent years, there has always been a lot of police, but everything passes peacefully, people simply bring flowers to the monument and then stay for a while to listen to a concert. I know that in the evening, a big fireworks display is organised there, but we do not go there in the evening. [Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

I am not sure since which year this tradition started, but for the past 15 years, my friends and I have spent almost the whole day at the Victory Monument. We come there with flowers, although there are a lot of flowers sold on the spot on that day. A few years ago, veterans could still be seen there, they were greeted, but now there are hardly any left, we leave the flowers at the monument. The organisation of the event is
always very good, it is clear that a lot of resources are allocated: a stage with a large screen and invited artists. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

It is evident that laying flowers in the Victory Park is the key action of the 9 May commemoration and the monument itself is the main element of it. Respondents also noted that for participants of this event, it is important for there to be many flowers on this day (‘Every year, people who come to the monument discuss how important it is that many flowers are brought, everything should be covered with flowers, the entire area near the monument’ [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]). However, laying flowers at the Victory Monument is not the only element of commemoration. The respondents were also asked what else they typically do on 9 May. Table 5.8 demonstrates the most popular answers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you celebrate 9 May?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I lay flowers at the Soviet memorials in honour of the Victory (9.7%)</td>
<td>I lay flowers at the Soviet memorials in honour of the Victory (49.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I take part in protests against the celebration of 9 May and the glorification of the Soviet occupation’ (9.7%)</td>
<td>I watch the fireworks (42.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch Soviet films about the war (8.8%)</td>
<td>I take part in celebrations in the Victory Park in Riga (39.2%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I watch the fireworks (7.1%)</td>
<td>I watch the broadcast of the Victory Parade from Red Square in Moscow (36.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I visit the graves of relatives and friends (6.2%)</td>
<td>I watch Soviet films about the war (36%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I take part in celebrations in the Victory Park in Riga (6.2%)

I watch the broadcast of the Victory Parade from Red Square in Moscow (6.2%)

I visit the graves of relatives and friends (21.5%)

I take part in the march of the 'Immortal Regiment' (21%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.8. ‘How do you celebrate 9 May?’ (Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As seen, the second most popular element of commemoration on 9 May for Russian-speaking respondents is watching fireworks. In the interview, some respondents noted that for them, it was very important to return to the Soviet tradition of launching fireworks on 9 May, which was interrupted in the 1990s:

I am very glad that the tradition of fireworks on 9 May has been revived. In Soviet times, we always went to the waterfront to watch the fireworks. There were very many people. When in the early 90s the fireworks in Riga stopped, I always felt a twinge, especially when I saw in film the Victory salutes. And I am very grateful that now there is again the opportunity to see fireworks. [Interview 7, Russian-speaking male, 55 years old]

What I like most about Victory Day is that the ending of fireworks is always very cool. It is much cooler than on 18 November [Latvian Republic Proclamation Day]. Without the fireworks, it is difficult for me to imagine 9 May. [Interview 5, Russian-speaking female, 27 years old]

On the evening of 9 May, my husband, children, and I always watch the celebratory fireworks in Victory Park. I remember as a child, I went to the waterfront to watch the salutes with my parents, then in the 1990s, it was cancelled, and we only watched the fireworks on television. Then people around the city also organised their own fireworks. And in the 2000s, they started launching fireworks near the Victory monument again. It became much more festive. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

Some researchers view fireworks during Soviet times on Victory Day as solely an ‘element of entertainment,’ which contradicts the concept of
mourning (see, for example, Kelly and Sitotinina, 2008). However, as previously noted in chapter 5.2, the annual fireworks display on 9 May in the capitals of Soviet republics reminded of the grand fireworks celebration in honour of victory over Germany, which took place at 10:00 PM on 9 May, 1945 in Moscow. Thus, the annual fireworks display on Victory Day can be understood not only as entertainment but also as a symbolic ritual reenactment (see Toporov, 1988; Bayburin, 1993; Durkheim, 1995 on how the mechanism of reenactment itself holds important meaning for the collective and carries the function of verifying the unchanging nature of paradigms of meaning and models of the world, as well as serves as a guarantee of safety and prosperity for the collective). It is important to note that in 2022, the Latvian state banned pyrotechnics on 9 May, justified by the fact that loud explosions cause stress for Ukrainian refugees in Latvia. Despite this ban, on 9 May, residents of Riga independently launched fireworks, it is known that the state police received 24 signals about the use of pyrotechnics in the evening and night of 9 May, and as a result, several administrative cases were initiated (Jauns, 2022).

Many respondents also mentioned that they watched the live broadcast of the fireworks in Moscow on 9 May and also cited as important elements of the commemoration of Victory Day the viewing of Soviet films about the war and the live broadcast of the ‘Minute of Silence’ or the Victory Parade or from Red Square:

On television the night before and on 9 May, they show war films, and though many of them I have seen dozens of times, each time I turn it on and begin to cry. We also always watch the Victory parade on Red Square and the Minute of Silence. It has become an important tradition in our family. [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]

In recent years we don’t often watch television, but 9 May is an exception. In the early morning we turn on the Russian channel and
watch the Victory parade on Red Square, then they show old war films, concert performances, and the ‘Minute of Silence.’ For me, the ‘Minute of Silence’ is a very important moment, with solemn mournful music and the eternal flame. Although both of my grandfathers returned from the war alive, at this time I remember them, how in childhood we celebrated this day with my grandfather, and that he always drank for his fallen comrades. I don’t try to hold back my tears at this moment, and I think that is what unites me with many other people who also cry at this moment. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

I make it a point to watch the Victory Day parade on Red Square every year on 9 May. Whether it be at home or on my phone in the park, I always catch the live broadcast. Additionally, I enjoy watching war films, particularly those from the 60s and 70s. Contemporary war films are often quite nonsensical and unappealing to me. The best Soviet war film, in my opinion, is from that era. I have had the opportunity to converse with veterans and have seen a wealth of footage from the war, and I find that Soviet films from that time to be far more authentic and true to life than contemporary ones. [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]

Personally, I am not particularly fond of military parades, but in my family, we always turn on the broadcast of the Victory Day parade on 9 May. I prefer to watch war films on television on this day, particularly old Soviet films about the war. [Interview 10, Russian-speaking female, 18 years old]

When I was a child, of course, my family and I would watch the parade and gather together to celebrate. Nowadays, I don't watch the parade because it's essentially the same thing every year. My wife’s grandmother enjoys watching the parade every year. It’s a strong tradition for her. My wife also watches it every year. Together, we watch Soviet war films. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

Of course, on that day I love to watch war films. Specifically, I prefer old Soviet films. I don't know, maybe I am nostalgic. I enjoy watching parades broadcast from Russia. And in my childhood, we always watched parades. On 9 May we spend more time in front of the TV than on other days. [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53 years old]

As previously noted in Chapter 3.4, a recent ban on the broadcast of Russian television in Latvia has been implemented; however, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which it will have a real impact on the practices of watching the broadcast of ‘Minute of Silence,’ Moscow Victory Day parade, or Soviet/Russian films about the Great Patriotic War, particularly in light of the
existence of technical means that allow for bypassing the blocking. According to Levinson (2015, p. 39), starting from the second half of the 1990s, Russian television has played a specific role in shaping and maintaining the Soviet nostalgia myth. The broadcasting of old Soviet films and contemporary films in the Soviet retro style on Russian federal television can be considered a specific ritual; in this, the specific content of Soviet films or songs is much less important than the fact of their regular and simultaneous presentation to the audience (ibid.).

It is important to note that young people, along with respondents of older age, stated that watching Soviet films about war is an essential element of Victory Day for them. Chapter 4.4 already delves more in-depth into how people of younger generations can experience nostalgia for a historical event or era that they did not personally experience through the memories and narratives passed down to them by previous generations (see Kalinina, 2014; Barash, 2017). In the case of Soviet times, younger people may experience nostalgia for this era through watching Soviet movies, as these films can serve as a way to access the memories and experiences of previous generations and gain an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the time. Therefore, watching Soviet movies can also create an emotional connection to the past contributing to nostalgia.

Except for one case, when the respondent mentioned a connection between watching films from Soviet times on 9 May and a sense of nostalgia for the Soviet Union, other respondents did not mention nostalgia for the Soviet Union directly. However, many still noted that it was important for them to keep Victory Day as it was during Soviet times. For example, in relation to elements
such as the celebratory fireworks or the Victory Day parade, the respondents mentioned that they were necessary on 9 May because these elements were characteristic of Soviet times. Furthermore, while respondents of a younger age who participated in the Victory Day commemorations emphasised that they did not in any way associate this day with the Soviet past, some older respondents not only highlighted the importance of preserving Soviet traditions on this day, but also noted that 9 May often evokes positive memories of everyday life in the Soviet Union. For example, respondents remembered Soviet traditions of banquets, specific Soviet food, or the atmosphere of collective gatherings:

I think that this day reminds us of our past Soviet life in a positive way. We remember the good things that were there, not the entire Soviet reality, which I wouldn't want to return to. But, for example, there used to be more collective gatherings, like going to demonstrations with colleagues or even celebrating holidays with neighbours. Nowadays, it's almost non-existent. On 9 May, there's a similar feeling that there's always a lot of people gathered at the monument, and there's a sense of unity. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

I relish coming to Victory Park on 9 May because there, I sense that all people are experiencing the same emotions. It reminds me of Soviet holidays, when people would march together in demonstrations and then hold festive gatherings at home, inviting friends, acquaintances, and neighbours. There were always large, noisy groups, not like now, when everyone sits in their own apartments. [Interview 24, Russian-speaking female, 65 years old]

I do not feel that 9 May is a Soviet holiday. For me, it is more connected to the history of my family. I come to Victory Park in memory of my fighting ancestors. There is nothing like communist slogans or glorifying the USSR on this day. However, victory in the war is still a part of Soviet history, and that is why many traditions from that time have been preserved, such as singing songs from the Soviet era in the park on 9 May. [Interview 18, Russian-speaking female, 38 years old]

Interestingly, I do not buy sprat on any other day. But on 9 May, I always make sandwiches with sprat. It is a kind of memory for me of the old times, of how we celebrated holidays in the Soviet era. I don't even know why in Soviet times we specifically ate sprat. Perhaps on this day
I simply want it to be like how we celebrated holidays in Soviet times, in my childhood. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

During Soviet times, we would always visit neighbours on this day for a festive gathering. Now these neighbours have long since moved away and I feel that people generally visit each other less. But on 9 May, I always cook something special, my relatives come to visit me, in the evening after visiting Victory Monument. I like that there are many people at the monument, like in the old years. Now we no longer have all those Soviet-era demonstrations. Before, there were more occasions to gather around a festive table, like 1 May, 7 November, and 8 March. Even birthdays were celebrated differently then, and guests were invited. Now we only celebrate New Year, Christmas, Easter, and birthdays. Soviet holidays have all stayed in the past. But 9 May is still an occasion to get together. I prepare festive food on this day, though not as much as on New Year. In Soviet times, we cooked different salads, it seems to me that this has changed a bit, but the tradition of getting together on this day has remained. [Interview 25, Russian-speaking female, 74 years old]

As seen from the above quotes, the respondents may not directly associate 9 May with nostalgia for the Soviet Union. However, for some, the commemoration of Victory Day is associated with positive memories of Soviet collective gatherings and ‘warmer’ human relationships, which, as previously noted in Chapter 4 (4.4) is a characteristic feature of the Soviet nostalgic myth. For these respondents, Victory Day is not related to the glorification of the Soviet Union or regret for its collapse but is rather perceived as an attempt to restore a connection with lost everyday practices, such as through Soviet food or songs from that time. Many respondents who stated their participation in commemorative and ritual practices noted that it is important for them to repeat and preserve elements of Victory Day that have been inherited from the Soviet era. In connection with this it is also interesting to trace their attitude towards ‘new’ practices that have emerged in the 2000s.

For instance, survey participants were asked about their attitudes towards the ‘St George Ribbon’ campaign and whether they wear a ribbon on
9 May. In general, among the Latvian-speaking respondents, 64.4% stated their negative attitude towards the campaign, while the share of Russian-speaking respondents with the same opinion is 18.8%. Furthermore, 24.7% of Russian-speaking respondents said they wear a ribbon, while only 3.9% of Latvian-speakers do so. Table 5.9 presents the answers of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your attitude towards the ‘St. George Ribbon’ campaign?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive, I consider it a symbol of victory over fascism; I wear a ribbon</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive, I consider it a symbol of victory over fascism, but I do not wear a ribbon</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative, I consider it one of the symbols of the Soviet occupation</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative, I think the action is too politicised</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not know about this campaign</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.9. ‘What is your attitude towards the ‘St. George Ribbon’ campaign?’ (Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents).

The main criticisms expressed by respondents in in-depth interviews regarding the St George Ribbon were, firstly, that people who wear the ribbon do not know history well, and secondly, that it is a Russian nationalist symbol:
The St George Ribbon, in my eyes, is a symbol of ultra-conservative Russians. And I do not like it. When I went to Georgia, I found out that there is generally an absolutely negative attitude towards the St George Ribbon, despite the fact that St George is their patron. But it has nothing to do with St George today. And I even read once that these colours [black and orange] have nothing to do with St George. In my understanding, this is a symbol of aggressive Russia. The ribbon appeared with Putin, with Putin’s party, with all this; this is a recent symbol, it has nothing to do with St George. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

This ribbon is associated with the cross of St George and, in my opinion, it is wrong for people to wear it themselves, who did not participate in the war. That is, it is a ribbon to which an award, a cross, is attached, and it is rather sacrilegious to wear it for those who did not deserve it. [Interview 23, Russian-speaking female, 26 years old]

I don’t like it when they wear the St George Ribbon. Many of those who wear it do not even know what the St George Ribbon means and in what century it appeared. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

In general, I have a very negative attitude to the St George Ribbon, because it is a symbol of Russian propagandists. And moreover, the Vlasovites used to wear the St George Ribbon here in Latvia, previously. [Interview 1, Latvian-speaking female, 38 years old]

In addition, the respondents criticised the fact that ribbons are worn inappropriately:

This is a relatively new symbol; before, the red ribbon was worn on the chest. Even in the photographs from the same 1960s, look, there are veterans, and there is a red ribbon on their chest, not St George’s. On the one hand, I understand that St George’s Ribbon is like an identification mark of friend or foe: it shows ‘I’m celebrating this too.’ But, on the other hand, when these ribbons persist everywhere, wherever possible, they tie them up on dirty bumpers of cars, even on dogs, it already starts to annoy. [Interview 2, Russian-speaking male, 42 years old]

One of the respondents described encountering a negative reaction to the St George’s Ribbon, as follows:

When I used to study at the Latvian technical school, and it was on 9 May, I went there with the St George’s Ribbon, and I was kicked out of the technical school altogether. They told me to go to my parade, and I was exempted from all lessons and sent to the monument. So this
actually happened. [Interview 19, Russian-speaking female, 24 years old]

Violetta Matvejeva, an official representative of the House of Moscow in Riga – a cultural and business organisation founded in 2004 by the Moscow Government which implements various social and educational programmes to support Russian compatriots – stated in an interview that: ‘The law prohibiting the Soviet symbols was adopted, and the distribution of St George Ribbons has also become banned, so we no longer do this’ [Interview E8] (In fact, at the time of the interview, there was no official ban on the distribution of the St George ribbon in Latvia, it was introduced in November 2021). In turn, Dmitrijs Šandibin (assistant to Tatjana Ždanoka, Latvian member of the European Parliament) claims that ‘in Latvia, 9 May does not have such a large commercial component in comparison with Russia. In Latvia, the St George Ribbon is precisely the symbol of 9 May and is used only on this day, while in Russia, it is the ideological symbol of the entire Russian patriotic movement’ [Interview E3]. The respondent's comments on the ban on wearing the St George Ribbon are as follows:

I have a negative attitude towards the law because the St George Ribbon is a symbol of the Victory, it is named after St George, who defeated the serpent, according to biblical legends, as far as I remember. And this is in honour of him, this ribbon, in honour of the Victory; so, of course, I have a negative attitude to this law. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

With this ban, the government does not want people to demonstrate that they are adherents of the Soviet Union, adherents of victory. But people, all the same – without a flag, without ribbons, just with flowers – they will come to the Victory Park to show that all these prohibitions do not make sense. [Interview 13, Latvian-speaking male, 60 years old]

The first association with the ban on St George’s ribbon is the armed conflict in Ukraine, when a civil war began there, which is still going on there and has not ended. The veterans came out to pay tribute to their fallen comrades because, officially, 10 million people died. And then the
nationalists tore the ribbons of St George from them. In general, to put it mildly, I was shocked when I saw it on TV. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

As previously discussed in Chapter 4.4, since 2013, a law banning the use of Soviet symbols in certain situations has been in force in Latvia, and in June 2019, amendments were made to it, tightening the ban on the use of totalitarian symbols in public events. As Svetlana Pogodina noted, ‘The key difference between the celebration of 9 May in Latvia and in Russia lies precisely in the fact that the symbols of the Soviet Union are prohibited in Latvia, and they are not used on Victory Day. In turn, in Russia, Soviet symbols are allowed, which is why they are so easily used there’ [Interview E10].

Although Russian-speaking respondents, as a rule, criticised the law banning symbols, referring to the fact that they consider it ‘senseless’ and ‘silly,’ most of them noted that it does not in any way affect the celebration of Victory Day:

I do not see much sense in this law, because no one walks the streets wrapped in a red flag with a hammer and sickle. I believe that it is wrong that veterans who have badges and medals with Soviet symbols on 9 May cannot wear them, but this does not change the meaning of the day, and people will still come to Victory Square. [Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53 years old]

This is stupid because I cannot, for example, wear a T-shirt with a hammer and sickle, and I have to pay a fine. But, on the other hand, for me, 9 May has nothing to do with the hammer and sickle, so this law does not change anything. [Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

I do not see anything wrong with Soviet symbols in themselves, so I am against the ban, and I think this law is silly. But on 9 May, in any case, I would not use Soviet symbols, because on this day we remember those who fought in the war, not those who built communism. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

To be honest, I do not understand whom this symbolism bothers and why, for example, on 9 May, veterans cannot wear their medals, but on the other hand, I don’t think that this prohibition changes anything for
the veterans themselves. In any case, for me, the meaning of Victory Day does not depend on this. [Interview 21, Russian-speaking male, 56 years old]

The above quotes can be compared to the previously stated notion that the respondents, participating in the commemoration of Victory Day, do not associate their actions on this day with the glorification of the Soviet Union and, with rare exception, do not mention nostalgia for the USSR directly. This may explain why, in general, the official ban on Soviet symbols has little impact on their commemoration. On the other hand, for respondents who criticise 9 May, the main argument explaining their negative attitude is precisely the perceived connection between Victory Day and regret for the collapse of the USSR. Here are just a few examples:

I don’t celebrate the holiday, I don’t consider it a celebration, I don’t think it is appropriate to arrange orgies in Victory Park... this is a completely politicised date, this is a ground for inexhaustible provocations, and many people who go to celebrate, especially those who did not study history, they mostly go to express their displeasure with the collapse of the Soviet Union... Everything starts well: they bring flowers, talk with the veterans, and then people start drinking, and then the booze has already started. [Interview 30, Latvian-speaking female, 37 years old]

To be honest, I just don’t go out on this day. People who celebrate look crazy, and they drink too much. I know that it’s really expensive for the country to accommodate this day. But I think that if you don’t like it – just don’t go out. It’s once a year so let it be. … I think this celebration is related to politics, but at the same, time people are just finding a reason for a party. Russians just want to have a day to celebrate, and also they regret the collapse of the USSR. [Interview 3, Latvian-speaking female, 31 years old]

I don’t know, but this is a strange celebration for me, absolutely strange. … But I think that in the style it is celebrated, this is not a celebration, it is a shame. And so many who celebrate it here, they don’t even know what date and what year World War II began... I don’t like how this is celebrated, because it’s just booze, alcohol and that’s it... I’ve seen how they behave there. There are just all sorts of iron medals that they did not deserve to bring at all, and they just take a bottle of vodka, a snack, and go there for a drink. Somehow I don’t understand this... I think that they consider themselves to be infringed, and in this way they show that they are for Russia, that they are Russians. And when another time they
ask people a question: well, if everything is so good in Russia, excellent in Russia, why don't you go there?... I think this is some kind of nostalgia. Then there was always a red carpet for Russians in Latvia, but for Latvians, nowhere. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]

It should be noted here that the accusations of alcohol abuse on 9 May, which are expressed by respondents who negatively regard the events on this day, are quite often shared by those who consider Victory Day a significant date:

I know that food is sold there, and alcoholic drinks. But I will state my opinion that I have an extremely negative attitude to this. You may have heard that the Russians have a song: ‘on the frontline one must drink a hundred grams.’ Well, yes, ‘front-line one hundred grams,’ okay – still, I understand, this is a tradition, before the battle, so that it would not be scary; there was always such a tradition that they drank one hundred grams. And so I, of course, have a sharply negative attitude; I do not think that it is normal to arrange, excuse me, even some kind of drunkenness right in front of the monument. I understand food, okay, because we have a long celebration, there is a concert, congratulations, fireworks – but alcohol is too much, in such quantities. [Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]

Due to the fact that for me, it is still a day of remembrance, of course, kebabs and beer do not seem appropriate. Even when a lot of veterans came, it really was a celebration for them, because they remember what happened, they participated. For them, the Victory was really a celebration. Now, when almost no veterans come, it seems to me that it is possible to give some kind of concert, but alcohol and food should not be sold there. Water – yes, water must be available. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

Importantly, the organisers of the events themselves criticise the consumption of alcohol and the commodification of the holiday. For example, Margarita Dragile, organiser of the Immortal Regiment campaign in Riga, expresses the following opinion:
As for the commercialisation of Victory Day, I believe that there is no need to sell some children’s toys or food in the park that day. I hope that this will somehow change due to the pandemic, and also with the change of government in Riga. Because there are things that we used to go overboard with – all these ditties, beer, dancing and drunk people who want to swim in the pool, shouting ‘let’s do Berlin again.’ I think the veterans are still alive, I think they hardly want a repetition of these events. [Interview E2]

Svetlana Savicka, head of the organisation 9may.lv, also shares this opinion: ‘It seems to me that the trading places, food stalls, barbecue, etc. – this is not exactly what should happen at the monument’ [Interview E9]. Moreover, informants taking part in the celebrations on Victory Square note that they consider the events taking place there as politicised, which they also disapprove of:

This is an overly politicised holiday. It is supported by various parties. A huge amount of money is being spent on this. All my relatives took part in this war, my grandfather disappeared without a trace. This is a grief for us. I believe that politicising this day is not necessary, but it is also not necessary to try to erase people’s memory. [Interview 7, Russian-speaking male, 55 years old]

Figure 5.12 shows the distribution of respondents’ answers to the question ‘Do you agree with the following statement: “The 9 May commemoration in Latvia has political connotations. By participating in commemorative events, does the Russian-speaking population express its displeasure with the current state system in Latvia”?’ Importantly, Latvian-speaking respondents were more inclined to consider 9 May a politicised date, in comparison with Russian-speakers.
Figure 5.12. ‘Do you agree that the 9 May commemoration in Latvia has political connotations?’ Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents’ answers.

Furthermore, in some cases, Russian-speaking respondents admitted that participation in these events was motivated by a mood of protest:

I think that this is also a form of peaceful protest because we have been deprived of education in our native language, in fact. In 2004, as a graduate, I even went to school pickets, protests, with classmates. And I think that on 9 May, one of the ways to show, it seems to me, that even these flowers that are brought there, these carpets of flowers are always gathered every year – this is also a form of protest, a peaceful protest. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

Perhaps for many people this is some kind of protest in our state; therefore, such a number of people always come out on 9 May to show that there are a large number of us, and this is an expression of some kind of protest against the government. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

Special attention should be paid to the issue of Russian state bodies’ participation in organising the celebration of 9 May in Latvia. Thus, according to the official response from the Russian Embassy in Latvia, received at the request of this research:
As part of the celebration of Victory Day, the Embassy, together with diplomatic missions of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, traditionally holds an official reception, solemn ceremonies of laying wreaths and flowers at the monument to the Soldiers-Liberators of Riga from the Nazi invaders, and at the monuments to Soviet soldiers on the territory of fraternal military graves throughout Latvia... Representatives of the Embassy also take an active part in the events held annually by public organisations in Latvia, on the occasion of the memorable dates of the Great Patriotic War... On the eve of Victory Day (8 May), the Russian Ambassador to Latvia E. V. Lukyanov takes part in an ecumenical service at Riga Dome Cathedral in memory of the victims of World War II. [...] At the expense of the funds allocated by the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Abroad, the Embassy carries out various events and actions to support socially unprotected compatriots living in Latvia (first of all, veterans of the Great Patriotic War), and provides all possible assistance in the implementation of their creative projects dedicated to significant dates of the joint history of Russia and Latvia. [...] By established tradition, veterans of the Great Patriotic War living in Latvia receive personal congratulations on Victory Day on behalf of the President of the Russian Federation, V. V. Putin. The staff of the Embassy conveyed congratulations to the veterans of the Great Patriotic War, celebrating their anniversaries on behalf of the Ambassador of Russia to Latvia, E. V. Lukyanov. [Appendix 16]

During the survey, respondents were asked the question ‘Do you think the Russian state should be allowed to support the 9 May Victory Day events in Latvia?.’ In general, 71.3% of Latvian-speaking respondents believe that the Russian state should not be allowed to support the Victory Day events in Latvia, and 11.6% hold the opposite opinion. The distribution of Russian-speaking respondents’ answers is 34.8% and 38.9%, respectively.

In addition to the Russian Embassy in Latvia, the House of has actively participated in organising celebrations for 9 May since its opening in 2004 (in April 2022, the Latvian state decided to freeze the assets of the House of Moscow against the backdrop of Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine, and it is unlikely to be able to continue its activities). In her interview, an official representative of the House of Moscow, Violettta Matvejeva, spoke about organising events dedicated to the celebration of 9 May [Interview E8]. She
said that preparations for the events begin a month before the holiday; the House of Moscow provides material assistance to veterans, and compiles lists of veterans in Latvia to be congratulated. These lists are sent to the Russian embassy in Latvia; then they are sent to the Moscow government, and after approval, the House of Moscow receives the necessary monetary compensation of about 100 euros per veteran. ‘For veterans, this is quite significant support, because they have a pension in Latvia of 180 euros, so for them 100 euros for a celebration is pure happiness,’ notes Matvejeva. The second aspect of the House of Moscow’s activities are cultural events: a concert dedicated to 9 May is held in the building of the House of Moscow, as well as an exhibition on a military theme in cooperation with various museums in Moscow and St Petersburg. The House of Moscow also gives gifts to veterans, in cooperation with large Latvian companies such as Dzintars and Latvijas Balzams. In addition to the exhibition and concert, a gala reception is organised, which is also funded directly by the Moscow Government and the Russian Embassy. In addition, a few weeks before 9 May, the House of Moscow, together with the Russian Embassy, will organise subbotniks [days of volunteer work on weekends; since the October Revolution subbotniks became an integral part of the Soviet system] at military graves. According to Matveeva:

In Riga there are two main celebrations on 9 May – one takes place in the House of Moscow, and the second in Victory Park, where there is a monument to the Liberators of Riga; and there is also a concert, and this concert is for all citizens, it is organised by the organisation 9may.lv, and their scale is very large. More than 100 people are involved there, and all the volunteers who lay flowers at the monument, who help the veterans to walk, pass, distribute gifts, balloons and so on, and who are directly involved in organising the concert. Judging by this, I can say that we remember the veterans only on 9 May, and I do not observe any movements during the rest of the year. [Interview E8]
The cost of organising a concert in the House of Moscow, according to Matvejeva, is 3,000 euros; an exhibition, about 1,000 euros; the cost of a buffet, about 3,000; and the cost of flowers, hall decoration, invitations, about 1,000 euros. A separate issue raised in an interview with Violetta Matvejeva is the participation of the Latvian government and Riga City Council in organising events on 9 May. Matvejeva claims:

The Riga City Council annually organises a big celebration in the Victory Park. This is happening directly at the initiative of the Riga City Council. As for the government, it seems to be against all this. We do not directly cooperate with the Riga City Council on 9 May, they seem to have their own platform, their own celebration; we have our own platform and our own celebration, but representatives of the Riga City Council come to us for a solemn reception, because we have invited distinguished guests, the ambassador of Russia, and there are always representatives of the Riga City Council. Thus, in this regard, we cooperate with them on such a diplomatic note. No interference or any conflicts have ever been observed. [Interview E8]

According to the survey results, the opinions of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents regarding the participation of the Riga City Council in the organisation of events on 9 May differ significantly. For instance, while 69.8% of Latvian-speaking respondents did not support the participation of the Riga City Council in the 9 May events, 15.5% supported it. Among the Russian-speaking respondents, this indicator was 6.3% and 56.3%, respectively. As part of the research, the following official response was also received to a request to Riga City Council regarding the events on 9 May, which contradicts the statements of Violetta Matveeva (Appendix 15):

The responsible bodies of Riga City Council have never been involved in organising the celebrations of 9 May, and a proposal for financial or organisational support has never been received and considered. Riga City Council has not given any cooperation in providing or conducting the celebration event on 9 May. Riga City Council has not provided financial or organisational support. The organisers of the events have concluded agreements with the Riga City Council company SIA ‘Rīgas
Thus, the organisers paid the company for cleaning up the area according to the official pricing. Riga City Council does not cooperate with organisations related to the 9 May celebrations. Permits for the organisation of the above-mentioned events are issued in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Security of Public Entertainment and Festive Events. Riga City Council does not have cooperation agreements with the House of Moscow and the Russian Embassy in Latvia. The public events on 9 May were widely attended and, given that they express opposing views and run the risk of confrontation, in order to ensure public order and security, the State Police developed a special plan for ensuring public order. Like any controversial event (the march on 16 March, the march of sexual minorities, etc.), the events of 9 May provoke mixed reactions in society, and clashes of views on social networks and the media. The local government may not influence the opinions of certain groups of the society in its decisions; therefore, it is strictly guided only by the norms of law. [Appendix 15]

In its official response, the Riga City Council states that the celebration of 9 May is a similar controversial event to ‘the march on 16 March’ and ‘the march of sexual minorities.’ According to numerous studies (Apine and Volkov, 2007; Bucur, 2010; Zelče, 2010; Ločmele, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Ločmele, Procevska and Zelče, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Ardava, 2011; Muižnieks and Zelče, 2011; Neiburgs, 2016; Kaprāns, 2016a), the conflicting traditions of commemoration in Latvia manifest themselves mainly through the opposition between two unofficial commemoration dates related to World War II: 9 May (Victory Day) and 16 March (Remembrance Day of the Latvian Legionnaires). Both the 16 March and 9 May commemorative rituals, despite their obvious opposition to each other, share many similar characteristics: they serve a socialising function within communities, and at the same they contribute to the construction of mythologised historical narratives, which are less correlated to historical events than associated with the contemporary political situation. Thus, the research conducted by the Latvian Social Memory and Identity Project, which examined both commemorative practices, argues that 9 May...
and 16 March underlie social memory conflicts between Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers, in which various political actors use a sharp and one-sided interpretation of history as a policy tool for short-term goals (Ardava, 2011, pp. 364–365). The main difference between these ritualised practices is the fact that 9 May includes not only commemoration events, but also festive celebrations.

The statement that 16 March, like 9 May, is perceived diametrically opposite by Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers is generally confirmed by the primary data analysis. The distribution of respondents' answers to the question ‘What is your attitude towards the Remembrance Day for Latvian Legionnaires (16 March)?’ is presented in Table 5.10. 43.5% of Latvian-speaking respondents have a positive attitude towards this day, while 21% have a negative attitude. Among the Russian-speaking respondents, this indicator is 2.5% and 66.1%, respectively. As for the question ‘Should 16 March be an official commemorative date in Latvia?,’ the share of Latvian-speaking respondents who answered in the affirmative was 29.5%, against 3.8% of Russian-speakers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your attitude towards the Remembrance Day for Latvian Legionnaires (16 March)?</th>
<th>Latvian-speaking respondents</th>
<th>Russian-speaking respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative, this is the glorification of Nazism, which should be prohibited</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, it is negative, but I think that memorial events of legionnaires should not be prohibited</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Positive, I participate in commemorative events | 35.7% | 0%
---|---|---
Positive, but I personally do not participate in commemorative events | 7.8% | 2.5%
Neutral | 20.9% | 8.4%

Table 5.10. ‘What is your attitude towards the Remembrance Day for Latvian Legionnaires (16 March)?’ (Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents).

In-depth interviews make it possible to see that the opposition of two commemorative practices is something that the informants attach great importance to. Thus, during in-depth interviews, Russian-speaking respondents repeatedly referred to 16 March as the opposite of 9 May. Here are just a few examples:

It seems rather strange that Latvian politicians constantly say that the Latvian legionnaires allegedly fought for Latvia, and they are very supportive on 16 March, but on 9 May, we do not hear their speeches about how wonderful the Soviet soldiers of the 130th Latvian Rifle Corps were, who also fought heroically for Latvia and fought against the Nazi occupiers. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

The most important thing that makes me happy is that much more people come on 9 May than on 16 March. Although if they want to gather for 16 March, I am neutral about it. [Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]

This does not mean that if we celebrate 9 May, then we are aggressively disposed towards those who gather at the Freedom Monument on 16 March. We have nothing to do with this, we just accept it; we do not condemn people on 16 March, we just, probably, ignore them. Russian-speakers also have a negative attitude to the outbreak of neo-Nazism, and violence in any manifestation that may exist in the modern world. But I see no threat on 16 March. [Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

Most respondents noted that although they would not like 16 March to be an official commemorative date, they are neutral about those who gather on this day at the Freedom Monument:
After all, a lot of legionnaires died during the war, and these are people who actually lived here: they are Latvians, and it is normal to remember them, even if they were in the German army. Therefore, I am neutral towards the participants of the commemorative events for 16 March, especially since it is not on a massive scale. However, I do not like that all this is too politicised; I would not want 16 March to be supported at the official level. [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]

I am not against the march of legionnaires; if they do not interfere with anyone, then let them go on 16 March. But in general, I have an ambiguous attitude towards the legion; I know that in Latgale, where my relatives live, the legionaries burned down a village during the war. Mom told how the Jews were exterminated, and this is also connected with the legion. But those who gather at the monument on 16 March apparently perceive it differently, and they claim that by this, they commemorate the memory of those who died in the struggle for Latvia’s freedom. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

I am neutral towards this because I think Latvian people deserve to do what they want, and if they want to honour the memory of their ancestors on 16 March, then this is ok. I think, however, that this is a private matter for these people, and the state should not interfere or provide them with support. [Interview 28, Russian-speaking male, 63 years old]

I think that it is not worth turning 16 March into an official date of some kind, although it may be a day of remembrance. I do not really like the processions of legionnaires, but in general, I am neutral about this since many people in this legion did not join from their own free will, I guess. If people want to honour the memory of those who died in the war on this day, then it seems to me that this is normal. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

Latvian-speaking respondents, in turn, also compared 16 March with 9 May, and noted that they associated 16 March with the struggle against Soviet power:

We have 16 March to honour the memory of the soldiers from the Latvian Legion who joined the German army. I have a positive attitude towards this date, because I think that these people mainly fought against the Soviet regime. On 16 March, unlike 9 May, no one drinks. We commemorate differently from Russian-speakers. We just put some flowers near to the monument, there is a march to commemorate those who were fighting and were killed. I participated just once. It was interesting. And yes, nobody was drinking. It’s basically three hours’ walk. It is a remembrance day, and that’s it. They were fighting for the free Latvia. And here is the difference between 16 March and 9 May,
because 9 May is related to Soviet occupation. [Interview 6, Latvian-speaking male, 32 years old]

It is noteworthy that one of the respondents even associates 16 March not only with the struggle against the Soviet regime but also with the day of remembrance of people who suffered from Soviet repressions. When asked about what days and how the respondent remembers her relatives who suffered from the Soviet regime, she replied:

On the Day of Legionnaires, 16 March, I remember those people who were repressed in Soviet times, my relatives. I visit the cemetery that day. But when I see the procession of legionnaires, I am very proud of these elderly people, their past. This is a very important day for me. I think that they are victims of history, some of them joined the legion because they were forced, and others because they wanted to make Latvia free, they wanted their own state, not Soviet Latvia. [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old]

Thus, anti-Soviet connotations are also found in the commemorative practices of 16 March, and the Day of Legionnaires is viewed by Latvian-speaking respondents not only as the antithesis of 9 May but also as a day to remember the fighters against Soviet power and even to commemorate people who suffered from Soviet repressions. Therefore, we see that the opposition of the commemorations of 16 March and 9 May can extend beyond the events of the Second World War, and functions within the framework of the memories and ideas about the Soviet era. In interviews with respondents, this opposition is constantly repeated, as well as such alternatives as the struggle for the independence of Latvia and the fight against Nazism, Soviet repressions and the Holocaust, neo-Nazism and re-Sovietisation, the memory of Russian speakers and the memory of Latvian speakers. This cross-referential nature of respondents’ interpretations allows us to talk about the overall interdependence of these opposed alternatives, the appropriateness of the
concepts of ‘multidirectional memory’ (Rothberg, 2009), and ‘entangled memory’ (Feindt et al., 2014) in this context. Hence, mutually reinforcing opposition and contradiction of the 16 March and 9 May can be seen as part of a shared field of various transnational discourses, including social, political, historical, ideological and identity construction.

Ultimately, despite all the contradictions, the interviews demonstrate that Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers agree that the peaceful coexistence of the two communities in Latvia is an undeniable common goal. The common grief and memory of the tragic events of Latvian history, which manifests itself in commemorative and ritual practices, can become the basis for the rapprochement of the two communities. The respondents themselves have indicated that there is a need to hear each other, as evidenced by their statements: ‘I believe that we, Russian-speakers, need, without looking back at the political agenda, to restore mutual understanding with Latvian-speaking people, to understand each other’s pain’ [Interview 22, Russian-speaking male, 65 years old]; ‘It is wrong to contrast our grief to the grief of the Russian-speakers. All people suffer the same way; and we, Latvians, grieve during the days of mourning about our human losses, just like the Russians do’ [Interview 4, Latvian-speaking female, 67 years old].

As noted previously, the primary data of this study were collected and analysed during the period 2020–2021, and the above analysis does not reflect changes in Latvian residents’ interpretation of 9 May, which may have occurred after the Russian military invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In Chapter 5.2, it was mentioned that the highest government officials of Latvia, as well as the Latvian State Security Service, called on Latvians to refuse to
commemorate Victory Day in 2022. For example, Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns stated:

Vladimir Putin’s regime has started a war against Ukraine and the entire free world... The same Russian tanks that took part in the ‘Victory Parade’ on 9 May in Red Square in Moscow are now firing at Ukrainians, as journalists report. Under such conditions, the celebration of the ‘Victory Day’ looks not only like an aggressive, immoral and divisive act, but also justifies the war crimes committed in Ukraine by Russia as the heir to the rights and obligations of the USSR (Latvijas Avīze, 2022).

The seriousness of fears about a split within society can be traced in the secondary data analysis. According to a survey conducted by the SKDS research centre in June 2022, most Russian-speaking respondents had a positive attitude towards Victory Day, despite the official condemnation of commemorations by the Latvian government (LSM, 2022a). In general, among those who speak Russian at home, 62% had positive emotions about 9 May, and 7% had negative ones; in turn, among the respondents who speak mainly Latvian at home, 3% reported positive emotions in connection with 9 May; another 60%, negative; and 35%, neutral (ibid.). In addition, the share of those respondents who declared their positive attitude to 9 May was less among those who condemned the Russian war in Ukraine than among those with a neutral attitude. Thus, among those Russian-speakers who condemned the Russian invasion, 40% reported positive emotions, and 36% were neutral regarding 9 May (ibid.). Among those who were neutral about the Russian invasion, these figures were 73% and 25%, respectively; and among supporters of the Russian Federation, 93% and 4%, respectively (ibid.).

As can be seen from these data, a wide split in opinions is observed not only between Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents but also within the group of Russian-speaking respondents. Excluding the Russian-speaking
speakers who support the Russian war in Ukraine (who account for 20% of the total number of Russian-speaking respondents, according to The Society Integration Foundation, 2022), almost half of the Russian-speaking respondents who condemn the war have a positive attitude towards 9 May, which contradicts the official position of the Latvian state.

Another confirmation of the polarised views of Latvia’s Russian-speaking community regarding Victory Day is that in April 2022, a group of Russian-speaking residents of Latvia initiated an open letter condemning the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine and calling for the abandonment of commemorations on 9 May in Riga (LSM, 2022). This letter states:

We all have the right to honour the memory of our loved ones who died in World War II. However, today it is impossible to ignore that the Russian government is using the legacy of that war to justify the bloodshed. We call on those who celebrate 9 May to realise that participating in the celebrations in Victory Park this year means supporting the war that is going on now. We ask you: do not arrange a celebration while innocent people are being tortured and killed every day in Ukraine. When remembering the loss of your family, respect the pain of others (ibid.).

One of the organisers of the Immortal Regiment action in Latvia, Elizaveta Krivcova, also declared that she considers the celebration of 9 May in 2022 to be wrong: ‘On 9 May of this year, we cannot but notice that we, as a society, as Europe, as representatives of Russian culture, all together did not save the peace, and especially the Russian-speakers have a special role, guilt or responsibility. On 9 May, it would be appropriate to hold an anti-war demonstration’ (Stashkevich, 2022). In turn, the Latvian Russian Union, on the contrary, called on its voters to ‘defend’ the tradition of 9 May and lay flowers at the Victory Monument: ‘We respect the tradition of 9 May. And we respect the memory of the victims of the war in Ukraine... We are convinced that mixing
and contrasting the memory of the victims of two different wars is an opportunistic decision aimed at inciting conflict in Latvian society... All wars eventually end. The sky over Europe will again become peaceful, and the tradition of 9 May will survive the current trials’ (Latvian Russian Union, 2022).

It should be noted that among a part of the population of Russia, as well as among the Russian-speaking residents of Latvia, there were changes in attitude towards 9 May after the military invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This is evidenced by recent studies (see, for example, Kurilla, 2022) and by journalists’ interviews with Russian residents (Meduza, 2022); as well as by posts on social networks criticising the celebration of Victory Day, against the backdrop of the ongoing war in Ukraine (Svoboda, 2022a). However, according to a survey conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Centre in May 2022, 67% of Russians consider Victory Day to be the most important holiday in a series of annual celebrations and events (moreover, 9 May has consistently had such strong support over the past five years) (VTsIOM, 2022). In turn, in Ukraine, where since 2015, the victims of World War II have been commemorated on 8 May and 9 May, in 2022, these days were held under the official slogan: ‘We defeated the Nazis – we will defeat the Rashists!’ (Interfax, 2022). Moreover, there is also no unity in Ukrainians’ views of Victory Day. For instance, according to the results of a survey by the Rating Group Ukraine, as of 27 April 2022, 36% of Ukrainians consider Victory Day (9 May) a relic of the past, while 34% continue to regard it as a holiday that is personally significant for them (Delo, 2022).

In general, we can conclude that the commemoration of 9 May in Latvia, as in other countries, is inevitably influenced by the socio-political situation.
For one part of the population, the current events of the war in Ukraine became the reason for reconsidering their views on commemoration, even to the extent of refusing to participate. For another segment, the need for commemoration on 9 May remains unchanged; however, in the face of state condemnation and legal prohibitions, they are forced to abandon at least the practice of ‘festival celebration.’ Undoubtedly, such a division of opinion carries the threat of conflict within the Russian-speaking community, as well as the polarisation and radicalisation of Latvian society as a whole. On the other hand, the readiness of at least a part of the Russian-speaking population to rethink the commemorative practices of 9 May, and potentially the history of the Soviet period, gives hope for overcoming interethnic tensions and achieving the rapprochement of groups within the Latvian society – united as they are by common grief over the tragic events, along with sharing common values and goals.

5.5. Conclusions

The findings of this chapter shed light on the complex interaction between politics and culture in shaping the commemoration of Victory Day and its relevance in the present. The study reveals that the commemoration has transformed from an informal celebration to a highly organised, politically charged event over the years. The adoption of Russian state practices, such as the Immortal Regiment, has elicited criticism from Latvian society and political leaders, who view them as attempts to spread Soviet mythological narratives that benefit the Russian Federation.
Our research provides a nuanced understanding of the differing perspectives and experiences of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents towards the commemoration of Victory Day. Our findings indicate that most Latvian-speaking respondents view the commemoration as a reminder of the Soviet occupation and see it as the glorification of the Soviet Union promoted in Latvia through the Russian propaganda. The struggle between different ideological positions is evident in the contrast between the 9 May and 16 March commemorations. Analysis of public discourse in Latvia and the words of the respondents show that for some Latvian-speaking individuals, the Day of Legionnaires holds anti-Soviet meanings and is remembered as a day for those who fought against Soviet power, and for some, it may even be associated with the commemoration of Soviet repressions. On the other hand, Russian-speaking respondents often see the 16 March commemoration as influenced by nationalism and neo-Nazism. Furthermore, the ‘Latvian nationalist politicians’ are perceived by Russian-speaking respondents as being responsible for the restrictions placed on the 9 May commemoration, such as the ban on the use of Soviet symbols.

Primary data analysis shows that the participation of Russian-speaking respondents in commemorative and ritual practices on 9 May cannot be explained solely by political or ideological factors. Various reasons drive participation, including the search for identity and the need for unity through shared memories. Respondents who participate in the Victory Day commemoration do not associate it with the glorification of the Soviet Union and rarely mention nostalgia for the USSR. However, for some, the holiday may evoke positive memories of Soviet collective gatherings and ‘warmer’
human relationships, which are part of the Soviet nostalgic myth. This myth can provide a sense of unity for some respondents, especially in the absence of a clear sense of identity and community. Additionally, the events of World War II hold significant personal and family memories for many Russian-speaking respondents. Among those whose relatives fought on the side of the Soviet Red Army, a higher percentage considered the 9 May to be the most important commemorative date for them personally compared to the average among Russian-speaking respondents.

In conclusion, this study has uncovered significant changes in Russian-speaking respondents' attitudes towards the 9 May commemoration in Latvia in recent years. The participants spoke of the transformation from a festive event to a day of mourning and remembrance, marked by a shift away from commercial activities and toward honouring war victims. The study also discussed the contrast between Victory Day in Latvia and its perception in Russia and the potential impact of Latvian cemetery rituals on the commemoration. Despite the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Latvian government's call not to participate in celebrations in 2022, many still visited the Victory Monument to pay their respects. Analysis of public discourse related to the issue suggests that the Victory Monument played a crucial role in establishing 9 May commemorative practices, and its demolition could lead to significant changes in the future. Finding alternative locations for commemoration, such as cemeteries, can bring together the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities by offering a mutually agreeable solution.
DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

In this dissertation, we discussed the influence of the memory of the Soviet period on the formation of independent Latvia in the 1990s, as well as the political and social processes present at the time. We explored the complexity of myth and memory and their significance in the process of identity construction in contemporary Latvia while also considering the broader context of the post-Soviet memory sphere. In this study, we examined why Soviet mythologies – simplified, largely irrational, emotionally charged, and based on a selective approach to representing the Soviet past – are shared among the Latvian population. We gave special attention to the political instrumentalisation of Soviet mythologies and memories of the Soviet past and their connection to the commemorative culture in contemporary Latvia.

We have identified and extensively characterised the distinctive features of the Soviet nostalgic myth in Latvia, which asserts that its ‘golden age’ coincides with the Soviet period. In particular, we have examined a group of characteristics classified as ‘socio-economic’ features. These include social protection of the population (free healthcare, housing, and education, and lack of unemployment), stability and confidence in the future, and the presumed successful economic development of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, many people found themselves in a worsening economic situation, and the loss of social status and material prosperity led many to regret the dissolution of the Soviet Union, not only in Latvia but also in other parts of the former USSR. Nostalgic sentiments are more pronounced among specific segments of the population, such as non-citizens who feel less integrated into
the Latvian society, as well as people with lower incomes. However, it is crucial to distinguish nostalgic sentiment from a genuine desire to return to the Soviet past.

In this study, we also discussed the issue of the relationship between ideology and mythology, which are related but distinct concepts. While myths may be used to support or reinforce particular ideological positions, they may also exist independently of any specific ideology and may not be directly tied to any particular political or social agenda. It is particularly important to distinguish between nostalgic sentiment and a genuine desire to return to the Soviet past. The fact that a significantly smaller proportion of our respondents claimed they wanted to restore the USSR compared to those who expressed regret about its collapse indicates that the declaration of a positive attitude toward the Soviet era by respondents does not always imply real support for the communist ideology. At the same time, mythologised narratives about the Soviet era are a subject of political struggle between ideological opponents in Latvia, particularly between radical nationalists and left-wing ideologies with opposing views on the Soviet symbolic legacy. While the ruling elites express a consistent course of action to limit the spread of Soviet myths and nostalgia, social democrats, whose electoral support is typically provided by Russian-speaking minorities, are the most outspoken opponents of restrictive measures on the Soviet symbolic legacy.

When discussing factors that contribute to the inclination of Latvian residents to embrace the nostalgic Soviet myth, we identified a trend in which this myth is much more pronounced among Russian-speaking respondents compared to their Latvian-speaking counterparts. In the absence of unity within
the Russian-speaking community, this trend can serve as a means of resolving the identity crisis and the trauma of the ‘lost homeland.’ However, narratives that glorify the Soviet era, ignore the Soviet occupation of Latvia, or justify the crimes of the Soviet regime, which are shared by a certain segment of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, widen the gap between the Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking communities and exacerbate the symbolic conflict of historical memory within the population. In our study, respondents often cited factors such as freedom or the lack thereof to use their native language and the presence or absence of inter-ethnic animosity as the basis for their positive or negative attitudes towards the Soviet Union. For example, the narrative of ‘friendship of peoples’ in the Soviet period and the absence of ethnic conflicts in the USSR is widely shared among older Russian-speaking respondents who remember life in the Soviet Union. In contrast, for many Latvian-speaking respondents, the suppression of the use of the Latvian language by the Latvian population during the Soviet period can be considered one of the key factors shaping their negative attitude towards this era.

The respondents in their interviews often referred to the perceived ‘mirror’ position of another ethno-linguistic group. For example, one of the frequent statements made by Russian-speaking respondents expressing the supposed hostile position of another ethno-linguistic group was that ‘Latvian speakers consider Russian speakers occupiers.’ For many Russian speakers in Latvia, accepting the fact of Latvia’s occupation is difficult because recognition entails a certain responsibility for the crimes committed by the Soviet regime. In some cases, positive characteristics attributed to the Soviet era by the respondents can be seen as a way to distance themselves from the
responsibility for the repressive nature of the Soviet system. In particular, Russian-speaking respondents named ‘the Soviet government did a lot to improve the country’s infrastructure’ as a positive aspect of the Soviet era for Latvia – a popular thesis of Soviet propaganda used to justify its presence in the Baltic countries. We also found other narratives in the statements of Russian-speaking respondents, serving as a way of disputing the fact of Soviet occupation, such as ‘the exaggerated scale of Stalinist terror and deportations,’ ‘not only Latvians, but many other peoples suffered during Stalin’s time,’ ‘Latvians were not only victims of Stalinist repression, but also carried out repressions themselves,’ and ‘Stalin was the architect of victory.’

The dissemination of these and other narratives glorifying the Soviet era corresponds to the state policy of memory and the Russian government's desire to establish its historical concept of the ‘great victory’ of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War. Since 2000, the Russian historical policy has systematically emphasised the concept of reviving the imperial idea, selective self-identification with the achievements, grandeur, and power of the Soviet Union. We have examined the instrumentalisation of narratives about World War II through Russian media and semi-professional historical discourse, which offer tendentious or simply false interpretations of events, projecting onto the Baltic region accusations of rehabilitating Nazism and Russophobia. The exploitation of the Soviet Victory myth in the interests of the Kremlin is crucial for the memory conflict between Latvia and the Russian Federation and contradicts the institutionalised anti-Soviet narrative that underlies Latvia’s official memory policy, which assumes that Latvia’s subordination to the dominance of the communist totalitarian system and Soviet deportations left a
severe trauma that cannot be overcome even after many decades. The increasing threat of historical disinformation from the Kremlin in recent years has prompted a series of measures by the Latvian state to protect against unwanted influence on pro-Soviet sentiments, including, for example, the legal ban on Soviet symbolism in 2013. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has had a significant impact on Latvia’s state policy towards the propaganda of pro-Soviet sentiments (from the decision to dismantle the Victory monument to equating participation in the 9 May commemoration with disrespect for the state).

It is evident that under current conditions, and especially in the situation of Russia’s war in Ukraine, the attitude of some Russian-speaking residents of Latvia is undergoing significant changes not only towards the policy of the Russian state but also towards the perception of symbols of Soviet victory, which have been appropriated and turned not only into a symbol of Russian imperial national pride but also for justifying territorial occupation. As the analysis shows, the Russian-speaking population in Latvia is not a homogeneous group, and its members have multiple identities, including ethnic, national, and political. Not all Russian speakers in the group regret the dissolution of the USSR, and not all necessarily share the historical narrative put forward by modern Russia, just as there is also a certain proportion among Latvian speakers who feel nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Our study has revealed a complex structure of memories that goes beyond national borders, with internal fragmentation and a cross-referential and interdependent character.
We noticed a generational divide among Russian-speaking respondents regarding their attitude towards the USSR – older Russian-speaking respondents more frequently experience nostalgia for the Soviet times and separate the crimes of the Soviet regime from the positive aspects of that period, which is idealised and mythologised. However, although less frequently than older respondents, young people who participated in our study sometimes expressed a positive attitude towards the USSR, explaining this by their familiarity with films and literature that idealise the Soviet era. Many young respondents under 35 have the same attitude towards Victory Day as their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. As our in-depth interviews showed, the interpretation of the Soviet past by respondents is often based on a complex mixture of media narratives and personal family narratives. Among Russian-speaking respondents, the former are more often associated with nostalgia for the Soviet era, and the latter with the tragic events of World War II and sometimes with repression. While the concept of ‘post-memory”, introduced by Hirsch (2008), implies ‘remembering’ traumatic experiences that they have never personally witnessed, as our analysis showed, this concept can also be applied to positively emotionally charged events of the past and thus to Soviet nostalgia. Thus, among young people, it can be considered within the framework of a post-memory approach.

We discussed the significant role that commemorative and ritual practices play in Latvians’ personal and collective memory about the Soviet past. Examining the example of Victory Day commemoration, we see that it serves an integrative function for the Russian-speaking community in Latvia, whereby through collective commemoration on 9 May, the community affirms
itself and recognises its unity, solidarity, and interdependence among its members. Participants in Victory Day commemoration share common feelings and sentiments that are absent in everyday life. It is fundamental that in ritual interaction, participants not only communicate with each other but also restore the connection between ancestors and descendants, between the past and present, reaffirming the values of the community. These functions are not unique to Victory Day but were already described by Durkheim (1912) as the integrative and reproductive function of ritual itself.

One characteristic feature of the Latvian ritual of Victory Day is that the sense of collective identity it engenders is not just a result of the annual gathering of the community and the performance of prescribed actions but also arises from the activation of positively tinged nostalgic memories of the collective participation in Soviet times. Additionally, for those Russian-speaking residents of Latvia who are experiencing an identity crisis and feel less integrated into the Latvian society, participating in the collective laying of flowers at the Victory monument in Riga can activate memories of a time when they felt at home in Latvia, as well as in other Soviet republics, and can symbolically unite participants with the population of modern-day Russia and with the ‘Russian world’ as a whole. In other words, in situations of crisis in collective identity, which threaten the normal functioning of the community and create a situation of psychological discomfort for individuals, participation in ritual practices such as the commemoration of Victory Day takes on particular importance. It is important to note that, unlike in Russia, where Victory Day is a state-supported practice, participation in the 9 May commemoration in Latvia can have a protest character and can be a way of expressing dissatisfaction.
with existing social and political realities. This situation can be used by different political actors, including oppositional pro-Russian politicians in Latvia, who often frame the commemoration as a defence of Russian-speaking minorities, and Latvian nationalists, who view it as a challenge to Latvia's independence and sovereignty.

After examining the structure of the commemoration of Victory Day in Latvia, we found that commemorative and ritual practices associated with 9 May in Russia, such as the 'Immortal Regiment', have been adopted in Latvia. However, we also noted that despite the surface similarities, the meanings behind these practices might differ significantly. The commemoration of Victory Day in Latvia today exhibits a mix of Russian and local elements. A notable difference between the commemorations of 9 May in Latvia and Russia is that in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in Latvia towards mourning and victimisation, away from the glorification of victory. This shift may be attributed to the influence of Latvian-speaking communities and the official commemorative policy of the Latvian state, as well as the traditional cemetery culture in Latvia.

It is evident that the demolition of the Victory monument in Riga, the main object associated with the 9 May commemoration, will bring about significant changes in the form of commemoration. We assume that cemeteries – places of memory that are especially significant in traditional Latvian commemorative culture and played a central role in the commemoration of Victory Day before the monument's installation in 1985 – could become the main places of commemoration for Russian-speakers in Latvia on 9 May. The Victory monument was the most controversial object of
Soviet architectural heritage in Latvia. As revealed in our research, Latvian residents with a negative attitude towards Soviet-era monuments have a much worse attitude towards the Victory monument than other Soviet objects. This is primarily motivated by the fact that the monument was a key location for the mass commemoration of 9 May. Our research found that criticism was mainly directed towards the forms of commemoration, focusing on the ‘festive’ and ‘celebratory’ elements rather than the desire to honour the memory of those who died in World War II. This criticism was not only observed among Latvian-speaking respondents, for whom 9 May marks the beginning of the Soviet re-occupation, but also among Russian-speaking individuals who regularly participate in Victory Day commemoration and even among the organisers of 9 May events. This demonstrates that despite existing contradictions, both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking groups of the population can potentially come to a consensus regarding the victimisation of World War II participants. In some examples of our informants’ statements, which seemed to express irreconcilable assessments regarding dates like 9 May and 16 March, we saw the ability to accept others’ grief. For instance, we saw cases where respondents expressed negative attitudes towards Latvian legionnaires and opposed their glorification at the state level but did not object to private commemoration, paying tribute to the complexity of family history. Although conflicting assessments of the outcome of the war may pose a risk of a social memory conflict, there are reasons for hope for reconciliation.

The role of personal family memory in shaping attitudes towards Victory Day is a significant issue examined in this study. The survey revealed a direct relationship between respondents’ participation in the 9 May commemoration
and whether their relatives fought in World War II. Among Russian-speaking respondents whose relatives fought on the Soviet Red Army side, a positive attitude towards Victory Day was more common. This relationship was also confirmed in the examination of Latvian residents’ attitudes towards practices related to commemorating the memory of victims of Soviet repressions. Those Russian-speakers whose families had experienced repression were much more likely to declare the need for commemoration than those whose families had not been repressed. Moreover, this group of Russian-speaking respondents were less likely to wish for the restoration of the Soviet Union compared to those Russian-speaking respondents who indicated no repressed relatives.

One of the most significant difficulties encountered during this study was that interviewees whose families had faced repression and deportation often perceived the topic of Soviet state terror as taboo. In many cases, respondents, especially Latvian-speaking ones, who, in general, more often see the need to commemorate victims of Stalinist repressions compared to Russian-speaking respondents, avoided mentioning the state security organs and the KGB directly when talking about the repressions their families had suffered. Although this behaviour creates a challenge for researchers, it provides valuable material since it indicates a fear that is embedded in the memory of generations. It is paradoxical that the same respondents freely criticised the Soviet era in general and were highly critical of the manifestations of ‘soviet symbols,’ including the rituals of Victory Day in today’s Latvia. Conversely, many Russian-speaking respondents, even when condemning Soviet repressions, retained a positive assessment of the Soviet era as a
whole. The same observation was confirmed when studying the associations of Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents regarding the Soviet era. Russian-speaking respondents rarely mentioned the restriction of freedom and repression characteristic of the Soviet era when speaking about the negative features of the USSR. In contrast, Latvian-speaking respondents noted these features as the most essential, even though the family histories of both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents may contain similar experiences of a collision with the repressive Soviet system and the same assessment of repression as inhuman and unacceptable.

The colossal losses suffered by Latvia’s population in the 1940s represent an undeniable shared grief for the country. In general, Latvian society agrees that ordinary people at that time, regardless of their affiliation, became victims of history. However, although many Russian-speaking individuals feel the need for commemorations, the perception that they are being held responsible for repression hinders their solidarity with official commemorations. We have seen that existing state-supported commemorative practices associated with commemorating the victims of Soviet repressions do not satisfy Russian-speaking respondents, despite their generally positive attitude towards the idea of commemorating the victims. This provides grounds for thinking that with a certain revision of approaches to state commemoration, better considering the opinions of ethnic minorities, and specifically including the memory of victims of Stalinist repressions of the 1930s alongside the victims of deportations, there are opportunities for improving state commemoration policy and enhancing existing practices.
In conclusion, we hope that the results of this research, which is based on the little-studied Latvian case, will not only expand the understanding of the relationship between historical myth-making and commemorative practices within the academic field of Memory Studies, but also have practical value. Latvian policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and the Ministry of Culture in particular can use this research to provide clues for solving the problem of coexistence between the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities in Latvia, within the framework of implementing the integration programme. Although the study deals with very different spaces of social memory, the human tragedies that fill these spaces are very similar, and this unifying experience of loss and common historical trauma of people living in Latvia may eventually help overcome existing contradictions of memory.
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Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethical approval

29/06/2020

Dr Ulleman Blacker
School of Slavonic and East European Studies
UCL

Cc: Ksenija Iljina

Dear Dr Blacker,

Notification of Ethics Approval with Proviso
Project ID/Title: 17347/001: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia

Further to your satisfactory responses to the reviewers’ comments, I am pleased to confirm in my capacity as Joint Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC) that your study has been ethically approved by the UCL REC until 29/06/2023 with the following proviso:

- Please note that this ethics approval only covers the online- and remote-only methodology. Any in-person methodology should be submitted as an amendment alongside a risk assessment and updated recruitment documentation.

Ethical approval is subject to the following conditions:

Notification of Amendments to the Research
You must seek Chair’s approval for proposed amendments (to include extensions to the duration of the project) to the research for which this approval has been given. Each research project is reviewed separately and if there are significant changes to the research protocol you should seek further confirmation of continued ethical approval by completing an ‘Amendment Approval Request Form’
http://ethics.greengateway.ac.uk/responsibilities.php

Adverse Event Reporting — Serious and Non-Serious
It is your responsibility to report to the Committee any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to participants or others. The Ethics Committee should be notified of all serious adverse events via the Ethics Committee Administrator (ethics@ucl.ac.uk) immediately the incident occurs. Where the adverse event is unexpected and serious, the Joint Chairs will decide whether the study should be terminated pending the opinion of an independent expert. For non-serious adverse events the Joint Chairs of the Ethics Committee should again be notified via the Ethics Committee Administrator within ten days of the incident occurring and provide a full written report that should include any amendments to the participant information sheet and study protocol. The Joint Chairs will confirm that the incident is non-serious and report to the Committee at the next meeting. The final view of the Committee will be communicated to you.

Office of the Vice Provost Research, 2 Taviton Street
University College London
Final Report
At the end of the data collection element of your research we ask that you submit a very brief report (1-2 paragraphs will suffice) which includes in particular issues relating to the ethical implications of the research i.e. issues obtaining consent, participants withdrawing from the research, confidentiality, protection of participants from physical and mental harm etc.

In addition, please:

- ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in UCL’s Code of Conduct for Research: www.ucl.ac.uk/srv/governance-and-committees/research-governance
- note that you are required to adhere to all research data/records management and storage procedures agreed as part of your application. This will be expected even after completion of the study.

With best wishes for the research.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor Michael Heinrich
Joint Chair, UCL Research Ethics Committee
Appendix 2. Questionnaire

Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia research

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. The main aim of this research is to ascertain Latvian residents’ opinions about the Soviet past as well as to find out about their possible participation in contemporary social rituals and commemorative practices related to the Soviet legacy. This survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your answers are completely anonymous and strictly confidential. Please answer the following questions by ticking the boxes or by writing your own answer in the space provided.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask for more information.

Ms Ksenija Iljina, PhD Candidate

Dr Uilleam Blacker

UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)
16 Taviton St, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0BW, UK

Project Ethics Identification Number: 17347/001

About You

A1. Your Age (Select only one)
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 plus

A2. Your Gender (Select only one)
- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

A3. Your Occupation or Role (Select only one)
- Student
- Manager
- Trained professional
- Clerical support worker
- Skilled labourer
- Self-employed
- Researcher
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Other
A4. Your Education (Select only one)
- Lower than secondary school leaving qualification
- Secondary school leaving qualification
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- PhD degree
- Other

A5. Your Place of Residence (Select only one)
- Riga
- Other city in Latvia
- Other place in Latvia

A6. Your Ethnicity (Select only one)
- Latvian
- Russian
- Belorussian
- Ukrainian
- Polish
- Lithuanian
- Jewish
- Romani
- Other

A7. Your Citizenship (Select only one)
- Latvian Citizen
- Russian Citizen
- Latvian Non-Citizen
- Other

A8. Your monthly household income per person (Select only one)
- Low income (less than 300 euros)
- Middle income (300-800 euros)
- High income (more than 800 euros)

A9. Your civil status (Select only one)
- Single
- Married
- Married with children
- Single parent
- Civil partnership
- Other

A10. What language do you speak at home? (Select only one)
- Latvian
- Russian
- Other
About your patriotic feelings and attitudes towards the Soviet past

B1. Do you consider yourself a patriot of Latvia? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

B2. Do you have patriotic feelings for any other country? (Select only one)
- No
- Yes, for Russia
- Yes, for another country
- Hard to say

B3. In December 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed. How do you generally evaluate this?
(Select only one)
- Positively
- Negatively
- Neutral
- I am not interested
- Hard to say

B4. Do you regret the collapse of the USSR? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

B5. Why do you regret that the Soviet Union collapsed? (Please do not answer to this question if you answered ‘No’ to question B4. Tick all that apply)
- There was unity of people in the USSR; ethnic conflicts arose nowadays
- I was free to use my native language and I was not forced to learn Latvian language
- I was born and grew up in the USSR
- The standard of living has decreased, people have become impoverished
- There was stability in the USSR, confidence in the future
- The powerful, large country that had authority in the world fell apart
- There was order in the USSR
- People were provided with work in the USSR
- Contacts with people from former Soviet republics were made difficult
- There were free and high-quality education and medicine in the USSR
- People were better, kinder in the USSR; mutual bitterness, distrust increased after the collapse
- The government was more concerned about people in the USSR
- In the USSR, people were provided with free housing
- There was no social stratification in the USSR
- I was born and grew up in the USSR
- Other
- I do not regret the Soviet Union’s collapse

B6. Which of the following do you feel the most nostalgia for? (Select only one)
- Developed social system (free medicine, education, etc.)
- Soviet culture
- Great goals of the USSR, a sense of the power of the state
- Details of Soviet life (catering, GOST, commodities)
- Demonstrations, collective celebrations
- Other
- I do not feel nostalgia for the USSR
B7. Do you agree that it would be better if Latvia was not separate from the USSR?
(Select only one)
☐ Yes, I agree
☐ No, I disagree
☐ Hard to say

B8. Do you think that the era of the USSR was better or worse for Latvia?
(Select only one)
☐ Better
☐ Worse
☐ Hard to say

B9. What do you think when you hear the word ‘Soviet’?
(Please write your own answer)

B10. What do you feel when you hear the word ‘Soviet’?
(Please tick all that apply)
☐ Delight
☐ Disappointment
☐ Hope
☐ Condemnation
☐ Nostalgia
☐ Fear, horror
☐ Endorsement
☐ Indifference
☐ Hate, anger
☐ Pride
☐ Gratitude
☐ Other
☐ Hard to say

B11. What features do you think are most characteristic of the USSR?
(Please tick all that apply)
☐ State care for ordinary people
☐ Free, high-quality education and medicine, free housing
☐ The absence of interethnic conflicts, the friendship of people
☐ Successful economic development, no unemployment
☐ Stability and confidence in the future
☐ Advanced science and culture
☐ The authoritarian role of the communist party
☐ Queues, shortage of goods
☐ Isolation of the country from the outside world, the impossibility to travel abroad
☐ Poverty
☐ Mass repressions
☐ Mass deportations of Latvians
☐ Persecution of dissenters, control by the KGB, lack of freedom
☐ Absolute power of the party and state officials, bureaucracy
☐ Lag behind developed countries in production of goods and their quality
☐ Militarisation
☐ Other
☐ Hard to say
B12. What role in history, in your opinion, did Stalin play?
(Select only one)
- Entirely positive
- Rather positive
- Rather negative
- Entirely negative
- Neutral
- Both negative and positive
- I do not know who Stalin is
- Hard to say

B13. Which of the following opinions about the Soviet mass deportations against Latvians would you agree with?
(Select only one)
- It was a political necessity; deportations are historically justified
- It was a political crime and there could be no excuse for deportations
- I do not know anything about these repressions
- Hard to say

B14. Were there people in your family or in the families of your acquaintances who became victims of Soviet political repressions and deportations?
(Select only one)
- There were in my family
- There were in the families of my acquaintances
- There were in my family and in the families of my acquaintances
- There were no such people in my family or in the families of my acquaintances
- Hard to say

B15. What do you think was the main reason for the inclusion of Latvia in the Soviet Union in 1940?
(Select only one)
- Free expression of the will of the people of Latvia
- Pressure from the USSR, against the will of most Latvians
- A secret arrangement between Stalin and Hitler
- Other
- Hard to say

B16. Do you agree the events of 1944 were not liberation of Latvia by the Soviet troops, but the Soviet re-occupation?
(Select only one)
- Yes, I agree
- No, I disagree
- Hard to say
B17. Do you agree with the following statement: ‘It is inaccurate to speak of the Soviet “occupation”. There was no Soviet occupation’?

(Select only one)
☐ Yes, I agree
☐ No, I disagree
☐ Hard to say

B18. Would you like the Soviet Union to be restored?

(Select only one)
☐ Yes, and I think that is quite realistic
☐ Yes, but this is currently unrealistic
☐ No, I would not like to
☐ Hard to say

B19. How do you feel about the law on the prohibition of Soviet symbols?

(Select only one)
☐ I support it
☐ I do not support it
☐ Hard to say

B20. Do you think that Memorial Day for the victims of Soviet repressions should be an official commemorative date?

(Select only one)
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Hard to say
C.1 Are there (or were there) combatants in World War II in your family?
(Select only one)
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Hard to say

C.2. If you answered ‘yes’ to the question above, please indicate which side your ancestors fought for. (Select only one)
☐ Both the Soviet Armed Forces and the Latvian Legion
☐ The Latvian Legion
☐ The Soviet Armed Forces
☐ Hard to say

C3. Did any of your relatives die during this war?
(Select only one)
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Hard to say

C4. Do you think that Soviet monuments dedicated to the war should be preserved?
(Select only one)
☐ Yes, the memory of victory in the war must be preserved
☐ Yes, but they must be accompanied by information that these are monuments of the occupation regime
☐ Yes, but only if they are cemeteries or contain the remains of fallen soldiers
☐ No, they need to be dismantled
☐ Hard to say
☐ Other

C5. Do you support the initiative to demolish the Victory Memorial to the Soviet Army in Riga? (Select only one)
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Hard to say

C6. Which of these commemorative dates is the most significant for you personally?
(Select only one)
☐ 20 January, Commemoration Day of Defenders of the Barricades in 1991
☐ 16 March, Remembrance day of the Latvian legionnaires
☐ 25 March, Commemoration Day of Victims of Communist Terror
☐ 8 May, the Crushing of Nazism and Commemoration Day of Victims of World War II
☐ 9 May, Victory Day
☐ 14 June, Commemoration Day of Victims of Communist Terror
☐ 17 June, Occupation of the Republic of Latvia
☐ 22 June, Heroes’ Commemoration Day (Anniversary of the Battle of Cēsis)
☐ 4 July, Commemoration Day of Genocide against the Jews
☐ 11 August, Commemoration Day of Latvian Freedom Fighters
22 September, Baltic Unity Day
11 November, Latvian Freedom Fighters’ Remembrance Day – Lāčplēsis Day
The 1st Sunday in December, Commemoration Day of Victims of Genocide Against the Latvian People by the Totalitarian Communist Regime

☐ Other date (please specify) ______________________________

C7. What is the date of 9 May associated with you? (Select only one)
☐ Victory Day of the Soviet people over Nazi Germany
☐ Victory Day of Russia over Germany
☐ Victory Day of the anti-Hitler coalition over Nazi Germany
☐ Memorial Day of relatives and friends who died in the war
☐ Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Nazism
☐ Day of remembrance and mourning for those killed in the war
☐ Day related to the Soviet occupation
☐ Holiday of a foreign state
☐ Other
☐ Hard to say

C8. On what day, in your opinion, should the memory of the victims of World War II be celebrated? (Select only one)
☐ 8 May
☐ 9 May
☐ Hard to say
☐ Other (please specify) ______________________________

C9. What feelings do you have on 9 May (Victory Day)? (Select only one)
☐ The joy of the victory over Nazism
☐ Mourning for the millions of deaths in this war
☐ Sorrow and joy equally
☐ Negative feelings in connection with the subsequent occupation of Latvia
☐ I do not have any special feelings
☐ Other
☐ Hard to say

C10. How do you celebrate 9 May? (Please tick all that apply)
☐ I take part in the march of the ‘Immortal Regiment’
☐ I watch the broadcast of the Victory Parade from Red Square in Moscow
☐ I take part in celebrations in the Victory Park in Riga
☐ I watch the broadcasted ‘Minute of silence’
☐ I watch Soviet films about the war
☐ I visit veterans
☐ I lay flowers at the Soviet memorials in honour of the victory
☐ I visit the graves of relatives and friends
☐ I watch the fireworks
☐ I attend concerts dedicated to celebration
☐ I participate in other social events
☐ I do not participate in social events, I celebrate the holiday at home, with my family
☐ I take part in protests against the celebration of 9 May and the glorification of the Soviet occupation
☐ I do not celebrate 9 May
☐ Other event (please specify) ______________________________
C11. What is your attitudes towards the ‘St. George Ribbon’ campaign?
(Select only one)
- Positive, I consider it a symbol of victory over fascism; I wear a ribbon
- Positive, I consider it a symbol of victory over fascism, but I do not wear a ribbon
- Negative, I consider it one of the symbols of the Soviet occupation
- Negative, I think the action is too politicised
- Neutral
- I do not know about this campaign
- Other
- Hard to say

C12. What is your attitude towards the festivities on 9 May in Victory Park in Riga?
(Select only one)
- Negative, this is a glorification of the Soviet occupation, which should be prohibited
- I do not support it, but I believe that commemorative events should not be prohibited for those who wish to participate in them
- Positive, I participate in commemorative events
- Positive, but I personally do not participate in commemorative events
- Neutral
- Other
- Hard to say

C13. Should 9 May be an official commemorative date in Latvia? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

C14. Should Riga City Hall support events on 9 May Victory Day? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

C15. Do you think the Russian state should be allowed to support the 9 May events in Latvia? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

C16. Do you agree with the following statement: ‘9 May commemoration in Latvia has political connotations. By participating in commemorative events, the Russian-speaking population expresses its displeasure with the current state system in Latvia’? (Select only one)
- I strongly agree
- I rather agree than disagree
- I strongly disagree
- I rather disagree than agree
- Hard to say

C17. What is your attitude towards the Remembrance day of Latvian legionnaires (16 March)? (Select only one)
- Negative, this is the glorification of Nazism, which should be prohibited
- In general, it is negative, but I think that memorial events of legionnaires should not be prohibited
- Positive, I participate in commemorative events
- Positive, but I personally do not participate in commemorative events
C18. Should 16 March be an official commemorative date in Latvia? (Select only one)
- Yes
- No
- Hard to say

C19. 23 August (the day of signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) in Latvia is the day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism. Which view is closer to yours? (Select only one)
- Latvia was equally affected by Stalinism and Nazism, I support the fact that 23 August is a commemorative date in our country
- I consider it unacceptable to equate Nazism and Stalinism, I do not support the inclusion of this date in the list of official commemorative dates
- Hard to say
- Hard to say
## Interview Guide

**Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia research**

UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies

(SSEES) Project Ethics Identification Number: 17347/001

1. Do you regret the collapse of the USSR? Why?
2. What exactly do you feel nostalgia for? Was there something in the USSR that you would like to return?
3. What details of Soviet everyday culture do you recall with pleasant feelings? What would you like to see return?
4. What details of everyday Soviet life are dear to you? Is there something you miss that you do not have right now?
5. Can you list the goods that have been preserved since the Soviet era and that you are buying now?
6. Which ‘Soviet’ holidays do you celebrate (for instance, 8 March, 1 May, 7 November)? Do you congratulate your friends on 23 February?
7. Which commemorative dates of modern Latvia are the most important for you?
8. Has something changed in the way you celebrate the holidays? What exactly has changed since Soviet times?
9. Do you celebrate religious holidays? Did you celebrate them in Soviet times?
10. How have relations between people changed compared to Soviet times? What are the positive and negative changes?
11. Some people believe that with the collapse of the USSR, the feeling of the power of a state pursuing ‘great’ goals was lost? Do you share this view?
12. Would you like the Soviet Union to be restored? Why?
13. In your opinion, was state social policy (education, medicine, housing) better in the USSR or is it better now? Is there something in the social system of the USSR that you would like to see return?
15. What feelings do you feel when you hear the word ‘Soviet’? Are they positive or negative? Please list.
16. Which state, in your opinion, was more concerned with ordinary people – USSR or Latvia?

17. When did you feel freer – living in the USSR or now? Why?

18. What was the most difficult thing for you personally in life in the USSR (for example, the inability to travel abroad, poverty, KGB control, lack of freedom, bureaucracy, queues)?

19. How do you personally assess the historical role of Stalin?

20. Has anyone in your family suffered from Stalinist repressions, deportations?

21. Has anyone in your family suffered from repressions in in the USSR after Stalin’s era?

22. Have you encountered repression from the KGB? Your friends, family?

23. During the Soviet period, many citizens secretly collaborated with the KGB. How do you react to this? Should these people today bear any punishment for this? Do you consider it fair that those who collaborated with the KGB should not hold public office?

24. Do you think the publication of KGB archives ('Cheka bags') is right?

25. Do you think that the era of the USSR as a whole was better or worse than today for Latvia?

26. What do you think of mass deportations against Latvians? In your opinion, can they be justified?

27. Do you think that Memorial Day for the victims of Soviet repressions should be an official memorable day? Do you celebrate it yourself?

28. In your opinion, is it legitimate to talk about the Soviet re-occupation of Latvia in 1944? How do you rate these historical events? Could you call this the ‘liberation’ of Latvia?

29. How do you feel about the Law on the prohibition of Soviet symbols?

30. In your opinion, is it permissible to use the word ‘Soviet’ in the names of hotels, restaurants and other public institutions, as well as in the names of goods?

31. Do you think that the history of World War II, the Stalinist repressions and the occupation of Latvia today is covered more faithfully or less faithfully than in Soviet times (in the media, in school history lessons)? What changes do you notice?

32. What feelings or associations do you have first when you hear about World War II?

33. Are (or were) there combatants of World War II in your family? On whose side did they fight – on the side of the Soviet army or in the Latvian legion?

34. Did any of your relatives die during this war?

35. Do you think that Soviet monuments dedicated to the war should be preserved?

36. Do you support the initiative to demolish the Soviet Victory Monument in Riga?
37. On what day, in your opinion, should the memory of the victims of the Second World War be celebrated (8 or 9 May)?

38. What do you think of when you think of 9 May?

39. Is 9 May a significant day for you? What feelings does it evoke?

40. How did you celebrate 9 May in your family during the Soviet era? Did you visit friends or invite guests?

41. How do you celebrate 9 May today?

42. Do you have any family traditions related to this day? Do you cook something special on this day? Is it customary to make toasts (which exactly)?

43. What do you watch on TV on 9 May? Do you watch the military parade in Moscow, the broadcast of ‘Minute of silence,’ war films?

44. What social events do you participate in (for example, concerts in Victory Park)

45. Have you heard anything about the ‘Immortal Regiment’? What do you think of it? Do you or your relatives/acquaintances take part in the Immortal Regiment? Why?

46. Do you wear a St. George ribbon? What do you feel when you see people with the St. George ribbon?

47. Do you visit veterans on 9 May or do you in any way care for them (for example, donate money)?

48. Do you follow the custom of visiting the victory monument or any other memorials on 9 May?

49. Do you lay flowers at any memorials? What kind of flowers?

50. Do you visit the graves of relatives and friends on 9 May?

51. Do you bring out the medals and orders of relatives on this day?

52. How do you feel about the festivities on 9 May in Victory Park? Should Riga City Council support them?

53. In your opinion, why are the ‘Immortal Regiment’ and other mass events dedicated to 9 May happening in Latvia? Is it a tribute to the dead or is it due to some other interests? Does the situation in Latvia differ from the situation in Russia?

54. Some people believe that the 9 May commemoration in Latvia has political connotations: ‘By participating in commemorative events, the Russian-speaking population expresses its displeasure with the modern state system in Latvia.’ Do you agree that this celebration divides society? Have you encountered bitterness on the part of people who do not share your views on 9 May?

55. Should 9 May be a public holiday or day off?

56. How do you feel about the Remembrance day of Latvian legionnaires (16 March)?
Should 16 March be an official state commemorative date? Do you celebrate this day in any way?

57. 23 August (the day of signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) in Latvia is the day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism. Do you agree that Latvia was equally affected by Stalinism and Nazism?

58. Is 23 August a significant date for you? Are there any other memorable days related to the Soviet occupation that are important to you? Should there be dates in the official Latvian calendar dedicated to the memory of victims of Soviet repression?
## Expert Interview thematic guide

**Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia research**

UCL

School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)

Project Ethics Identification Number: 17347/001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview topics for managers of ‘9may.lv’ organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organisation of the 9 May commemoration in Riga. Funding for the events of 9 May. Coordination with the municipality, state authorities. Difficulties that arise. Help that is provided to veterans. Fundraising for veterans. What changes are taking place in public opinion regarding 9 May? Composition and size of the audience attending events on 9 May. Youth participation. Relationship with the Russian Embassy, Russian public organisations. Potential divisiveness in Latvian society. Attempts to include those who are hostile or build dialogue? International political discourse around WWII.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview topics for representatives of Riga City Council</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does the city council contribute to the financing and other support of the events of 9 May? Discussion on banning the celebration of 9 May. Issuance of permits for events on 9 May and 16 March. Legislative settlement. Interaction with the Russian embassy regarding events of 9 May. Help from the city for war veterans and Latvian legionnaires. Conflict resolution, security on 9 May, 16 March. How is the opinion of residents of Riga on the 9 May celebrations taken into account? Preservation of monuments dedicated to the war – city council’s policy. Conflicts of the Riga City Council with state authorities regarding the celebration of 9 May.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Interview topics for representatives of the Russian Embassy in Latvia


## Interview topics for representatives of the Latvian Anti-Nazi Committee

- Activities during the events of 9 May and 16 March. Relations with the Latvian authorities and Russian officials and NGOs. Sources of financing. Difficulties of operating and oppression by the state. ‘Manifestations of Nazism’ in modern Latvia (in society, the media, at the state level). Public discussion about Nazism and Stalinism in Latvia, changes in public opinion. Work with youth.

## Interview topics for academic experts

- How the Soviet mythologies (and the myth of the Great Patriotic War) are embraced in present-day Latvia. The Victory Day (9 May) celebration by the Latvian Russian community. Nationalist counter-narrative of the war (Remembrance day of the Latvian legionnaires on 16 March). Conflicts arising from different perceptions of the Soviet past that coexist in contemporary Latvian society. Russia’s soft power influence (including diplomatic rhetoric and media) and how it is rejected by the Latvian state. How and why Soviet myths in Latvia are intentionally constructed. Which social actors are behind this process. Specifics of Latvian cultural memory and commemorative practices.
Appendix 5. Participant Information Sheet (Survey)

Participant Information Sheet for Latvian Residents
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 17347/001

Title of Study: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia

Department: School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):
Ms Ksenija Iljina, 

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Dr Uilleam Blacker, 

You are invited to take part in a research project. Please take the time to read the following information about the nature and aims of this research. Ask the researcher if you would like more information.

The main aim of this research is to identify Latvian residents’ opinions about the Soviet past, as well as to gather information about their personal memories and participation in contemporary social rituals and commemorative practices related to the Soviet legacy. You will be asked questions related to your personal emotional connection to Victory Day (9th of May) as well as your attitudes towards the Soviet past and Soviet myths. It will also take into account your individual characteristics, identities, experiences and beliefs.

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for you to participate in this project, it is hoped that this research will advance the understanding of Latvian society’s history and present.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty and you do not have to give a reason for this. Should you feel something goes wrong during the survey, please contact Dr Uilleam Blacker by email or phone number provided above. Should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please feel free to contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

This survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Your answers are completely anonymous. All the information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential.

Your answers will be stored securely and be used only for analysis and illustration in a PhD thesis that is going to be published in 2022. The data collected during the course of the project might be also used for additional or subsequent research (e.g. conference papers). You will not be identified in any report or publication. No other use will be
made of the data without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to them.

Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to join in. Thank you!

Notice:
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at
Appendix 6. Participant Information Sheet (Interviews)

Participant Information Sheet for Latvian Residents
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number: 17347/001 YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia

Department: School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)

Name and Contact Details of the Researcher(s):
Ms Ksenija Iljina, 

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Dr Uilleam Blacker, 

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please take the time to read the following information about the nature and aims of this research. Ask the research if you would like to know more information.

The main aim of this research is to identify Latvian residents’ opinions about the Soviet past, as well as to gather information about their personal memories and participation in contemporary social rituals and commemorative practices related to the Soviet legacy. You will be asked questions related to your personal emotional connection to Victory Day (9th of May) as well as your attitudes towards the Soviet past and Soviet myths. It will also take into account your individual characteristics, identities, experiences and beliefs.

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for you to participate in this project, it is hoped that this research will advance the understanding of Latvian society’s history and present.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty and you do not have to give a reason for this. Should you feel something goes wrong during the survey, please contact Dr Uilleam Blacker by email or phone number provided above. Should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please feel free to contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The data that you provided will be either anonymised or pseudonymised depending on your choice. All the information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be destroyed within 3 months after the data has
been collected. Your answers will be stored securely and be used only for analysis and illustration in a PhD thesis that is going to be published in 2022. The data collected during the course of the project might be also used for additional or subsequent research (e.g. conference papers). You will not be identified in any report or publication. No other use will be made of the data without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to them.

**Local Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This ‘local’ privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our ‘general’ privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click [here](#)

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the ‘local’ and ‘general’ privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: ‘Public task’ for personal data and’ Research purposes’ for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to join in. Thank you!
Appendix 7. Participant Information Sheet (Expert Interviews)

Participant Information Sheet For Latvian Residents
UCL Research Ethics Committee Approval ID Number:
17347/001 YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATIONSHEET

Title of Study: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia

Department: School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)

Ms Ksenija Iljina,

Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher:
Dr Uilleam Blacker,

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please take the time to read the following information about the nature and aims of this research. Ask the researcher if you would like to know more information.

The main aim of this research is to identify Latvian residents’ opinions about the Soviet past, as well as to gather information about their personal memories and participation in contemporary social rituals and commemorative practices related to the Soviet legacy. This research project should help to unlock the mechanism and ‘technology’ of Soviet myth construction and transmission through commemorative practices and rituals in Latvia. The study will address the following questions: 1) By whom how and why Soviet myths in Latvia intentionally constructed?; 2) Which social actors are behind the successful dissemination of a myth?; 3) What are these actors’ intentions and motives with regard to institutionalised rituals?

Taking part in the study is entirely voluntary. Whilst there are no immediate benefits for you to participate in this project, it is hoped that this research will advance the understanding of Latvian society’s history and present.

If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty and you do not have to give a reason for this. Should you feel something goes wrong during the survey, please contact Dr Uilleam Blacker by email or phone number provided above. Should you feel your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, please feel free to contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee – ethics@ucl.ac.uk.

This interview will take approximately 40-50 minutes. The data that you provided will be fully identifiable or pseudonymised depending on your choice. All the information collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be destroyed within 3 months after the data has been collected. Your answers will be stored securely and be used only for analysis and illustration in a PhD thesis that is going to be published in 2022. The data collected during the course of the project might be also used for additional or subsequent
research (e.g. conference papers). No other use will be made of the data without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to them.

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The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data are: ‘Public task’ for personal data and 'Research purposes’ for special category data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.

If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to join in. Thank you!
Appendix 8. Consent forms (Interviews with Latvian residents)

CONSENT FORM FOR LATVIAN RESIDENTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia
Department: School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: Ms Ksenija Iljina
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Dr Uilleam Blacker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 4 weeks after interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (name, position, educational background, ethnicity, age, gender, personal views, political beliefs) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, ‘public task’ will be the lawful basis for processing, and ‘research purposes’ will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anonymity is optional for this research. Please select from the following 2 options:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(a) I request that my comments are presented anonymously with no mention of my role/affiliation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) I request that my comments are presented pseudonymously but give permission to connect my role/affiliation with my comments (but not the title of my position).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I would be happy for the data I provide (audio recording and following transcription) to be stored securely by the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within three months after the data has been collected. To note: If you do not want your participation recorded you can still take part in the study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name of participant**

| Date | Signature |

**Researcher**

| Date | Signature |
Appendix 9. Consent forms (Interviews with experts)

CONSENT FORM FOR LATVIAN RESIDENTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

Title of Study: Soviet mythologies in commemorative and ritual practices in modern Latvia
Department: School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES)
Name and Contact Details of the Researcher: Ms Ksenija Iljina,
Name and Contact Details of the Principal Researcher: Dr Uilleam Blacker
Name and Contact Details of the UCL Data Protection Officer: Ms Alexandra Potts,

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee: Project ID number: 17347/001

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The person organising the research must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box below I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes means that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element that I may be deemed ineligible for the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick Box</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I confirm that I have read and understood the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had an opportunity to consider the information and what will be expected of me. I have also had the opportunity to ask questions which have been answered to my satisfaction and would like to take part in an individual interview.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to 4 weeks after interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consent to participate in the study. I understand that my personal information (name, position, educational background, ethnicity, age,</td>
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</table>
gender, personal views, political beliefs) will be used for the purposes explained to me. I understand that according to data protection legislation, ‘public task’ will be the lawful basis for processing, and ‘research purposes’ will be the lawful basis for processing special category data.

4. Anonymity is optional for this research. Please select from the following 3 options:

(a) I agree for my real name and role/affiliation to be used in connection with any words I have said or information I have passed on.

(b) I request that my comments are presented pseudonymously but give permission to connect my role/affiliation with my comments (but not the title of my position).

(c) I request that my comments are presented pseudonymously with no mention of my role/affiliation.

5. I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the University for monitoring and audit purposes.

6. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that if I decide to withdraw, any personal data I have provided up to that point will be deleted unless I agree otherwise.

7. I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits have been made to encourage me to participate.

8. I understand that the data will not be made available to any commercial organisations but is solely the responsibility of the researcher undertaking this study.

9. I understand that I will not benefit financially from this study or from any possible outcome it may result in in the future.

10. I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as a report.

11. I am aware of who I should contact if I wish to lodge a complaint.

12. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

13. I would be happy for the data I provide (audio recording and following transcription) to be stored securely by the researcher.

14. I consent to my interview being audio recorded and understand that the recordings will be destroyed within three months after the data has been collected. To note: If you do not want your participation recorded you can still take part in the study.

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List of interviews with experts

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<td>Interview E1</td>
<td>Aleksander Rzhavin</td>
<td>Coordinator of the project ‘Russian memorials in Latvia’ (<a href="http://voin.russkie.org.lv/">http://voin.russkie.org.lv/</a>)</td>
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<td>Margarita Dragile</td>
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<td>Dmitrijs Sandibins</td>
<td>Riga City Council deputy (Latvian Russian Union), Assistant to the MEP Tatjana Ždanoka</td>
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<td>University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty Member</td>
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Appendix 12. Attitude of respondents to Joseph Stalin and his role in history

For Latvia, Stalin was bad, and Germany, of course, was bad. Because, firstly, Stalin killed his own people; starting from 1937 he began to kill, even though Latvia was still Latvia then, and Stalin began repressions in Moscow, in Leningrad, in 1937. He destroyed the intelligentsia! Then he came to Latvia and began to do the same. And Hitler destroyed those who were not Aryans, full-blooded Germans. This is also bad, because all people have the right to live. He killed Jews, that’s also bad... But I can still understand when a conqueror kills aliens. But when Stalin in 1937 destroyed his own people… I will never understand this. He shot the intelligentsia, commandants, writers. All this is terrible... Stalin did this with Russians. I cannot understand how people did not resist this. Beria is a Jew, Stalin is a Georgian, and they began to destroy the Russian intelligentsia. But how can you destroy your people in your country? I believe that this does not fit into any framework at all. And most importantly, they destroyed the smart people, the intelligentsia. I will never understand this, and I will not be able to forgive such a thing.

[Interview 1, Latvian-speaking female, 38 years old]

I look at Stalin from the point of view of my family. My dad's parents and grandfather and his brothers were repressed. That’s all. Of course, we have a negative attitude towards Stalin... He was an inveterate bandit, a pickpocket, a deceiver, a robber, etc... If not for the revolution, he would have been shot for committing crimes. Stalin and Hitler are similar figures in history, because they were preparing their countries for the seizure of foreign territories. Identical people. How many innocent people were killed! I can only hate such a person. He did nothing good for humanity, for the Soviet people. I have a negative attitude towards him, definitely negative.

[Interview 7, Russian-speaking male, 55 years old]

I believe that it is impossible to relate positively or negatively to such people as Stalin, because he is an ambiguous figure. Of course, there were positive sides, there were also negative sides, which, in principle, are inevitable. Stalin won the war, and under Stalin, as far as I know, there was no corruption, unlike everything in the modern world. And there were repressions, of course, but, again, I don’t think that it could have been somehow avoided at that time.

[Interview 11, Russian-speaking male, 18 years old]

In the early 1990s, my history teacher at school told me that her father found a book in her house about exposing the Stalin cult. And she said: 'It was
scary to look at my father’s face, he had tears in his eyes. And he said: ‘Do you understand that this is a betrayal in relation to me, the fact that you even read this? We believed, we went to this war, we lived with this victory.’" I do not dare to answer the question myself, about the role of Stalin – not morally, ethically, or psychologically, to be honest.

[Interview 12, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

On the one hand, there were deportations of people, but on the other hand, victory in the war, a manufacturing boom that took place after the end of the war, and when the country began to develop. There were many, many things that I really wish hadn’t happened. The horrible attitude towards people, deportation and repression – this is all, of course, bad. But how could all this have influenced the further development of the Soviet Union in the 60s and 70s, when Stalin was no longer there? I think that only such a leader, with this approach, could win the Great Patriotic War; only with this approach, only in this way. Because he gathered the people and made them move forward when there were rather difficult moments. This was a person who, to some extent, inspired. I am not heroising him in any way, but this is a man who in that era acted as he did. I am not justifying him in any way, but, apparently, at that moment such a person was necessary for the Soviet Union. If there had been someone else instead of him, for example Yeltsin, I think now we would speak German here in Latvia.

[Interview 13, Latvian-speaking male, 60 years old]

I have a negative attitude towards Stalin, although it cannot be denied that he won the war, and in general, people loved him. And even when this truth about him was revealed, such ardent fans still remained. I cannot say that I feel directly negative towards him or hate him, because I know him as a leader, after Lenin. I don’t feel sympathy either, but I cannot say that I have some kind of hatred for him. Maybe because it didn’t affect me, I just understand that this figure is negative but I personally don’t feel that way.

[Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

Now there are political discussions about Stalin on the Internet, they are discussing that he killed a lot of people. I will say, I will not interfere in politics and in these disputes, I will simply say that he was a great politician, made the country very strong, defeated the Nazi threat. And he beat the main enemy. Although many people are dissatisfied, because until 1939 he actively collaborated with Adolf Hitler; he sent nickel, ammunition and army equipment to Berlin.

[Interview 16, Russian-speaking male, 25 years old]
This is a significant person in the history of the Soviet Union and world history, a person who trusted Hitler. He undoubtedly won the war, but he could do it with much lower losses, and without repressions. He was a tyrant.
[Interview 17, Russian-speaking male, 23 years old]

I have a positive attitude towards Stalin and sympathize with his personality. I think he was a strong man. If he raised the whole country like that, then this is something to respect him for, at least. He played a big role in the victory in the war, and, roughly speaking, he raised the impoverished country to a very high level.
[Interview 19, Russian-speaking female, 24 years old]

My mother cried when Stalin died. It was a little strange for me.
[Interview 20, Russian-speaking female, 53 years old]

How do I feel about Stalin? I only know that there were many repressed, there were resettlements from Kazakhstan, there was a lot of repression on his part. But at that time those who worked hard lived normally.
[Interview 21, Russian-speaking male, 56 years old]

Of course, Stalin is to blame, but, as they say, the retinue makes the king... I cried when Stalin died, I was seven years old, I was wearing a mourning band. And, by the way, people cried sincerely then... At home everyone cried. And everyone thought: how are we going to live now? But after all, despite the repressions, it remains in the memory that Stalin did a lot for the country, and now there is a lack of such a leader who will do something for the country.
[Interview 25, Russian-speaking female, 74 years old]

As far as I know, he developed the country in the post-war period. I think he, of course, put a lot of effort into rebuilding Russia, restoring the spirit of the people... I think he played a positive role. Although, of course, he did a lot of bad there too, all those repressions. I know that he was not so kind, good, and I know that a lot of bad was done at his direction. But, nevertheless, I think, in general, he did a lot for the state, for Russia, for our countries, yes.
[Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]
### Appendix 13. The associations that arise with the word ‘Soviet’ among Russian-speaking and Latvian-speaking respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORIGINAL (LV)</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+Deficīts</td>
<td>+Deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Verdzība</td>
<td>+Slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Okupācīja</td>
<td>+Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Okupācīja, svešs karogs, sveša valoda, apspiestība, stulbais ‘Krievu’ laiks</td>
<td>+Occupation, foreign flag, foreign language, oppression, stupid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Ļaunuma impērija</td>
<td>+‘Russian’ time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Kur tautas padomei pieder vara, nevis partiju sponsoriem</td>
<td>+Evil Empire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Diktatūru (Staljinisms)</td>
<td>+Where the people’s council has power, not party sponsors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Sliks pārvaldes stils . Liela valsts iekaušanās indivīda dzīvē. Mūžīgais</td>
<td>+Dictatorship (Stalinism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Birokrātija un ilga nespēja atrisināt ikdienas lietas, jo cīņvāks tika sūtīts no vienas valsts struktūras uz otru, lai viņa problēma tiktu risināta.</td>
<td>+Bureaucracy and a long inability to solve everyday things, because a person was sent from one state structure to another to solve his problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Tumsonība</td>
<td>++ darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Meli.</td>
<td>++ lying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Confidence for tomorrow...!</td>
<td>++ Confidence for tomorrow...!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagātne</td>
<td>+Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociālisms</td>
<td>+Socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+nomācošs</td>
<td>+Oppressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garīgs un fizīks cietums!</td>
<td>+Mental and physical prison!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ierobežotas brīvības; sadzīviski – deficīts</td>
<td>+restricted freedoms; everyday deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Padomju ‘laiki’. Ņemot vērā vecāku un vecvecāku stastīto, tad es neesmu tiesīks viņu domas piedēvēt sev saistībā ar šo vēstures posmu.</td>
<td>++ Soviet ‘times’. Given what my parents and grandparents have said, I am not entitled to attribute their thoughts to myself in connection with this stage of history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+muļķība</td>
<td>+stupidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Iebaidīts; nožēlojams</td>
<td>+Intimidated; miserable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Okupācīja</td>
<td>+Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Bezcerību žogs</td>
<td>+hopelessness fence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Krievu terors</td>
<td>+Russian terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Nabadzība</td>
<td>+Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Bardaks.</td>
<td>+Mess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Okupācīja</td>
<td>+Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Dzīve ir dzīve, ne ‘padomju’. cilvēki ir cilvēki, ne ‘padomju’</td>
<td>+life is life, not ‘Soviet’. people are people, not ‘Soviet’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Stabilitāte</td>
<td>+Stability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
+Trulums
+Padumju!
+Bērni ba, jaunība, karjera.
+Pagājis
+Meli
+kopīgs
+Vienīgais pareizais viedoklis un bailes kaut ko izdarīt neatbilstoši ideoloģijai.
+Trako maja
+Pilsonis
+Okupanti
+Okupācija
+Meli
+Morāle.
+jaunība
+Tautas vara.
+Krievu
+Barība
+Slepkavas, kas nošāva un izsūtīja manus tuviniekus.
+deficīts
+Boļševisms, terors, gulags, VDK, okupācija.
+kolhozs
+Necieņa pret manu latviesu tautu.
+saviņība
+stabilitāte
+Vienotība
+Saliedētība
+deficīts
+Socializm
+vara
+Krievu okupācija
+piespiedu rusifikācija
+komunizms
+noziegumi pret cilvēci.
+Nabadzība
+kibernetika
+režīms
+Krievu
+Viena lielā tauta, bez konfliktiem
+Vislabākais, varenais.
+Uzticams
+Saviņība
+Pagātne, ideoloģija, Krievija
+Deģenerātu un zemcīlveku kultūra.
+Okupācija. Naids.

+Dullness
+Stupid
+Childhood, youth, career.
+Past
+Lying
+Shared
+The only right opinion and fear of doing something not in accordance with ideology.
+Madhouse
+Citizen
+Occupying
+Occupation
+Lying
+Morality.
+Youth
+People’s power.
+Russian
+Mess
+The murderers who shot and expelled my loved ones.
+deficit
+Bolshevism, terror, gulag, KGB, occupation.
+kolkhoz
+Disrespect for my Latvian people.
+Union
+Stability
+Unity
+unity
+Unity
+Deficit
+Socialism
+Power
+Russian occupation
+Forced russification
+Communism
+Crimes against humanity.
+Poverty
+cybernetics
+regime
+regime
+Russian
+One great nation, no conflicts.
The best, powerful.
+Reliable
+Union
+Past, ideology, Russia
+Degenerate and underhuman culture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latvian terms</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+Negatīvu</td>
<td>+ Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Vēl gadiem ilgi mūsu valsts attīrīs</td>
<td>+ It will take for years for our country to clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Nekadu</td>
<td>+ None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Nabadzība</td>
<td>+ Poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+savienība</td>
<td>+ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okupācija, terors</td>
<td>+ Occupation, terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+internacionālisms</td>
<td>+ Internationalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+vecmodīgs</td>
<td>+ Old-fashioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Vardarbība</td>
<td>+ Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Apspiešana</td>
<td>+ Suppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Draudzīgs</td>
<td>+ Friendly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Vecs, novecojis,</td>
<td>+ Old, outdated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Sociālisms</td>
<td>+ Socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+agrāk</td>
<td>+ Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Sovok</td>
<td>+ ‘Sovok’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Ar padumju cilvēku!</td>
<td>+ Stupid people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Pagātnes</td>
<td>+ Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Stabilitate</td>
<td>+ Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+īdzīlesība</td>
<td>+ Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+okupācija</td>
<td>+ Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+propaganda</td>
<td>+ Propaganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Pagātne</td>
<td>+ past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Sveša vara.</td>
<td>+ Foreign power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Totalitārs, ar centralizētu varu</td>
<td>+ Totalitarian, with centralised power in the Moscow Kremlin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Stabilitāte.Draudzība.</td>
<td>+ Lack of Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Nebrīve</td>
<td>+ Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Jaunatne</td>
<td>+ stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+stagnācija</td>
<td>+ Socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Sociālistisks</td>
<td>+backwardness, decadence, heavy drinkers, aggressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+atpalicība, dekadence, dzēraji, agresori</td>
<td>+Soviet Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+padomju okupācija</td>
<td>+ red</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+sarkans</td>
<td>+ Oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Apspiežiba</td>
<td>+ Occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Okupācija</td>
<td>+ Depressed people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Depresīvie cilvēki</td>
<td>+Something old, something that works poorly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Kaut kas vecs, kaut kas, kas slikti strādā.</td>
<td>+occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+okupācija</td>
<td>+ Defective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Brāķis</td>
<td>+ None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Nekādu</td>
<td>+ multi-storey houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+daudzstāvu mājas</td>
<td>+ Lack of freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Brīvības trūkums</td>
<td>+ Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Konservatīvs</td>
<td>+ occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+okupācija</td>
<td>+ occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+okupācija</td>
<td>+ champagne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+šampanietis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORIGINAL (RU)</td>
<td>TRANSLATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Гордость</td>
<td>+ Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Порядок</td>
<td>+ Order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ гордый</td>
<td>+ proud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Советский – значит честный, качественный, устремлённый в будущее, нацеленный на благо всего общества.</td>
<td>+ Soviet means honest, high-quality, looking to the future, aimed at the good of the whole society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Братство</td>
<td>+ Brotherhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Культурный</td>
<td>+ Cultured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Стабильный</td>
<td>+ Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Справедливый</td>
<td>+ Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Устаревший</td>
<td>+ Deprecated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ отсталый</td>
<td>+ retarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Единение всех национальностей</td>
<td>+ Unity of all nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ дефицит</td>
<td>+ deficit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Хорошо</td>
<td>+ Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ воспитанный, честный, уверенный в себе</td>
<td>+ well-mannered, honest, self-confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ объединенный</td>
<td>+ United</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Счастье порядок мир</td>
<td>+ Happiness, order, peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Уверенность</td>
<td>+ Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Честный</td>
<td>+ Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Дружный, прогрессивный, добрый, сочувствующий.</td>
<td>+ Friendly, progressive, kind, sympathetic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Интернациональный</td>
<td>+ International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Истинный</td>
<td>+ True</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Народный</td>
<td>+ People’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Глупый</td>
<td>+ Silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ многонациональный</td>
<td>+ multinational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Юрий Гагарин</td>
<td>+ Yuri Gagarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Космос</td>
<td>+ Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ История</td>
<td>+ History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Патриот</td>
<td>+ Patriot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ серый</td>
<td>+ gray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Социальная справедливость</td>
<td>+ Social justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ произвол, упадок,</td>
<td>+ arbitrariness, decline,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ добрый</td>
<td>+ kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ передовой</td>
<td>+ advanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Гордость</td>
<td>+ Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ настоящий</td>
<td>+ real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ идеологический</td>
<td>+ ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ добрый</td>
<td>+ kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ принципиальный</td>
<td>+ principled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ качественный</td>
<td>+ high quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Гордость</td>
<td>+ Pride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Отличный.</td>
<td>+ Excellent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Общенародный</td>
<td>+ Nationwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Великий</td>
<td>+ Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Родной</td>
<td>+ Dear/native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ прошлое</td>
<td>+ past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ счастливый</td>
<td>+ happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Победа советского народа в войне</td>
<td>+ Victory of the Soviet people in the war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Настоящий</td>
<td>+ Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Старый</td>
<td>+ Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Прекрасное образование,</td>
<td>+ Excellent education, reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>читающая нация, великая культура</td>
<td>nation, great culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Толерантный</td>
<td>+ Tolerant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Великий, справедливый</td>
<td>+ Great, fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ стабильность</td>
<td>+ stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ союз</td>
<td>+ union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Великий</td>
<td>+ Great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Надежность</td>
<td>+ Reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Порядочный</td>
<td>+ Decent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Добрый.</td>
<td>+ Kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Великий, стоящий над</td>
<td>+ Great, standing above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>национальностью и религией</td>
<td>nationality and religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ справедливый</td>
<td>+ fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Лживый</td>
<td>+ Deceitful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Защищенный</td>
<td>+ Protected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Ленин-гриб :)</td>
<td>+ Lenin was a mushroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Лучший</td>
<td>+ Best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Гражданин.</td>
<td>+ Citizen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ No особой ассоциации</td>
<td>+ No special association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ старый</td>
<td>+ old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Заботящийся о людях</td>
<td>+ Caring for people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Защищенный человек</td>
<td>+ Protected person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ цивилизация</td>
<td>+ civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ фальшивый</td>
<td>+ fake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ стабильность</td>
<td>+ stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Стабильность...</td>
<td>+ Stability...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ Общий=ничей</td>
<td>+ Shared = No ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Человечный</td>
<td>+ Humane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Равный</td>
<td>+ Equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+социалистический</td>
<td>+ socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Бред</td>
<td>+ Delirium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Убогий</td>
<td>+ Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Некачественный</td>
<td>+ Low quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+тоталитарный</td>
<td>+ totalitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+равноправный</td>
<td>+ equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+человекоориентированный</td>
<td>+ human-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Некачественный</td>
<td>+ Low quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+изолированный от западного мира</td>
<td>+ isolated from the western world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+свободный</td>
<td>+ fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Правильный, родной</td>
<td>+ Stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+единный для всех</td>
<td>+ socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Что-то, чего давно уже нет</td>
<td>+ Right/proper, dear/native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+свой</td>
<td>+ one for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Коммунизм</td>
<td>+ Something that has long been gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+стабильный</td>
<td>+ own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Все как у всех</td>
<td>+ Communism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Справедливый</td>
<td>+ stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Окупант</td>
<td>+ Everything like everyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+раб</td>
<td>+ Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+убогий</td>
<td>+ Occupant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>+Союз</td>
<td>+ poor</td>
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<td>+ retarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>+ low-quality, gloomy, rude, +</td>
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<td>+границы</td>
<td>+ stupid, not free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Отсталый, кровавый,</td>
<td>+ Deficit, censorship, closed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+репрессивный, преступный.</td>
<td>+ Backward, bloody, repressive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Старый</td>
<td>+ criminal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Детство</td>
<td>+ Old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Честный, надежный</td>
<td>+ Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Противоречивый</td>
<td>+ Honest, reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Застой</td>
<td>+ Contradictory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+С местным городским советом.</td>
<td>+ Stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Равно как в любом городе США</td>
<td>+ With local city council. As well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>есть City Council.</td>
<td>as in any city in the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+качественный</td>
<td>there is a City Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Быт</td>
<td>+ high quality</td>
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<tr>
<td>+несвободный</td>
<td>+ Everyday life</td>
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<td>+Ограниченный.</td>
<td>+ not free</td>
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<td>+Бесправный. Нищий. Рабский.</td>
<td>+ Limited.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>+ Lack of freedom</td>
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<td>+ irresponsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Свой</td>
<td>+ Own</td>
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<tr>
<td>+Homo Soveticus; колбаса; джинсы; The Beatles; Владимир Высоцкий; космос; прогресс; социализм</td>
<td>+ Homo Soveticus; sausage; jeans; The Beatles; Vladimir Vysotsky; space; progress; socialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+старый</td>
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<tr>
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<td>+ Stable</td>
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<td>+ Ideologised</td>
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<tr>
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<td>+ fair</td>
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<tr>
<td>+Прошлое</td>
<td>+ Past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+союз</td>
<td>+ union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+дермо</td>
<td>+ shit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+мирный</td>
<td>+ peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Железный занавес</td>
<td>+ Iron curtain</td>
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<td>+Железный занавес</td>
<td>+ Iron curtain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Человечный</td>
<td>+ Humane</td>
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<tr>
<td>+стабильность</td>
<td>+ stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Победа</td>
<td>+ Victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+революция</td>
<td>+ revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Союз</td>
<td>+ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Союз</td>
<td>+ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+коммунизм</td>
<td>+ communism</td>
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<tr>
<td>+фильмы</td>
<td>+ movies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Победа</td>
<td>+ Victory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Москва</td>
<td>+ Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+сыр</td>
<td>+ cheese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Союз</td>
<td>+ Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+тотальный контроль, уравниловка, отсутствие возможности заниматься любимым делом</td>
<td>+ total control, leveling, the inability to do what you love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+сплоченный</td>
<td>+ Close-knit, hang together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Равноправие</td>
<td>+ Equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Сильный, надежный</td>
<td>+ Strong, reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Совок</td>
<td>+ ‘Sovok’</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix 14. Victory Monument in Riga. Quotes from in-depth interviews

It would, of course, be very bad if the monument is demolished. For Latvia it was not a victory, but it was a victory over fascism. I don’t think that if the Second World War had ended differently, it would have been great for Latvia. I don’t want to think at all about what would have happened if fascism had not been defeated. [Interview 27, Russian-speaking female, 47 years old]

Of course, I am against the demolition of the monument. It can even be regarded as erasing history, as an attempt to erase history. This is an integral part of history, no matter how anyone relates to it. [Interview 10, Russian-speaking female, 18 years old]

In general, I am a supporter of preserving any monuments... It does not matter what monuments – to German soldiers, Soviet soldiers, American soldiers. A monument is memory and history, it must be preserved. [Interview 9, Russian-speaking male, 24 years old]

I am against the erasure of historical memory, and therefore, against the demolition of a monument, because it is memory. I even think that even if it was demolished, people would still come there with flowers... I understand that now there is such a rewriting of history that those who are 20 years younger than me, they will no longer know the history that we know, and it will seem to them that this is a monument to the Soviet invaders and occupation. [Interview 8, Russian-speaking female, 34 years old]

There is no need to demolish the monument. This is memory, this is history. Then, millions, 40 million people died. [Interview 7, Russian-speaking male, 55 years old]

I know that half of Latvia would really like to demolish them, but I don’t think that we need to demolish it, no. It’s a part of history, it’s still there and we should never forget the history. These monuments are still part of that history. The same is happening with ‘Black Lives Matter.’ It’s a part of history, and we have to remember that we were in the Soviet Union. [Interview 3, Latvian-speaking female, 31 years old]
Well, probably, there is no need to demolish it, but to move it; I think this is under discussion. There is no need to demolish monuments, if they are not vulgar or untrue, or, shall we say, affecting the honour of others, for example. The Victory Monument has an awesome construction, so I don't know. I have no specific opinion on this matter.

[Interview 29, Latvian-speaking male, 50 years old]

I am against the demolition of the monument, of course... Before that, I was also perplexed about why it was necessary to demolish the monument to Lenin? Why couldn't it just be taken out somewhere outside the city, why was it destroyed? Why destroy what has been built?

[Interview 15, Russian-speaking female, 41 years old]

Who is interested in demolition? This is our government, the same legionaries, the same nationalists. The proof that people still honour this monument is that on 9 May, a very large number of people from all over Riga and the Riga region are still coming just to lay flowers. I believe that only people who want to completely erase history are talking about the demolition of monuments, monuments of the Soviet Union. I do not think that the people are interested in this, because I myself and many other people signed the petition to prevent the demolition of the monument. For me personally, it will be a great tragedy if they do demolish it. If they get rid of it, it will erase not only the history, but also human lives.

[Interview 26, Russian-speaking female, 42 years old]

I think that it is necessary to preserve not only the Soviet, but even the Nazi ones. Because this is a story, and to erase it somehow, to abandon it and forget it, it is a wrong thing to do.

[Interview 11, Russian-speaking male, 18 years old]

I have a negative attitude to the demolition of the victory monument. In general, there is no need to demolish any monuments.

[Interview 19, Russian-speaking female, 24 years old]
Appendix 15. The official response to a request to Riga City Council regarding the events on 9 May

Atbilde par 9. maiju

Rīgas domes Sabiedrisko attiecību nodalījuma <nrs@riga.lv>

Wed 2/10/2021 2:25 AM

To: Ilina, Ksenija <xxxxxxxxxxxxx>

Labdien!

Nosūtām atbildes uz Jūsu atsūtītajiem jaunatājumiem par 9. maiju.

1) Vai Rīgas dome iesaistīs Rīgas notiekošo 9. maija svinību finansiāli vai organizatoriski atbalstīšanā?


2) Vai pastāv informācija (finanšu pārskati) par to, cik daudz līdzekļu Rīgas dome tērē saistībā 9. maija svinību Uzvaras parkā, Rīgā (piemēram, sakošanai pēc pasākumiem, apsardzes organizēšanai utt.)?


3) Kādā vēlā Rīgas dome sadarbojas ar organizācijām, kas saistītas ar 9. maija svinību rīkošanu un norisi (".9maijsLV", "Mūsu atmiņas MEMORIĀLS" u.c.); vai šāda sadarbība izpaužas tikai kā atjaunī piešķiršana? Vai pastāv sadarbība starp Rīgas domi un Maskavas namu vai Krievijas vēstniecību Latvijā?


4) Vai Rīgas dome sniedz finansiālu vai jebkādu citu veida palīdzību Otrā pasaules kara dalībniekiem un Latvijas legionāriem? Kādā apjomā?

No Rīgas pašvaldības budžeta programmas "Sociālie pabalstīšanai Rīgas pilštas ledzītājiem" iekļauj tiek maksāts svētku pabalstīšanai politiski represētām un nacionālās pretošanās kustības dalībniekiem 100 eiro apmēra katrā. Izmaksā tiek nodrošināta pēc iesnieguma saņemšanas, balstoties uz Rīgas domes saistošajiem noteikumiem "Par svētku pabalstu politiski represētām personām un nacionālās pretošanās kustības dalībniekiem".

5) Vai Rīgas dome veic darbības un pasākumus drošības pasākumā dienās, kad notiek ar 9. maiju un 16. martu atzīmēšanai saistītie atceres un svinību pasākumi?

Publiskie pasākumi 9. maijā un 16. martā ir plaši apmeklēti un, pēmot vērā, ka tajos tiek pausti pretēji viedokļi un pastāv konfrontācijas riski, lai tiktu nodrošināta sabiedriskā kārtība un drošība, Vaists policija izstrādā speciālu plānu sabiedriskās kārtības nodrošināšanai. Plāna realizāciju piedalās arī Rīgas
pašvaldības policija, nosakot tādus uzdevumus un resursu iesaistīšanu, kas ir atbilstoša pašpārvaldības iesaistīšanai galīgās skaitļa un pastāvīgās laikmeta aizstāvības riskiem, līdzīgi kā tas ir uz jebkuru plaši apmeklētu pasākumu, piemēram, pilsetas svētkiem, koncertiem, festivāliem, u.tml.


Atļaujas publisko pasākumu rīkošanai tiek izsniegts saskaņā ar "Publisku izklaides un svētku pasākumu drošības likuma" normām. Savukārt sapulču, gājienu un piketu pieteikumi tiek izskatīti saskaņā ar likuma "Par sapulcēm, gājeniem un piketēm" normām. Ne viens, ne otrs normatīvais neparedz iedzīvotāju aptauju veikšanu pirms lēmuma pieņemšanas. Ja arī ŝādas aptaujas tiktu veiktas, tās nedrikst tiktētājā lēmuma pieņemšanu, jo Latvijas Republikas Satversmes garantē pulcēšanās brīvību arī sabiedrībā mazāk populāru viedokļu paudējiem.

7) Vai Rīgas dome ir viedoklis attiecinājumā uz iniciatīvu, kas paredz nojaukt Uzvaras pieminekli Rīgā?

Rīgas dome nav plānots virzīt vai kā citādi atbalstīt iniciatīvu par pieminekļa demontažu. Vienlaikus diskusijās vērta ir ideja par skaidrojošo plākstīšu izvietošanu Uzvaras parkā ar piemineklīm. Uz plākšņiem būtu dažādas valodas skaidrota 2. pasaules kara vēsture Latvijas teritorijā. Tāpat skaidrojumi būtu par okupēšanas režīmiem, un to, ka padomju okupācija Latvijā turpinājās ilgā līdz kara beigām.

8) Kāda ir Rīgas dome attieksme pret to, ka 9. maija (kā datuma, kas nav iekļauts Latvijas oficiālo atceres dienu kalendārā) atzīmēšana rada šķēršanos sabiedrībā? Vai ridzinieki vēršas Rīgas domei, lai paustu savu neapmierinātību ar 9. maija pasākumu atbalstīšanu (atļauju piešķiršanu pasākumu rīkošanai un tirdzniecībai Uzvaras parkā)?

Minētie pasākumi Uzvaras parkā notiek arī 8. maijā, Nacisma sagrāves un Otrā pasaules kara upuru piemītām dienā, kas Latvijā ir oficiālā atceres diena. 9. maija pasākumu organizatori parasti ir tie paši un trakšā to kā savā veida iepriekšējais dienas turpinājumu. Kā jebkuri kontrolierišķi pasākumi (16. marta gājens, seksuālo minoritāšu gājiens u.c.) arī 9. maija notikumi sabiedrībā rada neviennozīmīgu reakciju, viedokļu sadursmes sociālos tikos un medijos. Pašvaldība savos lēmumos nedrīkst ietekmēties no atsevišķu sabiedrības grupu uzskatiem, tādēļ tā stingri vadās tikai un vienīgi no likumu normām.

Ar cieņu

Rīgas dome
Sabiedrisko attiecinājumu nodalā
Rātslaukums 1, Rīga, LV-1539
Tālrīkis: +371 67026049
Web: www.riga.lv
К.Ильиной

Уважаемая г-жа Ильина,

В связи с Вашим обращением по вопросу предоставления сведений для проведения исследования, посвященного памяти жителей Латвии о советском прошлом, хотели бы поблагодарить Вас за интерес, проявленный к деятельности Посольства, и сообщить следующее.

В рамках празднования Дня Победы Посольством совместно с дипломатами Азербайджана, Белоруссии, Казахстана и Узбекистана традиционно проводится официальный прием, торжественные церемонии возложения венков и цветов к памятнику Воинам-Освободителям Риги от немецко-фашистских захватчиков и к монументам советским солдатам на территории братских воинских захоронений по всей Латвии. При содействии Посольства ежегодно организуется поездка группы проживающих в Латвии ветеранов – участников обоорны и жителей блокадного Ленинграда на праздничные мероприятия по случаю Дня Победы в Санкт-Петербурге. Представители Посольства также принимают активное участие в мероприятиях, ежегодно проводимых общественными организациями Латвии по случаю памятных дат Великой Отечественной войны (Международный день освобождения узников фашистских концлагерей, Международная встреча ветеранов на Кургане Дружбы, День освобождения Саласпилса от немецко-фашистских захватчиков, День освобождения Риги...
от немецко-фашистских захватчиков и др.). В преддверии Дня Победы (8 мая) Посол России в Латвии Е.В.Лукьянов принимает участие в экumenической службе в Домском соборе в память о жертвах Второй мировой войны.

В 2020 году в связи с введением в Латвии с 13 марта по 9 июня режима чрезвычайной ситуации в условиях распространения коронавируса “Covid-19” программу мероприятий, посвященных празднованию Дня Победы, пришлось пересмотреть. Торжественные возложения венков и цветов прошли в индивидуальном порядке в строгом соответствии с требованиями страны по соблюдению социальной дистанции, в Интернет-пространстве состоялись онлайн-акции «Поздравь ветерана с Победой», «Латышы — Герои Советского Союза», «С Победой в сердцах», в рамках акции «Прибалтийский субботник» в индивидуальном порядке отдельные дипломаты выезжали к местам братских воинских захоронений для проведения уборки.

За счет средств, выделяемых по линии Правительственной комиссии по делам соотечественников за рубежом (ПКДСР), Посольством проводятся различные мероприятия и акции по поддержке проживающих в Латвии социально незащищенных соотечественников (в первую очередь, ветеранов Великой Отечественной войны), оказывается посильное содействие в реализации их творческих проектов, посвященных знаменательным датам совместной истории России и Латвии. В международном культурно-деловом центре «Дом Москвы» (г. Рига) на системной основе проходят выставки, показы фильмов, театральные и музыкальные представления для ветеранов, изыскана возможность предоставления помещений для проведения собраний и хранения документов ветеранских организаций. Ежегодно для их представителей также осуществляется бесплатная подписка на российские и латвийские периодические издания. По доброй традиции ветераны Великой Отечественной войны, проживающие в Латвии, получают персональные поздравления с Днем Победы от имени Президента Российской Федерации В.В.Путина. Ветеранам Великой Отечественной войны, празднующим свои юбилеи, сотрудники Посольства передают поздравления от имени Посла
России в Латвии Е.В.Лукьянова. В 2020 г. при содействии Посольства по линии ПКДСР более 500 ветеранов ВОВ получили единовременную материальную помощь, 42 ветеранам были переданы бесплатные путевки на прохождение санаторно-курортного лечения. В январе 2020 г. группа из 7 ветеранов-жителей блокадного Ленинграда была направлена в г. Санкт-Петербург для участия в праздничных мероприятиях, посвященных Дню полного освобождения Ленинграда от фашистской оккупации.

Относительно инициативы по демонтажу памятника Воинам-Освободителям Риги от немецко-фашистских захватчиков продолжаем придерживаться ранее обозначенной позиции — для России и её многонационального народа неприемлемы любые угрозы существованию и попытки исказить исходное значение данного монумента, построенного на пожертвования жителей Латвии. Подобные идеи вызывают естественное отторжение у здравомыслящих людей, свято чтущих подвиг поколений, победивших нацизм. Так, помимо актива наших соотечественников, горой встающих в ответ на любые попытки изменения изначальный замысел памятника, коллеги из МИД Латвии проявляют взвешенный прагматичный подход к данной тематике, к соблюдению двустороннего профильного соглашения с Российской Федерацией, защищающего этот архитектурный ансамбль от вероломных посягательств.