

Becoming European: EU Identity Formation in Latvia from 2004 to 2019

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Abstract: *This paper provides an analysis of the European Union (EU) citizen identity in Latvia over a 15-year timeline from 2004 to 2019, examining the ways in which feelings of “Europeanness” have grown among Latvian citizens since the nation’s initial accession to the EU. This article contains theoretical, historical, and statistical frames for its analysis. Drawing on Eurobarometer reports and their data annexes published between 2005 and 2019, this paper documents the quantitative evolution of EU identity in Latvia and demonstrates that the EU citizen identity in Latvia has grown in recent years, but that, in certain regards, it still lags in comparison to other EU member states. Specifically, this analysis highlights that the social component of EU identity in Latvia—the “actual” self-description that one is culturally European—lags behind the EU average. This article contributes significantly to the existing body of EU scholarship because of its specific focus on Latvian identity development through the lens of Eurobarometer reports, and because of its selected 15-year timeline, which started with its initial accession to the EU. This article posits that, should the EU identity in Latvia continue to grow and develop in the coming years, then Latvia could—at a time when other nations are suffering from Eurosceptic ideology—elevate the country’s social voice in the EU and position itself as truly European, thereby ending Latvia’s previous connections to Eastern society and solidifying itself as a Western nation.*

Keywords: *European Union, Latvia, EU Identity, Constructivism, Neo-Functionalism*

Introduction

With many member states come a plurality of cultures and different societies. As such, the European Union (EU) has had to grapple, throughout its widening and deepening process, with the ways in which it can effectively ensure that, despite these varying societies, all member states possess a set of social values and principles that align with each other. This consistent set of ideals enables cohesiveness throughout the union and across cultural dimensions, increasing cooperation and engagement along economic, political, and social lines. An example of how the EU has accomplished this is through its attempts to create a common, collective EU citizen (i.e., European) identity. Establishing and developing a European identity is viewed as an effective mechanism in addressing and countering the perceived lack of international and social legitimacy of the EU.

Constructed by one's leading beliefs, values, and personality, an individual's identity defines their essence and supplies them with a sense of belonging. Citizenship is then inherently connected to this because it grounds an identity in an established, material label. In the case of the EU, the formation of a European citizen identity is produced through bottom-up, collective value-messaging methods, which initiate unity and social ties among the member states in a federal-like process. In doing this, the EU develops itself as not only an economic union, but also a social union with its own cultural identity, allowing the EU to create a social foundation within its member states. Under this foundation, EU citizens, even though they have many different nationalities and languages, can share with each other a common, communal identity. The cultural barriers are then removed so that the collective, cross-border communities can better engage with each other and operate in their shared social world.

This identity construction has, however, come with challenges, especially in the early stages of membership for certain post-Soviet member states, such as Latvia, whose language and culture struggled under Soviet occupation for nearly five decades, during which the Soviet Union attempted to remove its culture and language to instate a Slavic majority. Because of this occupation, Latvia structured its governmental framework around the basis of its national identity once it regained independence, re-establishing and providing its culture with a platform on which to flourish after years of oppression. Owing to this, Latvia has a strong national identity—and any attempt to incorporate another identity (i.e., a European one) into its society is met with caution. Though more and more Latvians are beginning to identify with being European, the country still finds itself behind the majority of the other member states in certain regards with its EU identity. In 2019, for example, it ranked 19th out of the then 28 member states for the number of people

who claim to feel they are a citizen of the EU.¹ Latvia also has struggled in the past with sharing common values and principles with the EU, and the nation has consistently had one of the lowest rates among all member states for citizens who believe their voice is actually considered in the EU. This then raises the question: How has the EU citizen identity developed in Latvia since its accession to the union in 2004?

Analyzing this phenomenon through a constructivist and neo-functionalist framework, this essay will explore Latvia's EU identity development over a 15-year period from its accession in 2004 to 2019. As a former Soviet republic whose national language and culture is crucial to its identity, the Europeanization of Latvia is a unique case to analyze as this country transitions—socially, politically, and economically—from the East to the West.

1. Methodology and Structure

This article employs a mixed-methods approach to understanding national and European identity in post-Soviet Latvia, examining this phenomenon through a theoretical and statistical framework. The article's analysis will be both descriptive and exploratory, and its objective is to shed light on the formation of the EU identity in Latvian citizens, paying attention to the historical factors that both contributed to this construction and rendered it difficult.

The article will begin with an academic examination of two necessary theories attached to Europeanization: neo-functionalism and constructivism. This is included to explain the background context and functionality of EU social development and how the EU encourages a

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¹European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019," European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

supranational identity. The section to follow will provide an historical review of Latvia, contextualizing its recent history under Soviet occupation as a means to explain why it chose certain policies post-independence and why the nation functions the way it does today. The information for this section was obtained through a comprehensive review of previous scholarship in the field, focusing specifically on scholarship that analyzed the nation's ethnic relations and its post-independence policies, which played a significant role in shaping the Latvia of today. Latvian primary sources, such as ministry websites and national demographic reports, were reviewed, as well.

The section that follows consists of a detailed analysis of Eurobarometer reports and their data annexes. Conducted regularly since 1973, the Eurobarometer is a series of public opinion surveys, which address a wide variety of topical issues relating to the European Union throughout its member states. The Standard Eurobarometer is published twice a year, both in the fall and spring. Occasionally, such as after EU elections, a special edition of the Eurobarometer is published in addition to its two usual seasonal reports. This section's analysis begins with the fall 2004 edition, after which it analyzes, for the most part, only the spring editions in two-year increments from 2007 to 2019. However, in a couple cases, when the needed information is not in the spring reports, the section's analysis will draw on a different year. These cases are noted either in the body of the text or in footnotes for the sections. This portion of the paper highlights the statistical overview of Latvia's connection to the EU since its initial joining, and the figures aim to show the development of an EU citizen identity in Latvia throughout the past 15 years. To generate the tables that appear in that section, each spring Eurobarometer report—and the one fall 2004 report—was reviewed individually to locate common sections and questions that appear in each, and specifically within the data annexes that contain the raw data. The information within

these reports and annexes detail Latvia's rates of EU attachment and identity over the selected period of time. The final section of this article then concludes with an analysis on the importance of EU identity development, and—considering the current EU climate—why Latvia has a unique opportunity to gain soft power in the EU in the coming years.

Lastly, it is important to provide a brief summary of this article's contribution to current scholarship. Within the existing body of literature, this article incorporates a new perspective of analysis in scholarship relating to Latvia and its position in the EU. Previous studies and articles have analyzed Latvia and the EU together. However, these analyses were very much politically- and economically-oriented, or they focused on Latvia's relationship with the EU under the guise of the ethnic Russian community and their minority rights, therefore not analyzing the nation as a whole.² This article's social analysis, instead, focuses on contemporary EU identity in Latvia over an illustrative 15-year timeframe from 2004 to 2019, providing an updated image of this identity. And though the article does provide an overview of Latvia's reassessment of minority rights in the lead up to EU accession, this is not a judicial analysis, and that information is included only for the purpose of historical contextualization.

2. Neo-Functionalism and Constructivism: The Theoretical Groundings of Europeanization

Europeanization is the structural emergence and development—at the European level—of defined, dominant layers of political, legal, and social governance. That is, it is the establishment

² Edgars Eihmanis, "Cherry-Picking External Constraints: Latvia and EU Economic Governance, 2008–2014," *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 2 (2018): 231-249; Edgars Eihmanis, "Latvia and the European Union," *In Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2019; Geoffrey Pridham, "Legitimizing European Union Accession? Political Elites and Public Opinion in Latvia, 2003–2004," *Party Politics* 13, no. 5 (2007): 563-586; David McCollum et al., "Rethinking Labour Migration Channels: The Experience of Latvia from EU Accession to Economic Recession," *Population, Space and Place* 19, no. 6 (2013): 688-702; Emel Elif Tugdar, "Europeanization of Minority Protection Policies in Latvia: EU Conditionality and the Impact of Domestic Factors on the Rights of Ethnic Russians," *CEU Political Science Journal* 01 (2013): 32-54; David Galbreath, "European Integration through Democratic Conditionality: Latvia in the context of minority rights," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 14, no. 1 (2006): 69-87; Conor O'Dwyer and Katrina Schwartz, "Minority Rights after EU Enlargement: A Comparison of Antigay Politics in Poland and Latvia," *Comparative European Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 220-243.

of an agenda and the implementation of a set of directives intended to embody the principles of its member states, which are obligated to adhere to and integrate them within their societies.³ These structures then are political problem-solving entities that establish interactions among all the actors along the lines of a European ruleset. In streamlining these values and principles, Europeanization can more easily allow countries to adapt to and integrate these ideas within their own societies, while also developing their own European identity connected back to the union. Before countries join the EU, they are required to adhere to and reach these conditions, which makes it so every EU member state has layers of Europeanization already cemented within its society. These conditions, which include a steady economy, a stable democracy and the rule of law, and an acceptance of EU legislation, are known as the “Copenhagen criteria.”⁴ Meeting these criteria creates commonality within the union and ensures there is not a large disparity in value sets among all member states, even though each nation comes in with a different background, history, culture, and, oftentimes, language.

One of the leading theories attached to European integration is neo-functionalism, and specifically because of its attachment to the “spillover” effect when discussing EU integration. This theory posits that throughout the process of integration, that which transpires in one state will organically transfer over to another (i.e. spilling over), which, in turn, passes the torch of integration from one actor to the next and facilitates a continuous flow of values throughout the region.⁵ This spillover is ongoing, as well, and it is also considered to have “spill-around” and “spill-back” effects; that is, the process of EU integration does not transpire in one country and

³ Maria Cowles and Thomas Risse, “Conclusions,” in *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and domestic change* (2001): 217-37.

⁴ “Joining the EU,” European Union, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/joining-eu_en.

⁵ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, “Grand theories of European integration in the twenty-first century,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 8 (2019): 1113-1133, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1569711.

then end there as it passes to another. Instead, integration reaches a point in one country where it can spillover into another, but the integration itself is still ongoing and continuing, since these processes can never be fully complete and do not exist on one finite line.⁶ Considering this, it is important to recognize the impact that each member state has, especially those from similar regions and with similar histories, on one another in the process of Europeanization.

Both neo-functionalism and Europeanization share a bidirectional relationship, in which each one influences and facilitates the other. This connection assists in the EU's efforts to promote its social policy at the regional level because principles are more easily adapted and accepted when coming from a bottom-up framework, rather than a top-down one. In other words, nations are likely to respond better to trends that neighboring countries do, if they share a European identity, rather than those coming from the center of power, such as Brussels, because the process of acceptance appears more natural and organic, and not forced or imposed.⁷

As a second theoretical framing, this essay also follows Holland et al.'s (2001) constructivist definition on identity creation. This theory posits that the production and overall formation of identity can be understood as a process by which "people are constituted as agents as well as subjects of culturally constructed, socially imposed worlds," and that this formation turns "from experiencing one's scripted social positions to making one's way into cultural worlds as a knowledgeable and committed participant."⁸ Constructivism is an important tool of contextualization because identity is not something that is static or stationary, as explained by Holland et al., but instead something that is variable, interactive, and multivocal. Identity levels

⁶ Thomas Dunn, "Neo-Functionalism and the European Union," *E-International Relations*, (2012): 1-3; Carsten Stroyb Jensen, "Neo-functionalism," *European Union Politics* 4, (2013); Arne Niemann, "Neofunctionalism," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, (2017).

⁷ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Grand theories of European integration in the twenty-first century," *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 8 (2019): 1113-1133, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2019.1569711.

⁸ Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, Harvard University Press (2001).

increase and decrease naturally; therefore, these levels are not guaranteed to always remain where they are, even after periods of notable augmentation.⁹

As a theory, constructivism rests on the concept that humans are not separate from their environmental context or structure, and that the ideas and beliefs that form the “ideational” environment, within which actors find themselves, create and inform the actions of individuals. Constructivism postulates that citizens, in a collective fashion, reproduce or reconstruct this environment through their ongoing behavior and actions. According to constructivists, our social environment fundamentally defines both who we are and what we think.¹⁰

For the EU, constructivism highlights and showcases a number of important areas of study, especially when analyzing the cross-cultural implications with identity. For instance, constructivism suggests that identity is a core part of states’ decisions to integrate with the EU and within its society, since states that feel more “European” are more likely to cooperate with EU policies.¹¹ This cooperation then spurs more engagement and participation along economic, political, and social lines, resulting in a more cohesive and connected union. A 2012 study analyzing cooperation levels between individuals who did and did not classify themselves as having a European identity supports this. That is, participants in the study with a “European identity”—those whose identities crossed their own pre-given national boundaries and moved into a supranational one—had significantly

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thomas Risse, “Social Constructivism and European Integration, European Integration Theory, eds. Anje Wiener and Thomas Diez,” (2004).

¹¹ Jeffrey Checkel, “Constructivism and EU Politics,” in *Handbook of European Union Politics* (2007); Rey Koslowski, “A Constructivist Approach to Understanding the European Union as a Federal Polity,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 6, no. 4 (1999): 561-578.

greater levels of social cooperation when compared to those who do not have as strong a sense of an EU identity.¹²

Additionally, for the EU, constructivism's interconnectedness with identity works largely on the process of "becoming," and especially for newer member states—like the several former Soviet nations that joined in 2004, such as Latvia—which are trying to construct and develop their own identities and cultures after years of oppressive occupation. Many of these attempts to develop their national identities in the contemporary, post-Soviet period also came with stringent naturalization and language policies, in order to ensure that their citizens were "true" patriots. This is especially the case for Latvia, whose citizenship is based on connection to the state, as demonstrated by a sophisticated knowledge of the state language, culture, traditions, history, and society.¹³

As the Eurobarometer reports support, Latvian citizens hold their identity in a high position, of which citizenship is the crux—because it ultimately defines who they are. In addition, having already lost their identity under a "union" during the USSR occupation, many citizens are cautious of forfeiting any level of their current identity for the sake of the establishment of a European one. As a result, this process of "becoming" poses a unique but challenging opportunity for the EU. Officials in the EU must work on the establishment of its own "EU citizen" identity, yes, but also navigate around and be respectful of Latvia's national identity. Specifically, officials must be aware of the role this label plays in the citizens' minds for their own national belonging

¹² Francesco La Barbera and Pia Cariota Ferrara, "Being European in a Social Dilemma: The Effect of European Identity on Cooperation," *TPM: Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology* 19, no. 3 (2012).

¹³ Graham Smith, "The Ethnic Democracy Thesis and the Citizenship Question in Estonia and Latvia," *Nationalities Papers* 24, no. 2 (1996): 199-216; Artemi Romanov, "The Russian Diaspora in Latvia and Estonia: Predicting Language Outcomes," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 21, no. 1 (2000): 58-71; Lowell Barrington, "Nations, States, and Citizens: An Explanation of the Citizenship Policies in Estonia and Lithuania.," *Review of Central and East European Law* 21 (1995): 103. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157303595x00066>.

and placement in society. The EU needs to cross cultural dimensions to create its own common identity, but it must do so in a careful, targeted, and concentrated process—or else it runs the risk of delegitimizing the European identity. In doing this, the EU can produce its own identity but still have citizens hold onto their original, national ones. This concept—the existence of a regional and national identity within the same citizen—is similar to what takes place in other federal and federal-like countries, where individuals identify themselves along national and state lines.

3. Contemporary Latvian History: From Occupation to Independence to EU Accession

Latvia has experienced varying levels of independence over the past several centuries, with the most recent example taking place in the 20th century during the Soviet Union's occupation of Latvia. Under Soviet occupation, from approximately 1940 to 1990,¹⁴ Latvians were subjected to a number of policies that were systematically aimed at lowering the rate of ethnic Latvians—along with their language and culture—in the Latvian USSR republic, as a means to create a Soviet state dominated by Slavic ethnicities and remove the nation of its titular ethnic group.¹⁵

To instate an ethnic Russian majority in the nation, the USSR had to remove significant portions of Latvians from their home nation. And this is exactly what the communist regime did. The Soviet Union initiated mass deportations of the country's titular population—many of whom were women and children—throughout the 1940s to intense labor camps and uninhabitable parts of Russia. Many perished on the ride to such locations, as well, having been crammed into small box carts with dozens and dozens of others, without food or water to survive the long journey.¹⁶

¹⁴ Latvia entered a transitional period into independence in May 1990. The Soviet Union officially recognized Latvia's independence in September 1991, thereby ending the period of occupation.

¹⁵ This tactic of lowering the rates of the titular ethnicity in non-Slavic republics took place all over the Soviet Union. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—coming from the Baltic region—experienced similar levels of hardship as a result of these policies, including deportations, executions, and the oppression of their cultural lifestyles.

¹⁶ Henrihs Strods and Matthew Kott, "The File on Operation 'Priboi': A Re-Assessment of the Mass Deportations of 1949," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 1-36; Aleksandr Moiseevich Nekrich, *The punished peoples: The deportation and fate of Soviet minorities at the end of the Second World War*, Norton, 1978.

The two largest deportations took place in 1941 and 1949. In Latvia, approximately 35,000 Latvians, some of whom were children under the ages of ten, were deported to, and subsequently died in, labor camps and uninhabitable parts of Russia as part of the 1941 deportation campaign. Latvia's 1949 deportations then saw the removal of 42,000 Latvians from their homeland. Over 11,000 of the 42,000 deported in 1949 were children. All in all, at least 100,000 ethnic Latvians are documented as having been deported as part of these initiatives, but these are only estimates and likely do not reflect the true number, since Soviet authorities largely withheld documentation and information around these population-reducing operations.¹⁷

*Table One: Ethnic Breakdown in Latvia from mid-1900s to Present Day*¹⁸

Latvia: 1935 - 2018								
<i><u>Ethnic Group</u></i>	<i><u>1935</u></i>	<i><u>1959</u></i>	<i><u>1970</u></i>	<i><u>1979</u></i>	<i><u>1989</u></i>	<i><u>2000</u></i>	<i><u>2011</u></i>	<i><u>2018</u></i>
<i>Latvian</i>	76%	62%	57%	54%	52%	58%	62%	62%
<i>Russian</i>	11%	27%	30%	33%	34%	30%	27%	25%
<i>Ukrainian</i>	0.10%	1%	2%	3%	4%	3%	2%	2%
<i>Belarusian</i>	1%	3%	4%	5%	5%	4%	3%	3%
<i>Other</i>	11.90%	7%	7%	5%	5%	5%	6%	8%

¹⁷ Heinrihs Strods and Matthew Kott, "The File on Operation 'Priboi': A Re-Assessment of the Mass Deportations of 1949," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 33, no. 1 (2002): 1-36; Philip Roeder, "Soviet Federalism and Ethnic Mobilization," *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991): 196-232.

¹⁸ Information was obtained from relevant censuses and national population data for 2018.

To mitigate the population loss and ensure a Slavic dominance, as evidenced by Table One, Soviet authorities brought thousands of ethnic Russians into Latvia, and placed them in the metropolitan areas of Riga, Liepaja, and Daugavpils. To this day, these cities still house the majority of the country's ethnic Russian populations.¹⁹ As a result of their resettlement, and the preceding deportations, the Latvian population lost significant, noticeable portions of their ethnicity during Soviet occupation. Nearing independence in 1989, Latvians barely made up half of the nation's population.

The phenomenon of "Russification" officially took hold in Latvia once the Russians had been resettled. The Soviet government sanctioned the removal of Latvian languages, holidays, cultural traditions, and history from many social and educational spheres. Russian language, culture, and traditions replaced them, consequently becoming the "superior" culture in occupied-Latvia. This facilitated the growth of an anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiment among the nation's titular ethnic population, and, ironically, it also had unintended consequences of strengthening Latvian national pride, which later on led to calls for independence.²⁰

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the situation did begin to change. After the success of various peaceful protests, such as the region-wide Baltic Way movement, and the Soviet government's relaxation of its social and political hold on its republics, Latvia publicly denounced the past five decades of Soviet occupation, announcing the commencement of a transitional period for the nation's full independence.²¹ By September 1991, this goal had been achieved; the Soviet

¹⁹ "Latvia - Russians," Minority Rights Group, February 6, 2021, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/russians-4/>.

²⁰ Janis Sapiets, "Out of Latvia," *Index on Censorship* 10, no. 2 (1981): 58-59; Mehmet Oğuzhan Tulun, "Russification Policies Imposed on the Baltic People by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union," *International Crimes and History (Uluslararası Suçlar ve Tarih)* 14 (2013).

²¹ The Baltic Way was a peaceful protest movement in which Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians linked arms with each other from Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius (the three Baltic capitals) as a way to express their wish to be free from Soviet occupation. This movement represented an important moment in Baltic history. The three countries' ability to all come together under one umbrella was specifically unique because it was something that both historically did not

Union itself recognized Latvia, along with neighboring Estonia and Lithuania, as a sovereign, independent country not attached to the USSR.²² This was a defining moment of triumph and hope for Latvians because now they finally had the opportunity to significantly develop their nation, freely speak their language, and create the society on which they were working before the 1940 illegal occupation.

However, now independent, Latvia found itself with a sizable ethnic Russian population who, for many, resembled the remnants of a dark, troubling past, away from which Latvian society wanted to break. And, on the other end, Russians in Latvia found themselves unwelcome and unwanted—sentiments that encouraged ethnic consolidation, causing the ethnic Russians to isolate themselves from the rest of Latvia in areas such as Daugavpils and concentrated enclaves in Riga. Ethnic Russians likely feared what a world would look like in which their ethnicity and language were no longer qualities that awarded them in society, but rather things that degraded their social position, since they were aware of, because of the Soviet oppression, the negative sentiments Latvians likely felt toward them.

To revitalize its culture and identity, the Latvian government passed policies that were rooted in its national language and culture in the 1990s, thereby rendering the country a nation-state, whose goal was to promote its own identity after years of having it oppressed, targeted, and degraded.²³ Paramount of these policies were those surrounding citizenship and the restrictive

happen and currently does not happen often, since all three nations like to assert their own uniqueness and identity from one another.

²² Serge Schmemmann, "Soviet Turmoil: Soviets Recognize Baltic Independence Ending 51-Year Occupation," *New York Times*, September 7, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/09/07/world/soviet-turmoil-soviets-recognize-baltic-independence-ending-51-year-occupation-3.html>.

²³ Richard Mole, "State- and Nation-Building: the Politics of Identity" in *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, discourse and power in the post-communist transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Routledge, 2012. 1-39; David Cameron and Mitchell Orenstein, "Post-Soviet Authoritarianism: The Influence of Russia in Its 'Near Abroad,'" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 28, no. 1 (2012): 1-44; Ammon Cheskin and Angela

requirements that encompassed the naturalization process. Once Latvia gained independence, the nation chose not to grant automatic citizenship to all permanent residents or individuals born on Latvian soil. Instead, the government granted citizenship based on ethnicity and familial relation to Latvia prior to the 1940 annexation. The naturalization process in Latvia was especially challenging for ethnic Russians, since a large component of it required advanced knowledge of Latvian—a complex language, which does not share linguistic similarities with Russian or other Slavic languages. Other aspects of the process, such as an awareness of Latvian history, culture, and sometimes an oath of allegiance, made it difficult for ethnic Russians to become citizens.²⁴

Instead of becoming a Latvian citizen or moving back to Russia, many ethnic Russians remained in Latvia (to the disappointment of ethnic Latvians) and received non-citizen passports, which signified that they had no state to which they were attached (i.e. stateless residents). These individuals are referred to as “non-citizens” in current discourse related to citizenship. Though allowed to reside in Latvia, non-citizens were and still are excluded from all political rights, meaning they are unable to vote or stand as candidates in local and national elections. Non-citizens are excluded from a range of jobs, as well. Until 2007, they were also unable to travel throughout Europe without a visa. The stigma attached to this label of statelessness has initiated a crisis of identity for many in this minority community, whose feelings of isolation are only exacerbated by the fact that they know they have no national identity of which they are a part.²⁵

Kachuyevski, “The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 1 (2019): 1-23.

²⁴ Graham Smith, “The Ethnic Democracy Thesis and the Citizenship Question in Estonia and Latvia,” *Nationalities Papers* 24, no. 2 (1996): 199-216; Artemi Romanov, “The Russian Diaspora in Latvia and Estonia: Predicting Language Outcomes,” *Journal of Multilingual Multicultural Development* 21, no. 1 (2000): 58-71; Lowell Barrington, “Nations, States, and Citizens: An Explanation of the Citizenship Policies in Estonia and Lithuania,” *Review of Central and East European Law* 21 (1995): 103, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157303595x00066>; Dace Akule, “The Europeanization of Latvia: Becoming Good Europeans,” *Policy Documentation Center* (2007).

²⁵ Dace Akule, “The Europeanization of Latvia: Becoming Good Europeans,” *Policy Documentation Center* (2007); Martins Paparinskis, “Political and Electoral Rights of Non-Citizen Residents in Latvia and Estonia: Current

This social and national alienation, in turn, created a set of integrational tensions between the Latvian population and the ethnic Russians, since the Russian community also began to operate and exist within different linguistic and cultural worlds, despite living in the same country. To Latvians, however, the social positionality of ethnic Russians mattered little, since the country was focused on its own national development, culture, and language. Consequently, these nation-state policies impacted Latvia's pre-accession phase for EU membership, because the nation received staunch criticism from the EU for its treatment and representation of minority rights, specifically for the ethnic Russian minority. Latvia's pre-accession period to the EU is a stark example of how social policy has been Europeanized—one tool used in the EU's process of forming a European identity in its member states and promoting European integration. Before joining the EU in 2004, the former Soviet-occupied nation had to meet a set of standards to ensure that it was in line with the EU's value system. Simply put, Latvia had to Europeanize itself. And to Europeanize itself meant to review how the country treated and handled minority rights. Eventually, Latvia did recognize the need to address the issues surrounding its ethnic Russian minority and to Europeanize its national policies (i.e. implement European values), or else it ran the risk of not meeting the EU's requirements for membership. The Baltic country was therefore no longer able to ignore its Russian minority community, even if a large portion of its citizens may have preferred to do so.²⁶

The EU observed "important shortcomings" in Latvia's application when it came to minority rights and their working conditions, since it was immensely difficult for the Russian community to find work, which as a result threw the community into the country's lowest socio-

Situation and Perspectives," *European Parliament and*, April 2018, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/604953/IPOL_BRI\(2018\)604953_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/604953/IPOL_BRI(2018)604953_EN.pdf).

²⁶ Peter van Elsuwege, "Russian-Speaking Minorities in Estonia and Latvia: Problems of Integration at the Threshold of the European Union," *ECMI Working Paper Series* 10, no. 20 (2004): 1-68.

economic status.²⁷ Out of necessity, and to address this labeled shortcoming, Latvia re-evaluated previous citizenship and labor policies, reconstructing them to reach the EU's standards, additionally addressing the future of the community and considering ways to further integrate them in Latvia. Latvia provided non-citizens with a special status in the country and corresponding rights.²⁸

However, to obtain all the rights of an EU citizen, it was necessary for non-citizens to acquire Latvian citizenship—their stateless passports did not suffice in this regard. As a result, a high number of non-citizens underwent the process of naturalization shortly before and after Latvia joined the EU, because they recognized there were significant benefits that came with this supranational citizenship. This is demonstrated through the decreasing number of non-citizens in Latvia. In early 2003, before Latvia joined the EU, there were roughly 500,000 in Latvia, who made up almost 22 percent of the nation's population. The figure then decreased to 18 percent by 2006, with less than 420,000 of Latvian residents classified as stateless. To this day, there are less than 220,000 non-citizens in Latvia, which has a total population of approximately 1.8 million residents. Non-citizens currently comprise roughly 10 percent of the nation's total population.²⁹

The benefits associated with Latvia's EU membership therefore appear to have had a positive effect on the nation's Russian community, giving a larger portion of them a further reason

²⁷ This community still occupies the lowest socio-economic status in Latvia. Areas with a high ethnic Russian population, such as the Latgale region, are the poorest in the nation.

²⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Resolution RESCMN(2002)8 on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Estonia," Refworld, Council of Europe: Committee of Ministers, June 13, 2002. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/51de6daf4.html>; Richard Mole, "State- and Nation-Building: the Politics of Identity," in *The Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the European Union: Identity, discourse and power in the post-communist transition of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*. Routledge, 2012. 1-39.

²⁹ "Latvia - Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions," European Commission, 2020, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-40_en. "Distribution of Latvian population by nationality," Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 2020, https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/assets/ISVP_Latvija_pec_VPD_2020.pdf.

to obtain Latvian citizenship, since now the doors to the rest of Europe were being opened. In this sense, the EU accomplished its goals and notably pushed Latvian politics further to the left, affecting national policy on economic and social levels. This push prevented Latvia from continuing to block out its Russian minority population from public discourse, and it also gave many in the community a needed encouragement to naturalize.³⁰

In opting into and agreeing to these standards, Latvia accepted, and additionally promoted, even if not openly or directly, the existence of a Europeanized social policy. Though the government opted into the European social policy, this does not necessarily mean the nation's citizens themselves developed a European identity as a result. In fact, many Latvians lacked a clear attachment to the EU, or faith in its institutions, in the early- to mid-2000s. They were likely wary of becoming incorporated into any union-like institution and losing out on national sovereignty after only just recently reclaiming it. This resulted in an initial lackluster ability for the EU to cultivate a European identity in the nation, as the next section will detail.³¹

Nonetheless, two-thirds of the nation's population voted to join the EU in 2003 and the Latvian government successfully moved forward with its application. In 2004, along with its two Baltic neighbors, Latvia joined the EU, signaling an important moment in its transition from Eastern to Western society. In becoming a member state and in re-assessing its national policies, Latvia did make a trade-off: in order to join the EU and integrate into an economic union that would spur development and provide the nation with newfound opportunities, it placed European values and standards above its own national ones at a crucial moment in the country's development. To this day, however, as the article will later analyze, a larger portion of Latvian

³⁰ Edgars Eihmanis, "Latvia and the European Union," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. 2019.

³¹ European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004," European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf

citizens still lack certain EU values and principles, believing that EU Member States are not close to each other in terms of shared values, and that Latvians' voices do not count in the EU.

4. 2004 to 2019: 15 Years of EU Identity in Latvia

Latvia's accession to the EU did not initially result in the strong creation of an EU citizen identity. In the early years of membership, Latvians lacked a clear connection to the union, and they also did not possess a feeling of "Europeanness," especially within the ethnic Russian population, even though the EU had previously advocated for this community.³² Other EU member states likely still considered the country "Eastern" because of its status as a former Soviet republic and geographic proximity to Russia, which ethnic Latvians strongly disliked, owing to the label's association with Russia.³³ This furthered their lack of connection with other EU member states and the EU as a whole in the early years, leading Latvians to side overwhelmingly with their national identity over a European one.

Half of Latvians in 2004, according to the first Eurobarometer report for which Latvia was an EU member, identified themselves only by their nationality, rather than as both their national identity and a European one. Only 29 percent of Latvians in 2004 claimed they had a social attachment to the EU flag, as well, which was 21 percentage points behind the national average. To Latvians back then, their language, culture, and history defined their national identity—European social integration had yet to really take hold. Considering this, it is no surprise that 84 percent of Latvians in 2004 claimed to be proud of their national identity, whereas only 51 percent

³² Latvia's predominantly ethnic Russian city, Daugavpils, was the only city in Latvia to overwhelmingly oppose joining the EU in 2003. This community viewed the EU as a tool to "Westernize" Latvia, which to them likely meant further shedding the country of its Russian past, even though this was far from the truth, since the EU was the factor that drove Latvia to rethink and revisit its post-Soviet policies, with which many from the ethnic Russian community struggled.

³³ All Baltic nations prefer the term "Northern" when describing their geography. This label does not attach them to Russia.

of Latvians claimed to be proud to be European: 17 percentage points lower than the EU average at the time.³⁴

This was the second lowest response rate among all member states at the time, as well, and it was only one point ahead of the UK, for which 50 percent of the nation’s citizens claimed to be proud to be European. In 2004, Latvia also lagged behind the regional average of most other member states on perceived importance of European institutions, such as the European Parliament or the European Commission, and whether or not these institutions delivered meaningful change. And when hypothetically asked whether its citizens would be sad if the EU were immediately disbanded and annulled, the majority of Latvians claimed they would be indifferent, with even 11 percent of the nation’s respondents stating they would be relieved.³⁵

Table Two: Percentage of Latvians Believing their Voice Counts in the EU (Source: Eurobarometer Reports from 2005 to 2019)

<i>Statement: My Voice <u>Counts</u> in the EU</i>								
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2019</u>
Latvians in Agreement	17%	18%	14%	10%	17%	23%	20%	30%
EU Average	39%	35%	38%	30%	28%	42%	44%	56%
Latvia's Rank among EU Nations	24 / 25	26 / 27	27 / 27	27 / 27	26 / 27 *	26 / 28	28 / 28*	28 / 28*

³⁴ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004,” European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf.

³⁵ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004,” European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf.

* In 2013, Latvia tied with Italy. In 2017 and 2019, Latvia tied for last place along with Estonia and Greece.

Latvians have also struggled over the years with believing that their voice has an impact in the EU. Only 30 percent of Latvians in 2019 believed that their voice mattered in the EU. Though this is nearly double the figure of what Latvians felt in 2004, it was still the lowest among all member states.³⁶ One of the smallest nations in the EU, Latvians likely associate population size with voice strength, and since Latvia has less than two million residents and is geographically on the outskirts of traditional EU territory—its citizens lack faith that their voices and their worries are truly heard. The nation has consistently lagged behind the EU average in this regard. Because of this, it is no surprise that Latvians also lack a shared value system with the rest of the EU. As of 2019, only 32 percent of Latvians (the lowest among all member states) believed that the EU nations are close to each other in terms of shared values, showcasing the gap that exists between Latvia's and the EU's democratic principles. Latvians are historically anti-immigration and do not align with the EU on social issues, such as LGBT rights, as well, and the nation has been cited before as being one of the worst European countries for individuals of the LGBT community.³⁷ In fact, 74 percent of Latvians view immigration from non-EU member states as a negative thing. Estonians possess the same amount of its citizens feeling this, placing these two Baltic nations in second-to-last place, with the Czech Republic ranking as last among all member states.³⁸ This causes another challenge in the country's development of "becoming" or "being" European, since

³⁶ European Commission, "Eurobarometer Survey 91.5: The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey," European Union, September 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>.

³⁷ European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019," European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

³⁸ European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019," European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

it cannot fully align its values cohesively with the EU's—and possessing a similar value system is imperative to form a shared identity.

Table Three: Latvia's Perceived Benefits of EU Membership from 2004 to 2019 (Source: Eurobarometer Reports from 2005 - 2011, Post-Election Eurobarometer Reports of 2014 & 2019)³⁹

<i>Statement: On balance, our country benefits from being a member of the EU</i>						
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2019</u>
Latvians in Agreement	51%	55%	38%	47%	-	71%
EU Average	53%	59%	56%	52%	-	68%
Latvia's Rank among EU Nations	15 / 25	18 / 27	25 / 27	21 / 27 *	-	19 / 28
<i>Statement: Generally-speaking, our membership in the EU is a "good thing"</i>						
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2019</u>
Latvians in Agreement	40%	37%	25%	25%	42%	55%
EU Average	56%	57%	53%	47%	51%	68%
Latvia's Rank among EU Nations	24 / 25	26 / 27 *	27 / 27	27 / 27	21 / 28	19 / 28

* In 2007, Latvia tied with Hungary; in 2011, the tie was with Greece.

Interestingly, Latvia has in the past had low rates of believing its EU membership is a actually good thing, despite having significant portions of the population recognizing that the

³⁹ These two questions were not included in the Eurobarometer reports after 2011. Different and more specific versions of the question were included, which asked about the benefits from certain actions and initiatives. These answers were then published in the reports.

country has, in fact, benefited from this very membership. It is also important to note that, in the first half of its membership, the belief that the EU is a good thing for Latvia decreased, indicating that Latvians were likely not content with how the first seven years played out. Shown in the table above, there was a significant disparity between believing membership is a good thing versus recognizing the benefits of that very membership. This is likely a result of the collateral effects that came with membership. On the surface, these two concepts would seem to be interconnected, but that was not the case in Latvia. That is, for Latvians, they can recognize that, yes, there are tangible benefits associated with EU membership: more professional and educational opportunities, an integrated economy, and easier travel that comes with the free movement.⁴⁰ In fact, 68 percent of Latvians in 2019 even listed the free movement of people, goods, and services as the most positive result of the EU.⁴¹ However, these benefits do not detract from the fact that EU membership, in a way, lowers Latvia's sovereignty. After five decades of Soviet occupation, Latvians were ready and eager to begin constructing a nation in the exact manner that they wanted. Though Latvia is largely free to make its own decisions, it is not entirely sovereign, as all member states are not, because it must adhere to certain standards and principles coming from the EU—standards that are social, economic, political, and judicial in nature. This was the initial trade-off it made in the early 2000s. In 2004, 11 percent of Latvians even cited the loss of cultural identity—as opposed to, for example, educational, economic, professional, or travel benefits—as the leading thing that the EU represents for them personally.⁴²

⁴⁰ In Eurobarometer reports, Latvians consistently label professional and educational opportunities as one of the largest benefits of being part of the EU. Latvia does not have many of these opportunities within its nation, so a number of its citizens have left in recent years to seek out jobs and education elsewhere in Europe. This phenomenon is known as “brain drain.”

⁴¹ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019,” European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

⁴² European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004,” European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf.

Because of this, there were, and likely still are, Latvian citizens who label certain effects of EU membership as negative, and therefore choose to view the membership itself as not a positive thing, even if they recognize that there are tangible benefits associated with it. In 2019, as reported in a post-election edition of the Eurobarometer, a little over half of respondents, 55 percent, claimed that EU membership is a good thing.⁴³ 24 percent of Latvians, nonetheless, claimed in 2019 that their nation would be better off to face the future outside of the EU.⁴⁴ This 55 percent figure—though low in percentage and thirteen points below the EU average—is a large increase from what the country said eight years prior, during which period only a quarter of Latvian citizens claimed membership was a good thing.⁴⁵ Although an increase, Latvia is again still lagging behind in regard to whether or not membership is a good thing when compared to its Baltic neighbors of Estonia and Lithuania. These two neighboring nations were both in the top three among all member states in believing the EU is a good thing for them. Lithuania was ranked number one, with 91 percent of its citizens citing EU membership as a “good thing;” Estonia ranked third, and it had 87 percent of its respondents feel this way.⁴⁶

As an important note, for unknown or unspecified reasons the answers to these two survey questions were not published in the Standard Eurobarometer reports, or their data annexes, after 2011. Instead, the survey posed similar questions to prospective member states, such as Turkey, Serbia, and so forth, and then published their responses in the standard report. 2014 and 2019 were

⁴³ European Commission, “Eurobarometer Survey 91.5: The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey,” European Union, September 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>.

⁴⁴ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019,” European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

⁴⁵ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 75: Spring 2011,” European Union, August 2011, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb75/eb75_anx_full_fr.pdf.

⁴⁶ European Commission, “Eurobarometer Survey 91.5: The 2019 Post-Electoral Survey,” European Union, September 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2019/post-election-survey-2019-complete-results/report/en-post-election-survey-2019-report.pdf>.

the only years post-2011 that contained results related to this question, which were published in the post-EU elections special editions of the Eurobarometer. This is why Table Three's timeline varies from the others, and also why information from 2014 does not appear on the top-half of it.

Table Four: EU Citizenship in Latvia (Source: Eurobarometer Reports from 2005 to 2019)⁴⁷

<i>Statement: You feel you are a <u>citizen</u> of the EU</i>							
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2019</u>
Latvians in Agreement	52%	52%	48%	56%	69%	74%	76%
EU Average	67%	53%	62%	62%	67%	68%	73%
Latvia's Rank among EU Nations	21 / 25	15 / 27	24 / 27	20 / 27	17 / 28	14 / 28	19 / 28

EU identity in Latvia has, however, been on the rise, despite these aforementioned factors. As the years have progressed, the popularity of the EU in Latvia has grown—and with it grew an EU citizen identity. This growth has not been as large as other member states, such as its northern neighbor Estonia, which simultaneously joined the EU when Latvia did in 2004. But, its further integration with European identity is still steadily increasing. This means that Latvians' views of their voices not counting in the EU or that EU membership is not necessarily a good thing did not entirely dissuade or hamper their EU identity development. Demonstrated in the table above,

⁴⁷ The 2009 Eurobarometer did not contain information related to this question; consequently, that year does not appear in this table.

connection to the EU and the feeling of European citizenship has grown over the past decade in Latvia. In 2004, 52 percent of Latvians claimed to be a citizen of the EU. This was 15 percentage points below the EU average, placing Latvia in the bottom four of all 25 member states at the time. It lacked a social place in the EU, with nearly half of its citizens not feeling an attachment to the union.⁴⁸ However, the EU citizen identity grew at a rapid rate from 2013 to 2019, during which it not only increased by 20 percentage points, but it also surpassed the EU average, thereby no longer placing the country behind the social average among member states.⁴⁹

15 years since the nation officially joined the EU, approximately 76 percent of residents associated themselves with being a citizen of the EU: three percentage points above the European average. One factor likely influencing this increase is that, after 15 years as a member state, there are individuals who grew up under the EU now being surveyed, and therefore were exposed to the EU in some way or another during their developmental and adolescent years. Having this exposure while developing their social opinions and perspectives, these younger individuals are the portion of the population who have really experienced the benefits of being in the EU. From a number of educational opportunities, increased exposure to the English language, and a regionally connected economy, this subset of the population has significantly more access to society than its parents' generation—and this is something they likely realize. As such, it can be inferred that this younger population has stronger feelings of EU identity than those surveyed in years before, because the majority of this younger demographic's upbringing took place in an EU member state. In relation

⁴⁸ European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004," European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf.

⁴⁹ European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 79: Spring 2013," European Union, July 2013, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/standard/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2013/surveyKy/1120>; European Commission, "Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019," European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

to this, Latvia in recent years ranks above other member states, which have historically had higher rates of belonging and been part of the EU longer; however, these nations, such as France and Italy, are experiencing the rise of populist parties in their countries, which are therefore affecting how citizens view and engage with the EU.⁵⁰

47 percent of Latvians trusted the EU in 2004, during which regional trust for the union and its institutions was at an even 50 percent average. 15 years later, 51 percent of Latvians claimed to trust the EU. Though this is only a four percent increase from 2004, it is noteworthy when compared to the EU average over the years. That is, in 2019, trust for the EU among all member states averaged out at 44 percent: six percentage points lower than it was in 2004.⁵¹ This decrease in trust reflects the growing populism in Europe, which has targeted the EU and its image among member states, claiming it strips nations of social and economic sovereignty. Nonetheless, while this decrease has manifested itself in other nations, Latvia has so far not fallen victim to it, instead growing its trust—albeit by only a few points—since the nation joined the EU.

*Table Five: Latvians’ Attachment to the EU Flag (Source: Eurobarometer Reports from 2005 to 2017)*⁵²

<i>Statement: You identify with the EU flag</i>					
	<u>2004</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2017</u>

⁵⁰ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019,” European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

⁵¹ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004,” European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf; European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019,” European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

⁵² This table, similar to Table Three, does not follow the two-year structure because information about citizens’ attachments to the EU flag was not included in several of the Eurobarometer reports. The Eurobarometer does not always ask the same survey questions each year and in each seasonal edition. Information after 2017 for feelings of identifying with the EU flag also could not be found, which is why the table does not include information from 2019.

Latvians in Agreement	29%	27%	42%	41%	44%
EU Average	50%	54%	53%	53%	56%
Latvia's Rank among EU Nations	25 / 25 *	26 / 27	20 / 27 *	25 / 28	19 / 28

* In 2004, Latvia tied for last place with the Netherlands. In 2012, Latvia tied for 20th place with France.

More and more Latvians identified with the EU's flag in 2017 compared to when the country joined in 2004. Flags play an important role in forming identity and developing a personal attachment to an institution, such as the EU, through which citizens can share a common pride and social connection.⁵³ In 2004, only 29 percent of respondents in the Eurobarometer report indicated that they identified with the EU flag. This figure was 21 percentage points below the EU average and placed Latvia with the lowest level of attachment to the flag: a position for which it tied with the Netherlands. Three years later, 2007 saw an even lower level of attachment to the flag in Latvia, 27 percent, even though the EU average had risen by four percentage points since 2004. However, the country's identification with the flag began to grow around the same time that the EU citizen identity also started to increase. In 2012, 42 percent of respondents cited an attachment to the flag, ranking Latvia 20th out of the 27 member states, and only 11 percentage points behind the EU average. Five years later, in 2017, 44 percent of Latvians claimed an attachment to the flag.

⁵³ Brent Nelsen and James Guth, "Religion and the Creation of European Identity: The Message of the Flags," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14, no. 1 (2016): 80-88.

When considering this, citizenship and attachment to the flag appear to develop symbiotically, but at differing quantitative levels.⁵⁴ As Latvians develop an EU identity, they also cultivate feelings of attachment to the flag, since it acts as a tangible representation of the greater European region.

Table Six: Overview of How Latvians Describe their Identity (Source: Standard Eurobarometer Report, Spring 2019)

Self-Described Levels of Europeanness in 2019		
<i>Do you see yourself as...</i>	Latvian Average	EU Average
Total “European”	60%	65%
Total “more national than European”	87%	88%
Total “more European than national”	12%	10%
Nationality Only	39%	33%
Nationality and then European	48%	55%
European and then Nationality	10%	8%
Only European	2%	2%

⁵⁴ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 62: Autumn 2004,” European Union, May 2005, https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf; European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 67: Spring 2007,” European Union, November 2007, https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/eb/eb67/eb67_en.pdf; European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 78: Spring 2012,” European Union, 2012, <https://lawsdocbox.com/Immigration/74338008-European-citizenship.html>; European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 87: Spring 2017,” European Union, August 2017, <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/standard/yearFrom/1974/yearTo/2017/surveyKy/2142>.

In the EU, there are four main frames for deciphering the structure of one's identity. These include: 1) Nationality only, such as one being solely Latvian; 2) National and regional, such as Latvian citizens who describe themselves secondly as Europeans; 3) Regional and then national, such as a European who identifies secondly as Latvian; or 4) Solely regional, an individual who defines himself as only European—with no national identity connected. While 76 percent of Latvians consider themselves citizens of the EU in 2019, only 60 percent of Latvians actually described themselves as “total” Europeans—five points behind the EU average. 87 percent of the nation's citizens also claim to be more Latvian than European, a figure that aligns with their strong national pride, and then 48 percent identify with their national identity first and their European one second. Approximately 39 percent of Latvians, on the other hand, only identify themselves based on their nationality, excluding European from their self-description. This is six percentage points above the EU average. So, though three-quarters of Latvians will say they are EU citizens, this does not entirely mean they view themselves as citizens on a social level.⁵⁵ Instead, they likely view themselves as citizens on a practical level: possessing an EU passport, having economic access to other member states, being allowed to travel freely, and so forth.

Conclusion: EU Identity in Latvia

Overall, this analysis indicates that the EU citizen identity is growing in Latvia. But, as the constructivist framework maintains, this continual growth is not guaranteed—identity levels increase and decrease naturally. As has been shown in member states all around the EU, a myriad of social, political, and economic factors can also reduce support for and attachment to the union. This has been the case in France, Italy, Poland, and Hungary, for example. To further legitimize

⁵⁵ European Commission, “Standard Eurobarometer 91: Spring 2019,” European Union, August 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/survey/getsurveydetail/instruments/standard/surveyky/2253>.

itself internationally and reduce the rate at which Euroscepticism grows, it is necessary that the EU maintains a collective identity throughout its member states, which transcends ethnic, linguistic, and cultural lines, bringing all citizens together under the umbrella of “European” and allowing for mechanisms of integration, as neo-functionalism posits, to spill over and help spur further integration from country to country. In doing this, the EU establishes itself as both an economic and a social union, and additionally provides itself with a deeper layer of legitimacy and soft power in the global community. In Latvia, it will be important for EU institutions to capitalize on the momentum of this current identity development and initiate programs that could garner more connection to the union on a citizenship or social level, therefore cementing this Baltic nation as “European” and giving it a socially grounded position in the EU.

Latvia is an interesting case to analyze in the EU—for economic, social, and political reasons. This essay focused on the social and historical side of Latvia’s role in the EU, and specifically on citizen identity formation, demonstrating that though Latvia struggled with sharing in the feeling of being an EU citizen in the first half of its membership, the nation’s citizens warmed up to the EU and its institutions over the years, with over three-quarters of Latvians in 2019 claiming they identify as citizens of the EU and 60 percent identifying as “total” Europeans. This development and these figures are important to recognize because they signal that though Latvians have a strong sense of national pride and attachment to their country, they are still able to share in the feeling of being European, as well, structuring their identity on some level through a national and regional basis. Although the Latvian identity takes priority for the nation’s citizens, and likely always will, European integration has generated notable success in Latvia, since a fair share of its citizens currently incorporate European into their own identity description.

The continuance of this identification is not guaranteed, however, because the EU's current political environment has demonstrated how populist parties can manipulate public attitudes toward the EU through hyperbolic political-messaging tactics that label the union as a sovereignty-stripping institution. From the UK to France to Hungary, Euroscepticism is on the rise in a number of member states, along with democratic backsliding, and this rise threatens the very regional identity on which the EU has worked for so many years. As nations drift from the EU's principles and values, so do their citizens' social attachment to the EU as an institution.

As one of the smallest EU nations, Latvia has only eight Members of the European Parliament (MEP), who represent Latvians' interests on a regional scale.⁵⁶ Latvians also have very low confidence levels in the EU: as of 2019, only 34 percent of Latvians believed their country's interests are well considered in the EU, which was the second lowest figure among all member states. Because of this, it is important for Latvia to acquire greater levels of unofficial soft power in the EU to position itself as an important voice to be heard. If Latvians developed an even larger sense of Europeanness—a cultural one, that is—in their nation, then it is likely that both their own views of individual voice power will improve and that the actual effect of these voices on a regional, European level will grow stronger, too. This is because countries with populations that are overwhelmingly “European” by citizen identification, such as in Luxembourg, Germany, or Spain, gain more public attention on those European matters they define as important since, after all, these countries are largely viewed as socially European themselves.

With this in mind, Latvia has a unique opportunity in the years to come. As other larger nations continue to grow more Eurosceptic and lose out on regional soft power, and as the EU fills

⁵⁶ Three out of the eight MEPs are from two pro-Russian parties: Harmony and the Russian Union of Latvia. These parties are dividing forces in Latvian society, which capitalize off of the anxieties the ethnic Russian minority faces, as a means to garner political support and instil ethnic divisions in the nation's political environment.

the void left behind after Brexit, Latvia can further its own position in the EU. Though a small nation, Latvia could surpass others in its image of “Europeanness” if the nation’s citizens continue to develop a supranational identity, raising it in the social ranks to a level where its MEPs, citizens, and national concerns are given a larger platform on which to be heard.

As a former Soviet republic, Latvia’s continued development of an EU citizen identity in its national borders also solidifies its shift from Eastern to Western society, and consequently breaks the social connection it has historically had with Russia. In breaking this tie and garnering larger feelings of Europeanness, Latvia would signal, on a symbolic level, that it has grown even more “Western” than a number of nations that are actually located in Western Europe, ironically, which have even previously labeled Latvia as part of the East.

On balance, Latvia can be considered a success story for European integration. However, as highlighted, its recent success must not be mistaken for guaranteed future success. As a result, tools of identity-building must continue to be strengthened in the nation, so that its development can capitalize on the current momentum and the forthcoming opportunities for the country in the EU. In doing this, Latvia will solidify itself as an important nation among the EU’s 27 member states, thereby rendering it integrated on all levels: economically, politically, and socially.