

Storylining Baltic News

Swedish Identity Mechanisms in Latvia's Citizenship Episode

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Since the end of the bipolar world, academic interest in globalisation and issues of identity has literally exploded. The avalanche of literature on the subject of identity has, for the most part, not been empirically oriented, but remains on a more theoretical plane. This chapter represents an empirical approach to one identity issue, namely how national identity mechanisms can be articulated and discerned in Swedish television news in a changing national and international environment. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that the media play a key role in the production and sustenance of the cultural, social and political spheres where identities are constructed. Through news narratives that construct certain realities, utilise certain symbols and reiterate certain stereotypes, the media co-produce and sustain not simply people's understandings of who 'Others' are, but perhaps even more clearly, who they themselves are. This is arguably most evident in foreign news reporting. Here, the audience has the opportunity to become one with the nation as Australia or Sweden acts and reacts to the international environment. It is also in international affairs that the government becomes synonymous with the nation, acting in the 'nation's best interests', something governments have not been averse to using for their own purposes.¹ Furthermore, foreign news coverage is often about conflict and thus becomes a natural framework for contrasting Us to Them.

The task at hand will be characterise the key mechanisms through which identity, and national identity in particular, is constructed and legitimised, and to locate the role of television news narratives in this process. These insights will be used as methodological tools to study the Swedish television news programme *Aktuellt's* coverage of Latvia's mini-crisis with Russia in April 1998.² The analysis focuses on the evolving structure and characters in the Latvia crisis episode, and where and how the boundaries are drawn between Latvia, Russia, Sweden, the West and the East. Finally, a comparison will be made with a previous study of Swedish television coverage of the Baltic states in order to generate discussion about change and stability in news portrayals of the Other.

Clearly, there are different types of identities, both personal and collective, the latter including professional, regional and ethnic, but the focus here will be on a specific type of collective identity, national identity. This is because the dominant form of television news on events outside national borders defines its audience to be national and its task to report on national and international affairs. This is not to deny that we live in an age

of global communication, media convergence and audience fragmentation, but to argue that national television news, continues to be a key site where people “imagine themselves a nation”, as Benedict Anderson has so often been quoted as saying.³ Collective identity can be characterised as those qualities in the self-perception of a group whereby said group members recognise, describe or identify themselves. To do this, a distinction must be made between qualities associated with the group in contrast to Others outside it. It is thus through the distinction between Us and Them and the relations between these two groups, that We not only define Them, we also delineate who We are.⁴ Morley and Robins argue that identity, like language, is constituted through categories of similarity and difference. “/.../‘European culture’ is seen to be constituted precisely through its distinctions from and oppositions to American culture, Asian culture, Islamic culture, etc”.⁵ Thus, an important mechanism in the construction of collective identities involves both the way a group defines itself, as well as how the group defines those who they are not.⁶

There are two aspects of this identity mechanism that scholars take note of. First, it is not the existence *per se* of Us and Them that should be the focus of analysis, but the implications of *where* and *how* the boundary is drawn between groups or nations.⁷ By studying television news of different types of Others and whether these evolve over time, I submit that we are studying narratives which articulate and legitimise the boundaries between Us and Them. Secondly, although identity formation may be tenacious, it is essentially a dynamic process, not something once and for all given and immutable. Schlesinger stresses the continual “construction and reconstruction of a sense of themselves by self-identifying communities”, involving “active strategies of inclusion and exclusion” by which the boundaries of the community are “policed”.⁸ This ongoing process of self-definition and simultaneous definition of Others may be especially observable in times of upheaval and change, where redefinitions and shifts in perceptions of the Other are responses to the disintegration of multi-ethnic states, civil unrest, European integration or changes in the global economic order. On the other hand, certain types of Enemy perceptions are tenacious, some perhaps more than others, as Huntington’s controversial book *Clash of Civilisations* demonstrates.⁹ Thus, when opening the Pandora’s box of identity, one needs to be specific: this analysis attempts to study the articulation of certain types of national identity mechanisms in relation to certain types of Others during a specific time period.

National identity, says Hedetoft, is a unique type of collective identity since it constructs a congruence between polity, culture and territorial boundaries. In other words, the nation-state has become the locus of identification through its ability to be a vehicle for political ideology and notions of citizenship; encompassing competing domestic interest groups, defending the ‘homeland’ against outsiders and formulating “national politics in the best interests of electorates and in harmony with the nationalist ideal”.¹⁰ At the same time, the nation-state is identified with “common patterns of communication, shared myths and practices, social and cultural institutions and an albeit constructed but nonetheless very real ‘collective memory’”.¹¹ As De Cillia, Reisigl & Wodak have described it, national identity encompasses both the notions of *Staatsnation* and *Kulturnation*.¹²

Secondly, national identity construction is reinforced by a global system of nation-states in which each state depends on recognition by other states for its status. In this world order, the nation-state subsumes those “citizens” within its borders as We, leaving “foreigners” and entities outside its borders as Them.¹³ The Other need not necessar-

ily be the Enemy, but can be involved in a range of relationships with Us, as in Billig's example of the banal discourse of national identity.

'We' are not confined to simply differentiating stereotypes, which downgrade the foreign as the mysterious Other. Foreign nations are like 'ours', but never completely alike. 'We' can recognise 'ourselves' in 'them'... 'We' can become allies, 'they' becoming 'you' and 'we' can become enemies. And 'we' can debate amongst 'ourselves' about the value of 'our' allies. 'We' can accuse 'them' of threatening 'our' particularity or of failing to act like proper, responsible nations like 'we' do.¹⁴

This quote points to the uses and flexibility in the roles of Others for the purpose of reinforcing and legitimising the "national" Us. That national identity needs be legitimised, mobilised and sustained is demonstrated by the multitude of examples Billig provides of ingrained habits of nationalist discourse used by politicians, schools, and the media on a daily basis.¹⁵ Thus, a key mechanism in the discourse of national identity involves defining who We are as part of a nation-state, while the Other can consist of a range of distances from Us: Friends, Dependents, Allies, Enemies, Mystical Others, etc.

This brings us to a second integral mechanism of national identity formation: so-called "collective memory" that is used to evoke identification of group members with a unique, and highly selective past, posited to be shared by the group as a whole. In national identity discourse, these historical experiences are often associated with certain key events and figures that are told and retold in political, social and cultural discourse, by politicians, in school and through the media in both fictional and non-fictional genres. National collective memory serves to give meaning to traditions, social organisation, cultural institutions, the national "way of life", but also to political arguments that justify decisions and courses of action. Edy argues that the media, particularly television, are central to the construction and maintenance of national collective memory in this century: partly due to television's visceral quality, evoking "personal and emotional connections with the past", but also due its pervasiveness and the "speeding up" of history, leaving the media responsible for recounting recent events.¹⁶ Edy focuses on collective memory in the news media since journalists not only claim to provide "factual accounts of what 'really' happened", but also because the past is used as "shorthand" for providing explanations, as analogies or as a yardstick against which to judge later events. These then become recycled and reused, part of a stock of situations that can be pegged to new stories, which, ultimately can construct a different reading of the past.¹⁷

The news media are central to the co-production and sustenance of collective memory, and thus also to the discourse of national identity. In general, the news constructs a certain kind of world through its address, the choice of events, images, people, and explanations.¹⁸ News stories privilege certain interpretations by referring to what has been reported previously, building a shared understanding of a certain reality, on familiar storylines and ways of seeing the Other. This is reinforced by the episodic, repetitive nature of television news over time. Fiske compares the news genre to soap opera, regarding "the lack of final closure, multiplicity of plots and characters, repetition and familiarity."¹⁹ Indeed, the structural similarities are striking: the news also incorporates previous conflicts into ongoing plots, uses flashbacks and repetitious dialogue (which allows viewers to resume watching whenever possible), and gives a sense of things happening in "real time".²⁰ One important difference between them, according to Fiske, has to do with the greater attempts in the news genre to "control meaning": "News stories impose closure upon the openness of ongoing events: recency must be tempered by com-

pletion.”²¹ Thus, television news can mobilise and sustain national identity due not only to its status of co-producing collective memory, but also to its episodic, repetitive storytelling which promotes identification and reinforces perceptions of Us and Them.

Studying Storylines and Episodes

Given the serial-like nature of the news, a close reading of *Aktuellt*'s coverage of Latvia's conflict with Russia over its citizenship law will look at identification mechanisms using the concept of storyline to analyse the Us/Them problematic. A storyline can be thought of as an overarching story containing relatively constant characters and recurring conflicts, with episodes characterised by different authors, allowing the characters some freedom of movement.²² Since only a longitudinal study could determine the way episodes are constructed and how they fit into the overall storyline, it will suffice to conceive of this particular conflict as one episode in a larger Baltic neighbour storyline.

The existence of a Baltic neighbour storyline is related to historical and cultural ties between Sweden as a former power in the Baltic region, the resurgence of the Baltic independence movements and subsequent applications to the EU and Sweden's active support to and substantial financial aid and investment in the Baltic states after independence. It is also possible that an aspect of Swedish collective memory may be relevant in Baltic neighbour storylines: what has been called Sweden's 'bad conscience' due to its passive policy towards the Baltic states between 1945 and the late 1980s. One much-publicised and politically contentious issue which epitomises this is the so-called Baltic extradition (trans. "baltutlämningen") – a catch-word used to describe some 146 Baltic soldiers who arrived in Sweden several days after World War II wearing German uniforms. After months in internment camps, despite hunger strikes and suicide attempts, the soldiers were turned over to the Soviet Union. It was a contentious issue in which the press, the non-Socialist parties, the Church and the King got involved.²³ In 1989, the government's passive post-war policy towards the Baltic states shifted and Sweden became one of the most active supporters of those countries' "right to self-determination".²⁴ But the issue of the so-called "Baltic extradition" in 1945-6 has continually resurfaced in public debate throughout the 1990s.²⁵ The trauma of the extradition for Sweden lay in the moral dilemma of returning individuals to a country where they are considered treasonous, also a contentious issue hotly debated in relation to asylum-seekers today. Thus, the incident strikes at the heart of the Swedish self-image of being able to take moral stances on international issues.²⁶ It is likely that some of these aspects of Swedish national identity will not only be evident in Baltic neighbour storylines but also in the specific episode analysed below.

The Latvia episode under scrutiny here was chosen with the aid of the Sveriges Televisions (SVT) database. All telegrams, voice-overs or items in *Aktuellt* which contained the words "Baltikum", (a Swedish geographic term often used to refer to the Baltic states), "the Baltic states", "Estonia", "Latvia" and "Lithuania" were searched between January-June 1998. In April, almost all of the "hits" dealt with Latvia and its "mini-crisis" with Russia; the unfolding story of Latvia's deteriorating relations with Russia over the status of ethnic Russians was deemed more appropriate for an initial study than disparate news items about different Baltic states. The entire *Aktuellt* news programme was viewed every day between 30 March and 30 April, but those dealing with Latvia were concentrated between 30 March and 15 April.²⁷

The analysis below includes all telegrams, items and commentary mentioning Latvia in this period. There were 7 telegrams, items and commentary. Including anchor lead-

ins and one headline, this amounted to 12.56 minutes of Latvia news concentrated in the 16 days between 30 March-15 April. This episode was characterised in *Aktuellt* as a “war of words” and by the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson as a “mini-crisis“. It included bomb attacks, demonstrations, and the threat of international economic sanctions.

The Latvia episode is analysed in terms of the plot and in terms of the characters and their interrelations. The plot is conceived as the overall structure and development of news coverage on Latvia, i.e. what is the story about and how does the image of Latvia unfold chronologically in the flow of news during the coverage? Secondly, who are the cast of characters and how are they discursively constructed? What are they seen to be doing and how are they related to each other? The news stories and images were analysed according to the following categories, posed as questions:

- 1) Who are the Latvians and how are they characterised? Are they government authorities, politicians, protestors, nationalists or civilians? What do they want/what do they do?
- 2) Who are the Russians and how are they characterised? Are they government authorities, economic elites, nationalists, politicians, protestors or civilians? What do they want/what do they do?
- 3) Who are the Swedes? What do they want? What is the Swedish role in the conflict?
- 4) Who is the “East”? What do they want?
- 5) Who is the “West”? What do they want? What is the role of the West in this conflict?

The answers to these questions included both journalists’ descriptions of the character categories, what they are said to be doing, what was said about them by others in the news text, what they themselves say, and what image they try to present of themselves. The *Aktuellt* programmes were transcribed and categorised according to whether the character category was the subject, i.e. their actions, statements, what they are thinking or feeling, or according to the way others describe them. Thus, the first part of this analysis of the Latvia crisis episode looks at structure of the coverage, and the overall story as it unfolds through its chronology. This will also serve to set the story in context for the reader. The second part takes the point of view of the implied viewer and looks at the cast of characters following the above-mentioned five questions.²⁸

The Evolving Story

The overall structure of *Aktuellt*’s coverage during this period is one in which increasing priority is given to events in Latvia, its conflict with Russia and Sweden’s role. This is seen in the way news of Latvia is first moved up in the programme’s running order, followed by an in-depth look at the problem, finally culminating as a top story about the Swedish Prime Minister’s visit to Latvia. As in the soap opera, the Latvia narrative builds on the technique of flashback. The run-up to the conflict is explained by references to and video footage of previous incidents, some of which (two bombing incidents) had not been covered in the broadcast. These incidents are discursively collected under the heading “provocations” and presented as causes of the increased tension between Latvia and Russia.

The Latvia episode is also characterised by a type of narrative closure, meaning simply that the story is “wrapped up”, the conflict has reached a new equilibrium, and the

episode ends. The coverage of the conflict between Latvia and Russia stops abruptly on 15 April when, according to Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson, the root of the conflict is “resolved”. This brings us to the third noticeable aspect in the structure of the coverage: the dominating presence of the Swedish government, which is mentioned in the majority of items, telegrams and voice-overs dealing with Latvia. It is with the Swedish Prime Minister’s visit to Latvia that a change in the Latvian position is said to have taken place, thus giving the impression that the crisis with Russia is over.

The following chronology of *Aktuellt*’s coverage sets out the context of the plot development of Latvia news. Latvia appears first on 30 March, when *Aktuellt* carries an item concerning the initiation of EU enlargement procedures: who the candidate members are, what the EU is offering/demanding and what the mostly Eastern countries have to do in order to become members. The Swedish government has persuaded the EU that those not in the “fast lane” for membership should have the chance to initiate negotiations once a year. Latvia is used as an example of the success of this policy.

The next report dealing with Latvia on 3 April is a 30-second voice-over, with the news anchor reading to full-frame news footage of the two incidents described. The Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis and Prime Minister Krasts have announced that they want to fire the Army Commander and the National Police Commissioner. The Army Commander had taken part in a 500-man march to mark the 55th anniversary of a Latvian SS brigade two weeks earlier. The National Police Commissioner was given responsibility for lax security enforcement when a Jewish synagogue in Riga was bombed a 2nd time on 2 April.

On 8 April, Latvian news is moving up in the programme; this telegram is third in the running order. To the left of the newsreader is a Latvian flag with the words: ‘Latvia under pressure’. Russia is considering economic measures to get Latvia to stop discriminating against its Russian minority. The Swedish Foreign Minister calls “Yeltsin’s measures deeply disturbing”. A day later, *Aktuellt* takes an in-depth look at the Russia-Latvia crisis: there are two items devoted to Latvia, one of which is a live interview with a studio guest. The anchor opens by saying that President Yeltsin’s spokesman has recanted the Russian “threat” of sanctions, but relations between the two countries are still tense and the Latvian government coalition is in “crisis”. Reporter Hans Cederberg’s item uses flashbacks to frame the background to the crisis. Video footage shows soldiers cleaning up after a bomb that was said to have gone off “two nights ago” in front of the Russian embassy (not previously mentioned in *Aktuellt*), this is followed by a description of the “protest storm” resulting from the Latvian SS brigade march three weeks before, along with previously shown footage of the SS march, where the camera zooms in on an older, presumably Russian, man whose shouting from the sidelines is now translated (‘Murderers!’). Following this is WWII documentary footage of soldiers dragging away civilians and civilians being marched off. “Yet another provocation” was the bomb attack on the synagogue last week, along with the previously shown footage of a Jewish candelabra lying in broken glass. These incidents precede a description of the ethnic Russian minority in Latvia, who “demonstrate for human rights”. Now, says Cederberg, Russia threatens economic sanctions which, if carried out, would be a “stranglehold” on the Latvian economy.

The item following consists of studio guest, Elisabeth Hedborg, presented as freelance journalist and Russia expert.²⁹ According to Hedborg, there are extremists on both sides who would like to exploit this situation and it is the Latvian economy that will suffer the consequences. In particular, she describes the Russian extremists as including

nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who is said to have united the Russian Duma behind demands for economic sanctions. Although Yeltsin has backed down on the threat of sanctions, the situation is still serious, according to Hedborg.

On 14 April, *Aktuellt's* anchor announces in a telegram early on in the programme, that the Swedish Prime Minister is going to Riga to “discuss the crisis between Latvia and Russia”. The Russian position on Latvian discrimination is repeated and the Swedish position is modified: Latvia should follow the OSSE’s recommendations on treatment of minorities. On 15 April, *Aktuellt's* top story is headlined: “Swedish Support Eases the Crisis in Latvia: Language Laws Liberalised”. The “controversial language laws” are identified as the crux of the problem, i.e. the reason for the “crisis” with Russia and the reason why ethnic Russians cannot become citizens. The item is based around an interview with Prime Minister Göran Persson. *Aktuellt's* correspondent says that both the EU and the US want Latvia to liberalise its citizenship law. Persson connects Sweden with this stance and says that the Latvian government has now made a decision which implies that they will meet the recommendations of the OSSE.³⁰

What can be inferred by the (in)consistency of coverage and its abrupt end is that the bomb attacks in Latvia were not considered particularly newsworthy in and of themselves, and may not have been more than a common “telegraphed” foreign news story, had not the Russians reacted so strongly or the Swedes become involved. It took the Russian reaction and the Swedish involvement to move the story up in the running order. The plot also shifts in focus from the bombing incidents and SS march (“provocations”), which lead up to the crisis with Russia, to the citizenship law which is identified not only by the Russians, but by the “West” (the US, the EU, Sweden, the OSSE) as being unfairly exclusive towards the Russian ethnic minority. The bombings and the actions of the extremists are thus implied to be connected with the citizenship issue, and although it is a conflict between Russia and Latvia, the problem as defined here, lies with the latter.

The Cast of Characters

Moving from the overall structure of the news coverage of Latvia to the cast of characters, the attempt here is to analyse how the main groups of characters emerge in the text and what they do. This analysis follows the aforementioned five questions; the main groups of characters are first deconstructed and then the relations between them examined.

Who are the Latvians?

The Latvians can be divided into three categories in *Aktuellt's* coverage: a) the government, b) the extremists and, c) “Latvia” the country name used in the first person singular, as if the country did things and felt things as an individual rather than a diverse entity. The latter is far more common than the first two categories and through its usage we can deduce that it means more than just the government, it includes the country as a whole.

The government includes individuals like President Guntis Ulmanis, Prime Minister Guntar Krasts, the Foreign Minister Valdis Birkavcs and also what is called the “Latvian government”. The individuals are seen as responsible and ‘westward-looking’ whereas the government is having a crisis which it then wisely ‘resolves’. Above all President Ulmanis, but also the Prime Minister, “call on” parliament to approve the dismissal of

the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner, due to their responsibility for the SS demonstration and the synagogue bomb. President Ulmanis appears most concerned about the situation since he later invites the Swedish Prime Minister to come to Latvia. The Latvian Foreign Minister, Valdis Birkavs, seen speaking at the EU enlargement meeting on 30 March, is said to be “optimistic”. The determination to become part of the West is seen through phrases such as, “Latvia is prepared to fight hard in order to get to the negotiating table by December”. Latvia’s goal of starting bilateral negotiations with the EU is aided by Sweden’s persuasive powers on Latvia’s behalf. The Swedish foreign minister, indeed, Latvia itself, is depicted as Sweden’s protégé.

The “Latvian government” is characterised as “having a crisis”; this is exemplified by the “Democratic Party Leader Jurkans” accusing the Prime Minister of “incompetence which could seriously damage the country’s democratic development”. The Democratic Party, described as the largest party in the governing coalition, is said to have left the government “to protest anti-Russian policy”.³¹ Later in the coverage, the “government” comes to a decision to change the Latvian citizenship law so that it will be “compatible with the norms that apply in Europe generally”.³²

The Latvian extremists are the 500 SS veterans and the “extremist forces” who carry out bombing attacks. The Latvian SS are:

*.../parading through the streets of Riga. During World War II they marched with the Germans, now they performed a ceremony to commemorate their SS brigade. The Russian population was deeply offended. Those who experienced the Nazi terror first-hand. This was too much; this was a direct insult.*³³

This quote is accompanied by sequences, described in the previous section, of the Latvian SS march followed by WWII footage of the Nazi regime in Latvia in the 1940s. This leads directly into a repeat of images from the preceding week of the bomb attack on the synagogue and the Jewish candelabra surrounded by broken glass. The connection we make between the first two sequences is that of soldiers victimising civilians both then and now: they were German and Latvian then and they are Latvian now. These are then connected to the synagogue bombing footage from the previous week, reinforcing a connection between now and the victimisation of Jews in the past. In the sequence immediately following this, the actions of these extremists are transferred to the Russian ethnic minority’s claims that they are being discriminated against. This implies that the same anti-Semite extremists are also anti-Russianists. This leads, chronologically, into mention of Latvia’s human rights obligations and, later in the coverage, to its citizenship law.

The extremists are personified only by two individuals: the Latvian Army Commander and the Police Commissioner. Otherwise they are mainly anonymous “forces” (trans. “krafter”) who stage so-called “provocations” such as the bomb attacks against the synagogue and the Russian embassy. These forces are described as wanting to “use the situation for their own political ends”, or who “would like to see matters brought to a head.” Their provocations are characterised as “a series of setbacks in Latvia’s attempts to approach the European Union.” Thus the extremist forces that provoke confrontation with Russia are holding the country back from its aspiration to join the West. The complicity of the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner give the impression that extremist forces may also be found in responsible positions in Latvia, but since this is left unclear, they could just as well be scapegoats. It should be noted that the metaphor “forces”, depersonalises those responsible for the attacks, connoting some-

thing unknown, some kind of nature-related force, whose inevitable, threatening and murky elements man can do nothing to stop.

What and who is “Latvia”? Latvia in the first person singular is used in *Aktuellt*’s coverage most often to refer to the country as a whole, rather than simply the government. While the first person singular is used as the acting subject in the description of the three character groups analysed here, “Russia” and “Sweden” almost always describe their respective governments, whereas “Latvia” is used more often to denote the country as a whole. This usage can be exemplified by the characterisation of Latvia as getting “a bad reputation” or “a country that still identifies Jews in their passports.”³⁴ Latvia’s “controversial language laws” or “citizenship law”, which keep the large Russian minority from becoming citizens, is often referred to in the context of the norms of the Council of Europe, the requirements of the EU or the “recommendations” of the OSSE.³⁵ On the other hand, “Latvia” is “extremely” vulnerable economically to Russian sanctions and “extremely dependent” on Russian (and Swedish) trade for its economic well-being. The political consequences of the conflict are also Latvia’s problem, since it could “only have a negative effect” on the development of Latvia’s relationship with the EU.

Thus, the individuals and the government are seen as responsible and ‘westward-looking’, while “Latvia” risks a bad reputation and economic ruin due the “provocations” of the extremists. This hides the responsibility of the Latvian parliament for the citizenship law, and focuses anti-Russian sentiment on the extremist nationalists. It is with the Swedish characterisation of its view of the problem that this becomes clear (see below).

Who are the Russians?

The Russians are seen in the following three roles: a) the ethnic Russians in Latvia, b) President Boris Yeltsin, the Russian government and its representatives, “Russia” in first person singular, and c) extremist, ultra-nationalist forces. Regarding the ethnic Russians in Latvia, they are clearly the victims in the coverage of Latvia. They are “a third of the population who are Russian-speaking and therefore barred from real citizenship”.³⁶ The Latvian SS veteran’s march provoked a “storm of protest”. The ethnic Russians want “human rights”: we see footage of protest signs saying ‘human rights’ (in English), while Hans Cederberg explains, “The Russian minority is demonstrating for human rights. There is a large Russian-speaking minority here, about 700,000 people. Many feel discriminated against/.../”.³⁷ As noted above, *Aktuellt* legitimises their complaints through its references to different Western norms and standards.

Who is the Russian government? The references vary from the “Russian government”, to President Boris Yeltsin and his spokespersons, to Moscow and, in a reversion to the Cold War label, “Kremlin leaders”. When the Russian government or spokespersons are mentioned, it is always in the context of receiving orders from Boris Yeltsin. It is Yeltsin who is calling the shots. The Russian leadership emerges with two messages: a) the Russian minority in Latvia “is discriminated against,” “opposed”, and “unfairly treated”, b) and economic steps, called “pin-pricks of economic measures designed to influence Latvia”, or “sanctions” are either under consideration, are threatened, or are being implemented. President Yeltsin has “given the order” to redirect Russian exports to other ports than Latvian ones. Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov appears once to confirm that oil shipments to Latvia have been “drastically reduced and that almost all Russian oil companies have reacted to the situation in Latvia”.³⁸ These

are described by *Aktuellt* as “threats” of “punishment” and continue to be used as a handle to describe the conflict even after 9 April, when “President Yeltsin let it be known that he would not like to implement sanctions, and that there is still room for dialogue.”³⁹

Russia in first person singular is synonymous with the Russian leadership. Hans Cederberg opens his story on 9 April by saying “The Russian Bear Roars”, accompanied by footage of Boris Yeltsin in discussion with his young Prime Minister candidate Sergei Kiriyenko, where the former looks like he is giving the latter some kind of lecture. This is particularly interesting considering the disclosure, by *Aktuellt*’s studio guest, Elisabeth Hedborg, that Russia itself has no official government in place. In the event, the Russian government, its leadership and “Russia” are unified and interchangeable words, personified by images of Yeltsin. This entity is then associated with threats, punishment, protests and criticism vis-à-vis Latvia.

Who are the Russian extremists? The extremists are identified by names such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy or Mayor Lushkov of Moscow. The former is described as the “politician setting the tone on the Russian side” and the one who led the Russian Duma in its calls for sanctions. Here again we encounter the use of the term “forces” (here in the Russian Duma), who would “like to use this for their own political purposes”. Indeed, it is in this context that commentator Elisabeth Hedborg characterises the conflict as “serious”. Granted that the Russian extremists and the “vulnerable Russian domestic situation” are found only in the item with Hedborg, if compared to the “sanctions” or “pinpricks of economic influence” later recanted by Boris Yeltsin, the extremist “forces” appear more ominous than the Russian government. This impression is reinforced by the standard footage of Yeltsin, taken from the context of his repeated attempts to persuade the Duma to accept his prime ministerial candidate. Thus, the Russian “threat” appears to come from the weakness of Yeltsin, and the strength of unseen ultra-nationalists. The democratic credibility of the Russian standpoint on its countrymen in Latvia is not connected to any intrinsic Russian democracy, but gains legitimacy from the fact that it coincides with the victim’s (ethnic Russian) complaints as well as those of the West.

Who are the Swedes?

Aktuellt’s Swedes consist of the Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén, the Prime Minister Göran Persson and Sweden first person singular. The latter category is synonymous with the government, with the exception of rather vague references to the negative consequences of the Russia-Latvia conflict for the Baltic region.

/.../It is extremely important for us in Sweden that we have a stable situation in the region, since we believe that the Baltic region has the ability to develop in a very positive way. And so this type of conflict should be put on the backburner.⁴⁰

While it appears that Persson is here talking about the government’s view of the importance of the Baltic region, *Aktuellt*’s anchor, as well as reporter Hans Cederberg inquire as to the risk of the conflict “spreading to the region”. This appears to be a standard journalistic query aimed at legitimising the conflict as a concern for Sweden as a whole, rather than the government in particular.

Regarding the Swedish individuals in government, Foreign Minister Hjelm-Wallén emerges a staunch supporter of Latvia in the 30 March item on EU enlargement. Sweden is given the credit for persuading the EU to allow candidate countries who didn’t

make the “fast lane” for membership a chance to negotiate every year. The Swedish Foreign Minister describes, with poorly concealed pride, what an “enormous incentive this is” for Latvia to carry through with “difficult reforms”. Sweden is here Latvia’s dotting patron, personalised as an optimistic Hjelm-Wallén. Hjelm-Wallén is also seen supporting Latvia in a telegram on 8 April where she rebukes Russia’s “veiled or open threats” and calls for “dialogue” as the only means of solving “Latvia’s problems.”

Prime Minister Göran Persson’s support for Latvia is more cautious. He first appears late in the conflict, taking the role of ‘Judicious Mediator’ who journeys abroad to bring home a “solution” to the conflict. When it is reported that Persson is going to Latvia to discuss the crisis with President Ulmanis, the Swedish position on the conflict is modified, “Sweden does not condone the Russian threats, but at the same time supports the OSSE’s demands that Latvia follow international norms and treat minorities well”.⁴¹ Thus, a change occurs if compared to the Foreign Minister’s previous rebuke of Russia. The following day, 15 April, *Aktuellt*’s top story announces that it was “Swedish support” that alleviated the “crisis in Latvia”. Sweden, actually the Prime Minister, appears to have persuaded Latvia to “liberalise its language laws”, to follow OSSE representative Max van der Stoel’s recommendations and this, it is implied, will help Russia and Latvia “put the conflict behind them”. The decision by the Latvian government is clearly sourced by the Prime Minister’s statement in the item itself, since no other source is mentioned. What then does this Swedish “support” consist of? *Aktuellt*’s reporter Hans Cederberg asks: “How can Sweden help”? Göran Persson answers, “Partly, naturally, by supporting the Latvians in their struggle to change their legislation. That is important.” In an effort to get Göran Persson to clarify, Cederberg asks, “Is it the citizenship laws that need to be liberalised”? To which Persson answers, “Yes, they need to be compatible with the norms that apply in Europe generally and that is the process Latvia is going through right now.”

Two things can be noted about Persson’s answers. The first thing is that the Swedish Prime Minister connects Sweden’s (modified) position on Latvia’s citizenship law to norms “in Europe”, to “EU requirements” and to the international community as represented by the OSSE, in other words, to the West. The second and more instructive thing to notice is that, far from criticising the Russian “threats”, Swedish “support” centres on Latvia’s “struggle to change its legislation”[sic.]. But this begs the question, who is Latvia struggling against? Certainly not the Russians. The viewer is left hanging. Although one is tempted to connect this struggle with the “provocations”, i.e. the bomb attacks and SS marches, it cannot be the extremists “Latvia” is struggling against, since bomb attacks are by definition marginal to politics. In Russia, the extremists are identified in the Russian Duma, while in Latvia, they are not. It is only through implication – by way of the coverage of the Army Commander and the Police Commissioner, and the protest by the Democratic Party leader Jurkans of the government’s anti-Russian policies – that the viewer can infer that there are nationalists, perhaps in the government, perhaps in the Latvian parliament, that oppose a liberalisation of the citizenship laws.⁴² Yet, this central aspect, the “why” of the existence of the citizenship law and the longer term cause of inter-ethnic conflict, is practically invisible in *Aktuellt*’s coverage. Those in the Latvian constituency and parliament who are against citizenship for the Russian minority, who disagree with the “human rights norms” and “European standards”, are shielded.

In summary, the Swedes are mainly the government, which criticises Russian “threats”, but later emerges as “supportive” of Latvia, although it is in essence agreeing

with the Russian position that Latvia's citizenship laws are too exclusive. Its rationale is that of "EU membership and "European" standards. Those forces in Latvia that oppose change in the citizenship law, are here, by Swedish implication (not explicit in the characterisation of Latvians) something more than a few extremist incidents, yet they are invisible in the coverage. In the guise of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Sweden is Big Brother instructing Little Brother on the ways of the West. Foreign Minister Hjelm-Wallén is like an optimistic mother encouraging her child's aspirations, while Prime Minister Persson is like a father teaching Latvia the "manners" of the West.

Who is the East/Who is the West?

Not surprisingly, the East/West problematic emerges most explicitly in the March 30th item on EU enlargement, which is set in the context of "the problems encountered" (by the West) in negotiations with the East. The East is exemplified by Polish farmers whose milk is banned by the EU due to hygiene standards. The images accompanying this open in a dingy barn with one cow and perhaps two chickens, with the camera following a farmer as he moves into the kitchen where his kerchiefed wife wrings out the washing. This is said to be just one of "hundreds of examples" of areas where Eastern countries do not live up to "West European" standards. While the first candidate country could become an EU member around the year 2003, it will take "many more years" for the Polish farmer to "reach the standards of the West European farmer". The East is also the Latvian Foreign Minister, who didn't make it into the "fast lane" of candidate countries, but who is given the chance to try for negotiations every year, thanks to the efforts of Sweden.

The West is represented by the "EU farmers" or "West European farmers" who "live under strict controls regarding hygiene, the environment, animal protection, labour laws, etc."⁴³ The West is also the EU bureaucracy which "offers carrots and sticks" to the Eastern countries. The EU offers money, but "makes demands" that Eastern countries "reform at a certain pace". The West is the EU that Latvia is attempting to join. It is the "surrounding world" as Hans Cederberg puts it on 15 April, reporting from in front of a building with an EU flag in Riga. This "surrounding world" is referred to variously as the Council of Europe, the EU, the US, the OSSE and Sweden who all put pressure on Latvia to liberalise its citizenship law.

Us and Them in *Aktuellt* 1998

The analysis of the cast of characters in *Aktuellt's* Latvia crisis episode demonstrates that Sweden and the EU are the Western "We" and both Latvia and Russia are "Them". As in Billig's example, however, the Other is defined by its distance from Us, and clearly, there are also two versions of Us. The Swedish "We" is the benevolent Big Brother helping Latvia to become more like Us in the West. The Swedish We differs from the West by virtue of its strong support for Latvia, and its self-proclaimed "mediator" role in communicating demands to Latvia. The EU, the Council of Europe, "Europe" and the OSSE are variously and interchangeably used to describe the "West" and its standards and norms, although little explanation is given of what these norms and recommendations actually consist of. The audience only knows that Latvia is not abiding by them and the implication is that this has to do with democracy. Thus the West stands for democratic standards, "human rights" norms and economic demands and

Sweden is its messenger, charged with the task of seeing to it that Latvia complies. On a structural level, the Swedish government has a dominating presence, and this must be seen as one of the reasons for the coverage of Latvia in the first place.

Russia is the “bear” that “roars”, a beast one wouldn’t want to disturb or upset. Russian threats are accompanied by images of the famously unpredictable Boris Yeltsin, who is calling the shots. Russia appears, in other words, as an unstable and mercurial Other, a threat, due just as much to its own domestic disarray and its own extremists, as to economic sanctions against Latvia. Here it is interesting that the threat of an unstable, rather than a powerful, Russia is probably more prevalent in “Western” eyes than in Latvia. One need only to look back to 1990 to the use of Soviet oil and gas sanctions against Lithuania to imagine how easily Latvia could interpret this as a ‘typical’ example of Russian bullying of its weaker neighbour. But this is not how Russia emerges in *Aktuellt*. The position of both Sweden and the West lends credence to the Russian position on the status of the ethnic Russians, although being the Other, there is no explicit connection made between the two. In other words, while We have the same interpretation of the Latvian (democracy) problem as They do, They are differentiated by the consequences of their threats and unpredictability.

Latvia is also the Other in *Aktuellt*, but it is a closer Other than Russia. Latvia is a Dependent to Sweden, and a potential Ally to the West. Latvia is depicted as aspiring to become like Us, but not quite succeeding. Latvia has to “live up” to human rights standards, make difficult reforms and change its citizenship legislation, which carries the implication that Latvia is not fully democratic. Latvia is depicted as struggling against extremist forces and an anti-Semitic, anti-Russian past. Latvia’s extremists are however not placed in the parliament, as they are in Russia: they are anonymous, visible through bombing attacks and other “provocations”. We can infer by the status of the Latvian Army Commander that there are similar ultra-nationalists in responsible positions. Yet on the surface, Latvian nationalist forces are invisible and this plays up Latvia’s “Western” aspirations. *Aktuellt*’s coverage implies that if Latvia would only allow the ethnic Russian minority to become citizens and conform to Western norms, then Latvia can become like “Us”. Russia, despite the “democratic” character of its criticism of Latvia is given no similar possibility.

Baltic Neighbour Storylines in the 90s: Recycling Collective Memory?

In the initial discussion it was noted that one way of analysing expressions of national identity is to focus on the boundary between Us and Them in foreign news. Journalistic constructions of foreign actors can often say more about the reporting country than the country reported on. It was also noted that national identity, as any type of identity, is not static, but must continually be relegitimised and reconstituted. In view of the changes taking place in the world, particularly in Europe with the reconstitution of Central and Eastern European countries and the accelerated integration of the European Union, not to mention changes which undermine the very foundations of the nation-state, it would be interesting if there were any shift in the boundaries between Us and Them over time.

One way to understand the Latvia crisis episode is to compare it with previous coverage of the Baltic states. One such study of the Swedish coverage of the Soviet crack-down in the Baltic states in January 1991 has been done by the author (Riegert, 1998). Briefly, this crisis was a confrontation between Soviet troops and the elected Baltic nationalist governments along with the civilian populations of Lithuania and Latvia. The

tension between the Baltic states and the Soviet Union had been considerable since the preceding spring, when the Baltic nationalist parliaments passed independence declarations. The increased military activity in the region and President Gorbachev's threats to institute direct presidential rule were direct precursors to the crisis. In Sweden, the events of the Soviet crack-down were closely monitored by both the government and the news media. While news programmes in other countries were dominated by the impending Gulf War, Sweden's most popular news programme *Rapport* was headlining its stories and extending its running time to cover the dramatic events in the Baltics.⁴⁴ The Lithuanian and Latvian nationalist movements had mobilised civilians to build barricades and to form "human shields" to protect the parliaments and press buildings from attacks by the Soviet military. The death of some 19 civilians resulted in huge funeral processions, which were called "political demonstrations for democracy and freedom" by the Swedish correspondents who covered them.

Rapport set the Baltic crisis in the context of deep divisions in Soviet society which could evolve into a civil war, and what this would mean for the Baltic region (i.e. Sweden) and East-West relations. Swedish government support could be seen through the much publicised attempts to internationalise the conflict, news coverage of the visits by representatives of the Baltic national governments to Sweden and the presence of observers such as diplomats and parliamentary delegations in the Baltic states during the crisis. *Rapport* provided a dramatic portrayal of the physical threat to civilians in favour of Baltic independence and a disproportionate amount of attention to the statements of the Baltic nationalists and demonstrators compared to those representing the Soviet government's position.⁴⁵ *Rapport's* language use framed the position of the Baltic nationalist movements sympathetically: these were the underdogs who had a moral right to independence. President Gorbachev was implied to have betrayed his own ideals and thrown in with the "hard-liners" to keep the Soviet Union together.

Compared to the Latvia episode, the Baltic crisis of 1991 was clearly a "proper" crisis, including civilian deaths, the element of surprise and the perception of the need for quick decisions, whereas the 1998 "mini-crisis" between Russia and Latvia involved no loss of life and developed slowly over a period of two months. However, as a vantage point from which to generate hypotheses about changes in journalistic constructions over time, there are interesting parallels. Both conflicts between the Latvian government and the Soviet (later) Russian governments prompted concern and reactions from other countries, especially from Sweden. In both cases, the Swedish government was anxious to show its support for the Baltic countries and Latvia, not least through references to international bodies. In both, the consequences of the conflicts were said to be serious, especially for Latvia, but also for regional stability.⁴⁶

How then does Swedish news coverage of Latvia in 1998 compare to coverage of the Latvia and Lithuania crisis in 1991 regarding storylines constructing Us and Them? As was noted initially, the Baltic nationalist governments in 1991 were given the moral upper-hand, described as wanting "only freedom and democracy" and supported by Russian and Baltic civilians "on the barricades" together. In other words, they wanted to be, and they were, just like Us. To be a nationalist, to want self-determination, was per definition anti-Communist. Like other former East bloc countries, however, the term nationalism has now shifted implication for the West. Nationalism now connotes anti-democratic tendencies and ethnic hatred (i.e. denying citizenship for ethnic Russians in Latvia). In 1998, Latvia's extremists and the country's acquiescence to Hitler Germany are coupled to Russian demands for "human rights". Now it is the nationalists that are

not quite democratic and their number is hidden behind a facade of extremist incidents. Thus, while Latvia was the underdog and the victim of oppression in 1991, it may now be, the Oppressor with a Past.

What this means in terms of the Latvia episode examined above, is that there is a dualism in the Swedish coverage of 1998 compared to 1991. In 1998, while it is clear that *Aktuellt* buys into the Swedish Prime Minister's attempt to portray himself as Judicious Mediator whose efforts help to bring the conflict to a close, also shielding the responsibility of the Latvian parliament and constituency for the citizenship law, it also graphically depicts Latvia's "murky" past and present extremist incidents. It would be in the Swedish government's interests to smooth over these problems in Latvian society, and the difficulty of identifying other nationalist elements than the extremists illustrates this. But due to the fact that the EU and the OSSE concur on the interpretation of Latvia's citizenship law, the viewer is left with a residue of suspicion regarding Latvian democracy and the strength of nationalist sentiment. Thus, the Swedish government's interpretation is not the only one available for events taking place, as was the case in 1991.

What could the trauma of the Baltic extradition and Sweden's 'bad conscience' mean for Baltic neighbour storylines in the 1990s? One suggestion is that there may have been few journalists in 1991 who would look into the ethnic make-up of Latvia, Latvia's past or its future agreements with the Soviet Union. In 1998, the ethnic tensions have become troublesome and the Swedish government's staunch political and economic support makes it possible for the media to reassess the past. The uncertain extent of Latvian collaboration with Nazi Germany (there was difficulty determining the extent to which the Baltic soldiers were collaborators or drafted in 1946) resurfaces again in *Aktuellt*'s images of present-day Latvian nationalism. Thus we see an interaction between the political and media spheres of discourse; the media recycling the non-too-flattering memory of the Baltic states during WWII and the government attempting to 'forget', to start fresh in 1991 by sponsoring the Baltic countries' in their entry to the West.

Another interesting element in the comparison between 1991 and 1998 are the similarities in the portrayal of the Russian Other. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin are the personification of power in their respective countries, yet we are not quite certain if they really are in control of unruly opponents. In 1991 the opponents were democrats clamouring for change and hard-liners fighting against it and Gorbachev had "gone with the hard-liners". The opponents in 1998 are the ultra-nationalists in the Russian Duma, which Yeltsin appears to be battling more for his own purposes than for democracy. In 1991, Swedish news covered the forces for democracy in the Soviet Union whereas in 1998, they are nowhere to be seen in Russia. The Soviet and Russian threat against Us, both then and now lies in the country's instability and possible "retreat" back to an "Eastern" traditionalism and repression.

Using the 1991 Baltic crisis as a vantage point, it is clear that something called a "mini-crisis" was not really covered like a crisis by *Aktuellt* in 1998. The 1998 mini-crisis was covered inconsistently and ended abruptly with the impression that the conflict "was solved". While this closure may appear to contradict the aforementioned serial character of news, it could also be interpreted as a new equilibrium in a continuing story of the "trials and tribulations" of Latvia's attempts to become one of Us.

Notes

1. See Bloom (1990), Chapter 4.
2. The Swedish public service news programmes, *Rapport* and *Aktuellt*, are the two main evening news bulletins. The difference between the two is that the latter should not only summarise important news of the day, but also develop in-depth news coverage. In practice this means that one or two subjects are treated in-depth every evening. Up until 1997, the two were supposed to compete with each other, whereas now they are seen as complimentary programmes.
3. For a discussion of Anderson and the concept of national identity, see Barker (1999: 65-68). Despite the plethora of satellite channels, the majority of European news viewers still prefer national news programmes.
4. Morley and Robins (1996: 45).
5. Morely and Robins (1996: 45).
6. Schlesinger (1993: 7).
7. It should be noted that delineating Us and Them also involves suppressing differences within the group. Drawing from Stuart Hall, Barker (1999: 68) sees national identity as unifying cultural diversity under a certain set of "symbols and practices"; and thus an expression of the cultural power of some groups over others.
8. Schlesinger (1994: 2).
9. Huntington (1996) forecasts international conflict along broad lines of "civilisations". The Islamic Other replaces the Soviet Union as a major threat to the "West".
10. Hedetoft (1997: 4-6). The quote is from page 5.
11. Hedetoft (1997: 6).
12. De Cillia, Reisingl & Wodak (1999: 169). These authors as well as Hedetoft (1997) and Billig (1995) all eschew the traditional division in nationalism theory between "civic" nationalism and "ethnic" nationalism, exemplified in Smith (1991). Rather, national identity gains strength from drawing on both of these types.
13. Balibar (1996: 358) notes that citizenship, indeed the community and its politics, is defined by the "principle of exclusion" dividing the citizens from the foreigners.
14. Billig (1995: 87).
15. Although a more common strategy for analysing national identity discourse has been to look at celebrations (Dayan & Katz, 1995) and the mobilisation of Others in times of war and crisis. Redefinitions of the Enemy, for example, are clearest when a country goes to war and efforts are directed to mobilise national identity to legitimise why people are asked to face death for their nation. Literature on the Gulf War exemplify this. See Bennett & Paletz (1994).
16. Edy (1999: 71-72).
17. Edy (1999: 71-72, 83).
18. See Ekekrantz & Olsson (1994) or Dahlgren (1995).
19. Fiske (1987:308).
20. While Cantor & Pingree (1983) do not compare soap operas to news, these aspects of soap opera are clearly applicable to news. In particular, the use of aspects of one story to launch new and associated stories.
21. Fiske (1987: 287).
22. This notion is taken from Olsson (forthcoming).
23. See the introduction in Silamikelis (1997) by Dr. Curt Ekholm, whose dissertation on this subject is an authoritative account. See also Zalcmanis (1983).
24. See Ahlander (1992) for some of the reasons for this.
25. Ekholm (1997: 9) calls it one of the most publicised and discussed issues in modern Swedish history. A simple word search in the Presstext archives for the word "baltutlämningen," which houses the largest Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* and the tabloid *Expressen*, for articles between 1990-99 reveals some 80 articles. Many of the headlines of these articles carry the words "guilt" and "shame".
26. Jerneck (1983).
27. The stories relating to the Baltic region in January 1998 were the "Östersjö" meeting of the leaders of states bordering the Baltic Sea, the new Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, and the conclusion of a bilateral cooperation agreement between the United States and the Baltic states.
28. According to Chatman (1995: 478), "...the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse the *how*". The analysis here does not make this traditional distinction in narrative theory.
29. Interestingly enough, it was Elisabeth Hedborg who reported on the 1991 Baltic crisis from Latvia for the rival news programme *Rapport*. For coverage of that crisis, see below.
30. This was however not the case. *Aktuellt's* own current affairs programme *8 dagar* reported on 28 May 1998 that the "Latvian parliament voted to keep its restrictive citizenship law". In the Swedish daily *Dagens Ny-*

- heter* from October 1998, 53% of Latvians voted in a referendum for a liberalisation of the citizenship laws. This was interpreted as meeting the criteria of the OSSE and the EU. See Winiarski (1998).
31. Hans Cederberg, 9 April 1998. Confusingly enough, according to the previously mentioned article in *Dagens Nyheter* (fn. 30) on 5 October 1998, Janis Jurkans is part of the Harmony Party.
 32. Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. Interviewed in *Aktuellt*, 15 April 1998. 1st item.
 33. Hans Cederberg, *Aktuellt*, 9 April 1998. 7th item.
 34. *Aktuellt*, 9 April.
 35. Both journalists and Prime Minister Persson refer to the human rights norms of Western institutions. Elisabeth Hedborg says, "As a member of the Council of Europe, the country is bound to follow the human rights norms that are set out there." *Aktuellt*, 9 April 1998, 8th item.
 36. Hans Cederberg, *Aktuellt*, 15 April 1998.
 37. Hans Cederberg, *Aktuellt*, 9 April 1998.
 38. *Aktuellt*, 9 April 1998.
 39. Elisabeth Hedborg, *Aktuellt*, 9 April 1998.
 40. Prime Minister Persson, *Aktuellt*, 15 April 1998.
 41. *Aktuellt*, 14 April 1998.
 42. A number of openly nationalistic parties have consistently won at least 15% of the vote to the Latvian parliament. The 'Fosterland och frihet' party, was represented during the Latvia-Russia mini-crisis by the Prime Minister Guntar Krasts, although this is not mentioned in *Aktuellt*. In 1995, 'Little Hitler', Joachim Siegerist's party "Folkrorelsen för Lettland" won 15% of the vote.
 43. Peder Carlqvist, *Aktuellt*, 30 March 1998, last item in programme.
 44. This period was between 10 January-24 January. The Baltic crisis was in the headlines on 10 of the 14 days included in the study. Riegert (1998).
 45. Riegert (1998). This is demonstrated in the analysis of sources used, the priority given to statements and positions of the Nationalist governments as compared to those supporting the Soviet central government and in the dramatic, connotative language used to describe the nationalist movements' aspirations.
 46. In 1991, there were rumours of coup attempts against the Latvian parliament and the threat that Latvia may come under direct Soviet presidential rule. In 1998, the events in Latvia and the citizenship law risked not only Russian economic sanctions, which were said to have grave effects on the country's economy, but also its sought-after membership in the European Union.

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