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LATVIAN POPULAR FRONT SUPPORT GROUPS ABROAD: EXPRESSION OF CHANGE IN DIASPORA ATTITUDE TOWARDS HOMELAND*

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The aim of the study is to analyse the change of Latvian diaspora's attitude towards homeland from late 1988 to late 1989, while determining the role of Latvian Popular Front (LPF) support groups abroad in this process and the resulting emergence of close political cooperation with the homeland. The article examines the founding of LPF support groups and their nature – the number of members, duration of existence, etc., as well as analyses the impact of personal contacts with LPF representatives or Latvia on the founding of groups. The main arguments in the diaspora against cooperation with the LPF were fear of the influence of the Communist Party, reluctance to fragment diaspora activities, concern of possible loss of influence by the existing organisations.

Keywords: Latvian diaspora, Awakening, Latvian Popular Front, LPF support groups, meeting in Gananoque

Introduction

In the late 1980s, at the time of the Awakening processes in the Baltic States, which eventually led to the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia

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(as well as the Republics of Lithuania and Estonia), a significant and hierarchically organised Latvian diaspora was present in the Western countries. Formed from the war refugees who dispersed around the world after the Second World War, this diaspora was characterised by a unifying goal that held true from its formation in the early 1950s up to and including the late 1980s: to promote the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia and to preserve the idea of independence in their host countries. This objective was pursued mainly through political lobbying and public relations activities.[1] The means through which to reach this ultimate aim in almost all cases of diaspora actions was perceived to be through influencing the host society, thus trying to bring about political changes in the Baltic States, which since the Second World War were illegally incorporated into the USSR, by means of external influence. Possible agency of the people of the Baltic States themselves in the restoration of independence was an idea not seriously entertained in the diaspora. Only in exceptional cases were some political actions directly connected with Latvia, such as Radio Free Europe and Voice of America broadcasts to Latvia. They were, however, far from the primary focus of political activity in the diaspora. For the most part, even such activities as support for dissidents in the USSR served the object of obtaining objective information about what was happening in Latvia, to be used as evidence to influence politicians in the host countries.[2]

The diaspora was faced with the need to change and re-evaluate in the second half of the 1980s, when, after the introduction of Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies, radical changes began to take place in the Baltic States themselves. Latvian diaspora at the time meets the criteria of a classical diaspora[3] and as such their existence was deeply intertwined with their homeland. At least 3 out of 7 characteristics of a classical diaspora directly describe the diaspora's connection to their country of origin (collective memory and myth of the homeland, idealisation of the homeland, desire to return). It follows that a diaspora cannot but react to important changes in the homeland, which in the case of Latvia, in the late 1980s, were of a political nature. The plenum of the Creative Unions, the mass demonstrations, the founding of the Latvian Popular Front (LPF) – these changes in Latvian society were undeniably visible from abroad and conceptually important enough not to be ignored.

Ongoing contacts between diaspora and Latvia were present since the mid-1960s – the so-called "cultural contacts" that were not unambiguously appreciated

1 For overview of such activities, see: Beķere 2022.

2 For example, see: Bekere 2023.

3 See, for example: Cohen 2018. Similar descriptions of diaspora elsewhere as well.

in the diaspora. In contrast, drastic changes in the attitude towards cooperation took place in a very short period – from the second half of 1988, when the occurrence of important changes in the Baltic States became clear for the diaspora, to the meeting of the diaspora and the LPF in "Abrene" (France) in May 1989, which marked the formalisation of practical cooperation between the two sides. The previously prevailing attitude, namely, that political change in the Baltic States could be possible only as a result of pressure from outside and under the guidance of the diaspora, completely changed, leading to both very extensive and intensive cooperation between diaspora and various nationally-minded organisations in Latvia. One of the important nuances of this process of change was the establishment of LPF support groups. Although these groups were relatively small compared to the total number of Latvians in the diaspora and the number of people involved in the traditional diaspora organisational structure, their activities during this short period have been very active and noticeable.

The dynamics of these changes in the context of the internal development processes of the diaspora community have not been analysed in detail, nor has the role of LPF support groups in the West in this process of change. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to analyse the change of diaspora attitudes towards homeland from late 1988 to the second half of 1989, while determining the role of LPF support groups abroad in this process and the resulting emergence of close political cooperation with the homeland. To achieve this objective, first the circumstances and process of the founding of the LPF support groups are analysed, and then the related gradual change in attitudes towards the possibility of political cooperation with Latvia in diaspora society as a whole is traced. The article does not delve in details concerning the internal difficulties of mutual understanding, which are evident during this process of change and which are rooted in the different social and cultural experiences of both sides.

The issue of the involvement of Latvian diaspora in the Latvian Awakening processes has been previously addressed only occasionally and has not been comprehensively analysed either in the context of the history of diaspora or in the context of the restoration of Latvian statehood.[4] In the most recent, voluminous and detailed work by Andrejs Plakans on the history of diaspora,[5] the author mentions this change in attitude in the diaspora during 1989 and the marked reduction of the existing prejudice against cooperation,[6] but does

4 Some small-scale attempts: Celle, Ojārs 1998; Bekere 2018. LTF support groups are mentioned also in Zaķe 2010.

5 Plakans 2021.

6 Ibidem, 552.

not analyse the process of change in detail and does not mention LPF support groups. Another potentially seminal recent research on the renewal processes of the Baltic states independence by Una Bergmane[7] mentions Latvian contacts with the diaspora, specifically the "Abrene" meeting, as one of the factors that influenced the Baltic decisions to seek full independence,[8] but understandably does not analyse the actual details of this influence or events in diaspora leading up to the meeting, as they are outside the scope and focus of the book. However, memoirs and recollections of several participants have been published.[9] The most important of these is the book *LPF in the West* by the first chairman of LPF Dainis Īvāns[10] – it gives a vivid insight into the feelings and attitudes of the eyewitnesses but is of limited use from a factual point of view, as the events described are rarely dated. Another volume to be noted is an account by an Australian Latvian Jānis Ritenis,[11] who was personally involved in the processes analysed here.

As far as original written sources are concerned, unfortunately, very little material on the activities of LPF groups has found their way into the archives, mostly as parts of personal collections of individual diaspora activists. A pleasant exception is the collection of the LPF support group in San Francisco, held by the Latvian National Archives Latvian State Archive (LNA LVA) and those documents stored in the collections of the Museum of the Popular Front of Latvia. Therefore, this research makes relatively extensive use of information published in diaspora periodicals.

Establishment of LPF support groups outside Latvia

The support groups of the Latvian Popular Front abroad were very diverse in their nature, scope, and intensity of action. This makes it somewhat difficult to establish the history of these groups. Not all support groups registered their activities officially, formulated their statutes, etc. Similarly, the registration of an organisation may have taken place later than the actual start of its activities. However, it is possible to get some idea of the founding and basic operation of the organisations. In total, at least 25 LPF support groups were established abroad in the Western countries.

7 Bergmane 2023.
8 Ibidem, 50.
9 For example: Lejiņš 2002; Kalniete 2015.
10 Īvāns 2001.
11 Ritenis 1999.

Among the LPF support groups, the Swedish and Australian groups occupy a special place, as they evolved and operated in a closer and more formal capacity with the LPF – as LPF chapters. The LPF Support Group in Stockholm is the first and earliest LPF Support Group abroad. It was founded at the same time as the LPF itself and was admitted to the LPF at its founding congress on 8 October 1988. The founding of a joint Swedish LPF chapter, on the other hand, took place only on 3 March 1989 at a public meeting in Stockholm. It was attended by representatives of the LPF – Chairman D. Īvāns, Chairman of the Board Valdis Šteins, and Head of the Foreign Affairs Committee Jānis Jurkāns. A total of 89 representatives of diaspora attended the meeting. The meeting extensively discussed the need for such chapter, the status of its activities, and the draft statutes (which were adopted in a slightly amended form), as well as elected a temporary board headed by Atis Lejiņš, and approved the membership fee for the Swedish chapter of the LPF – 200 kronor per year.[12] It is interesting to note that the LPF members, despite their presence at this same founding meeting on 3 March, characteristically do not distinguish in their memoirs between these two separate groups – the Stockholm Support Group and the wider LPF Sweden chapter – and emphasise that the LPF Sweden chapter has been part of the LPF since its founding congress.[13]

In Australia, the founding of the LPF chapter followed similar lines – first, on 16 September 1989, the LPF Support Group was established in Melbourne. On 27 December 1989, the LPF Australia chapter was established, with its headquarters in Melbourne.[14] Support groups were also active in Sydney (founded on 13 December 1989)[15] and in Adelaide.

In Toronto, Canada, even two LPF support groups were established. In early December 1988, artist and public figure Ēriks Dzenis announced the establishment of an LPF support group.[16] However, the activities of this group are later not particularly noticeable. It is the second LPF support group in Toronto, established under the auspices of the Latvian Arts Trust Society (LATS) in Toronto,[17] that is of importance regarding the change of the diaspora attitude towards cooperation with Latvia. LATS, founded in 1984, was one of the first diaspora organisations to take an important practical step in support of the Awakening process in Latvia

12 Minutes of the founding meeting of the Latvian Popular Front in Sweden. 03.03.1989. Riksarkivet, folder "Ev Peteris Vasarins arkhiv".

13 See, for example, the memoirs of D. Īvāns: Īvāns 2001, 40.

14 Liepiņa 2011, 129–131.

15 LTF atbalsta grupas. *Austrālijas Latvietis*, 19.01.1990.

16 Tautas fronte arī Toronto. *Laiks*, 17.12.1988.

17 Kalns 2014.

by publishing in a separate volume, and thus making available to the general public, the resolution and papers of the plenary meeting of Creative Unions held in Riga on 1 and 2 June 1988, at which previously taboo topics such as the occupation of Latvia, the influx of migrants, and the policy of Russification were publicly discussed for the first time in Latvia.[18] In the context of this, the activity of the LPF support group under the auspices of LATS from November 1988 onwards is a logical further step. The official founding meeting of the group took place on 22 February 1989.[19] The importance of this support group in initiating the first LPF visit to North America, which included the Gananoque meeting in April 1989 (see below), should be stressed. The group was also active in advocating the formation of support groups elsewhere.[20] In addition to the two groups in Toronto, another LPF support group was active in Ottawa. Like the Toronto group, it was founded on the same day, 22 February 1989.[21]

In the USA, a number of LPF support groups were formed in different cities: Chicago on 30 December 1988,[22] New York on 4 January 1989,[23] Cleveland in January 1989,[24] Los Angeles on 3 March 1989,[25] Kalamazoo in early April 1989,[26] Minneapolis on 7 June 1989,[27] and in several other cities.

LPF support groups in the USA coordinated their activities with each other, although not on a very regular basis. One such instance of cooperation is a joint meeting in Chicago on 7 and 8 April 1990. It was attended by representatives of groups from Chicago, Milwaukee, Kalamazoo, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, and New York. The meeting discussed cooperation with Latvia, with the central diaspora organisations, as well as with the local Latvian diaspora and American communities.[28]

18 Resolution and reports of the Plenary Meeting of Latvian Creative Unions, 1 and 2 June 1988. Toronto: Latvian Arts Trust Society (LATS), 1988.

19 Latvijas Tautas frontes grupa viesosies Kanādā un ASV. *Laiks*, 11.03.1989.

20 Letter from Voldemārs Gulēns to Latvian diaspora organisations, inviting them to form LPF support groups, 04.01.1989. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–1.

21 Latviešu dzīve Kanādā. *Laiks*, 25.03.1989.

22 Spuris 2001.

23 Nodibināta LTF atbalsta grupa Ņujorkā. *Laiks*, 11.01.1989.

24 Darbu sāk Tautas frontes atbalsta grupa. *Laiks*, 22.02.1989.

25 Dižgalvis 1989.

26 Kalamazū nodibinājusies LTF atbalsta grupa. *Laiks*, 10.05.1989.

27 Mineapoles LTF atbalsta grupas darbība. *Laiks*, 07.02.1990.

28 Zaube 1990.

In Europe, besides Sweden, several other LPF support groups were formed – in the UK, Germany, Switzerland, and France.[29] In Switzerland, a small group of activists took the name of the LPF Support Group at the suggestion of D. Īvāns in March 1990.[30] This fact once again confirms the often informal and free nature of LPF support groups, including sometimes a long and active existence without the establishment of a formal group. There were also some support groups in places such as Moscow, Lithuania, Estonia, and elsewhere in the USSR,[31] but since they are not connected with the Latvian diaspora in the West, whose changing attitudes are the subject of this article, the activities of these groups are not dealt with here.

Membership of LPF support groups varied widely. It should also be noted that, just as the situation was fluid and uncertain with regard to the registration of the organisations themselves, not everyone involved in their activities was always a formal member. Some groups were very small and relied on a few individual activists. This was the case in Europe, for example in Germany[32] or in Switzerland, where there were mainly two participants, Vita Matīsa and Ansis Reinhards.[33] However, several groups reached quite a significant number of members. The very active Swedish group had 31 members in 1989 and 24 members at the end of 1990.[34] The Australian chapter of the LPF had 65 members at its founding meeting (reaching around 130 members in its first year),[35] while the Sydney support group, for example, had 47 members at its founding meeting.[36] The number of interested members at the founding of some US-based support groups also varied: the Los Angeles support group had 20 members at its founding meeting,[37] the New York group had 16,[38] Cleveland had 50 members shortly after its founding,[39] Kalamazoo had an initiating group of 20.[40] In San Francisco, more than 80 people signed the membership list to be submitted to the LPF Council with

29 Īvāns 2001, 87–88.

30 Reinhards 2001.

31 See the "LPF Support Groups Abroad" collection at the LPF Museum.

32 Īvāns 2001, 87.

33 Ibidem, 191.

34 Minutes of the Congress of the Latvian Popular Front in Sweden, 23 March 1991. Riksarkivet, "Ev Peteris Vasarins arkhiv" folder.

35 Liepiņa, 2011, 131.

36 LTF atbalsta grupas. *Austrālijas Latvietis*, 19.01.1990.

37 Dižgalvis 1989.

38 Nodibināta LTF atbalsta grupa Ņujorkā. *Laiks*, 11.01.1989.

39 Darbu sāk Tautas frontes atbalsta grupa. *Laiks*, 22.02.1989.

40 Kalamazū nodibinājusies LTF atbalsta grupa. *Laiks*, 10.05.1989.

a request to register the support group.[41] The Chicago group had 25 members at the time of its foundation, but by 1990, the number of supporters and committed members was approaching 200.[42] In Canada, the LPF Support Group, established under the auspices of LATS, had 60 members at the time of its foundation,[43] and in Ottawa, around 20 people attended the founding meeting of the Support Group.[44] It is likely that the membership of all groups increased over time after their establishment. Of course, as in all organisations, not all members were equally active, and those elected to the boards were usually responsible for most of the activities carried out.

The founders of the LPF support groups had very similar motivations, which could be summarised as a desire to use every opportunity to promote the restoration of independence of the Republic of Latvia – including methods that had not been used in diaspora previously. The organisers and participants saw support for the LPF and cooperation with LPF support groups as an opportunity to "lend a hand to compatriots back home".[45] Ilze Švarca, the organiser of the LPF group in Cleveland, aptly describes her motivation as "If I don't do it, it don't get done".[46] Andris Padegs, treasurer of the New York support group, has also noted a deeper motivation to help Latvian visitors, describing it not only as a desire to help Latvia, but also as a kind of debt repayment: "[...] by our kindness and generosity, we wanted to show that, while we live in America's prosperity, we are in some way indebted to Latvia."[47]

The duration of the LPF support groups varied. Some of these support groups were active only for a short time, mostly in 1989–1990, and after the restoration of independence their activities faded away, often without the official closure of the group. This was the case, for example, of the group in New York.[48] The very active support group in Toronto, under the auspices of LATS, also ceased its activities with the restoration of independence, with the persons involved continuing their activities as before, within the LATS organisation.[49] The Minnesota support group ceased its activities in mid-1993.[50] The Swedish

41 Registration lists. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–1.
42 Spuris 2001.
43 Latvijas Tautas frontes grupa viesosies Kanādā un ASV. *Laiks*, 11.03.1989.
44 Latviešu dzīve Kanādā. *Laiks*, 25.03.1989.
45 Celle, Māra 2001.
46 Švarca 2001.
47 Padegs 2001.
48 Ibidem.
49 Īvāns 2001, 112.
50 LTF atbalsta grupa Minesotā izbeigusi darboties. *Laiks*, 07.08.1993.

chapter of the LPF, however, was one of the longest lasting and did not dissolve itself until 1999.[51]

Some groups continued to operate after the restoration of independence but changed their names and objectives. For example, the LPF Support Group in Chicago changed its name to "Latvian People's Support Group in Chicago" at its general meeting on 12 February 1993 and continued its general work of helping Latvia both financially and in public relation field. In announcing this name change to the LPF, the group emphasised that it still supported the Popular Front in principle, but since it had become a political party, the support group, under the laws of tax-exempt organisations in the USA, could not persist. They would continue to "support the national direction in Latvian politics, public and cultural life".[52] Similarly, at the meeting of 27 February 1993, the LPF Support Group in San Francisco changed its name to "Latvian Support Group in San Francisco", re-electing the previous board of directors under the leadership of Raimonds Slaidiņš.[53] This change of name was also initiated by the LPF's change from a social movement to a political party and participation in democratic elections.[54]

The analysis and detailed evaluation of the activities of the LPF Support Groups are issues for future research and are beyond the scope of this publication. However, overall, during their existence, LPF support groups can be identified as having several main areas of activity. As one of their activities, these groups continued the traditional approach of other diaspora organisations of the previous decades – political lobbying and public relations work, writing letters to politicians in their host countries and organising public events. At the same time, however, other areas of activity were very important and probably more significant: material assistance, information supply, mediation in foreign visits. The relative importance of the activities is well illustrated by their arrangement, for example, in the activity reports of the LPF chapter in Sweden: education and exchange of experience activities are mentioned first, followed by material assistance, then the organisation of visits, and only lastly, public relations work in the host country.[55]

51 Īvāns 2001, 88.

52 Letter from Juris Kīna, Chairman of the LPF Support Group in Chicago, to Uldis Augstkalns, Chairman of the LPF, 26.02.1993. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–4.

53 Invitation of the Latvian Support Group in San Francisco to attend an information meeting on the 5th Saeima elections. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–4.

54 LPF San Francisco support group questionnaire on name change, 15.11.1992. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–13.

55 LPF Activity Report from March 1989 to March 1990. LPF Museum, TFM 3813 "LPF Swedish Branch Documents", pp.150–152.

The provision of financial, material, and technical assistance of various kinds to the LPF was especially extensive. Dainis Īvāns emphasises the arrival of the first computer equipment in Latvia, purchased and sent by LPF support groups, as almost the main contribution of the groups to the Awakening.[56] At least as important was the flow of information to Latvia, both in the form of books,[57] and personal trips to Latvia by professionals giving lectures on their experience and knowledge, as well as the education of Latvian students abroad.[58] Another very important activity was the organisation of visits to Western politicians by officials of the LPF and later the new Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other statesmen. Jānis Ritenis, head of the World Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL, the central global Latvian diaspora organisation) Information Centre, lists 13 visits of public figures from Latvia to European officials that he helped organise between April 1990 and February 1991 alone.[59] Such visits took place in large numbers on other continents as well, starting with the very first trips of LPF officials to the West. It has to be noted, that such trips of LPF members to the West were in principle only possible thanks to the funding and organisational work of the diaspora, often the LPF support groups.

LPF support groups were not unique in their nature, i.e. formal or informal groups established in diaspora to cooperate with a Latvian public organisation. As early as in 1987–1988, support groups for the *Helsinki-86* movement were formed.[60] The support for *Helsinki-86* was, however, a relatively short-lived phenomenon, which was soon overshadowed in early 1988 by disputes and confusion over financial matters and the use of the rather large amount of money donated (a balance of almost 31,000 USD).[61]

Despite the tricky situation with *Helsinki-86*, long-term informal support structures similar to the LPF support groups were also formed in diaspora for other public organisations involved in the Latvian independence process. For example, the American chapter of the Latvian Environmental Protection

56 Īvāns 2001, 23–25.

57 One of many examples: Kaugars 2001.

58 For example, the admission of five dental students from Latvia to Sweden. See: Minutes of the Board Meeting of the LPF in Sweden, No. 3/91, 23.05.1991. Riksarkivet, "Ev Peteris Vasarins arkhiv" folder. Student exchange with the University of West Michigan: Īvāns 2001, 175.

59 Celle 1998, 453.

60 For support in Australia, see: Liepiņa 2011, 126–127.

61 See, for example, the correspondence between Linards Lukss and Pēteris Vasariņš, as well as the financial statement of the Helsinki-86 Foundation as of 16 April 1988. Riksarkivet, Peteris Vasarins Arkhiv.

Club (EPC) reached as many as 200 members.[62] The activities of the EPC were generally particularly interesting for Latvian diaspora youth in the USA, and the American Latvian Youth Association strongly supported the EPC, inviting all their members to join.[63] Support groups for the more radically national organisation Latvian National Independence Movement (LNIM) existed in Sweden, the USA, Canada, and Australia.[64] As is typical of diaspora organisations, the same people often participated in several such support groups. In Sweden, for example, Pēteris Vasariņš was in both the LNIM's Swedish chapter and the LPF's Swedish chapter.

Despite the existence of various support groups of public organisations, in the context of the changes in the sentiment of the diaspora towards cooperation with Latvia on political issues, as well as in the context of the main political issue on the agenda of the diaspora – the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia – the role of the LPF support groups is of primary importance. The LPF being the leading organisation in achieving political change in Latvia by following the "parliamentary road",[65] it was also the LPF support groups in diaspora whose activities had the most direct impact on the process of restoration of the Republic of Latvia.

It should be briefly noted that Lithuanian *Sajūdis* and Estonian *Rahvarinne* also gradually established cooperation with their diasporas in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to find individual studies on this issue. In her memoirs, LPF member Sandra Kalniete mentions that initially the Lithuanian and Estonian central organisations refused to cooperate with the newly established Popular Fronts in their countries of origin even more sharply than in the case of Latvians.[66] A little later, in 1991, one of the Estonian *Rahvarinne* leaders, Marju Lauristin, mentions cooperation with the Estonian diaspora and the use of the resources it offered for economic reorganisation, as well as for political contacts with the West,[67] functions which, at least in general terms, are very similar to the diaspora's contribution in the Latvian case.

62 LTFR, 62. Tija Karkle.

63 Resolutions of the 36th ALJA Congress. *Vēja Zvani*, Nr. 27, 01.09.1989, p. 13.

64 Report on the activities of the LNNK in Sweden from October to December 1990. Riksarkivet, "Ev Peteris Vasarins arkhiv" folder.

65 On different approaches to the restoration of independence, see: Deksnis, Jundzis 2015.

66 Kalniete 2015, 88.

67 Lauristin 1991, 147–148.

Different attitudes and their gradual change

The motivation for the establishment of LPF support groups has already been briefly mentioned above. However, when the first LPF support groups were founded, the attitude of the diaspora society as a whole was not unambiguous. There were a wide range of opinions about the LPF and the need or, on the contrary, the reluctance to support it, expressed both at the founding meetings of the LPF support groups and in the diaspora public media in general. The major diaspora central organisations took a negative or even strongly negative attitude at first.

Recognising that the processes taking place in the Baltic States were something completely new and that it was necessary to respond to them in diaspora, an Extraordinary Congress of the largest regional Latvian diaspora organisation, the American Latvian Association (ALA), was held on 10 December 1988. LPF members Sandra Kalniete and Edvīns Inkēns, who happened to be in the USA at the time, attended the congress and were given the floor to address the participants. Sandra Kalniete recalls that the attitude on the spot at the congress was rather kind and there was no indication of the subsequent largely negative reaction in the diaspora media.[68] The simple fact that Latvians from Latvia were present at the congress provoked such a lively reaction that after the event, ALA President Valdis Pavlovskis felt compelled to publicly explain the organisation's position in a publication with the significant title "ALA's national political principles have not changed". The ALA's position on the LPF support groups was that "[...] I see no real need for the establishment of a new organisation that would exclusively support the Latvian Popular Front. [...] In any case, such a new organisation – a Popular Front support group – should not be involved in politics. This would be to the detriment of the Popular Front in Latvia and would be, in my opinion, a disastrous move for our national political work here in the USA. It could lead to a situation where we would have different national political objectives, activities, demands. [...] For my part, I would like to suggest that such groups need clear and definite objectives and a plan of work. We also need a measure of when and how support for the work of the Popular Front would be stopped if the Soviet authorities took control of the Latvian Popular Front."[69] Even six months later, in the summer of 1989, the attitude of the ALA was still one of a wait-and-see attitude. In discussions about ALA cooperation with Latvian Popular Front support groups here and the establishment of new

68 Kalniete 2015, 87.

69 ALA nacionālpolitiskie principi nav mainījušies. *Laiks*, 07.01.1989.

groups, the Board acknowledged that the American Latvian Association would remain neutral in its attitude towards the establishment of LPF support groups in America.[70]

The central organisation of the Latvian diaspora, the World Federation of Free Latvians, was initially very negative towards the LPF, and they came into first serious contacts with the LPF in fact latest of all diaspora organisations, only with the Abrene meeting (see below).[71] Accordingly, it is telling that the WFFL, in a printed 2001 volume dedicated to the federation's 45th anniversary, begins its review of its political activities during the Awakening only with this meeting.[72]

One of the arguments most often repeated in the sceptics' opinions is the fear of the Communist Party on the LPF. Opinions ranged along a spectrum from the belief that the entire LPF was a project created by the Communist Party to harm the diaspora and to the logical admonition that the diaspora needed to keep a close eye on what was happening in Latvia and to stop cooperating with the LPF if its activities deviated from the goal of restoring the independence of the Republic of Latvia or if people loyal to the regime actually took over. Not being familiar with the duality of the Soviet regime – often saying one thing and meaning another – it was especially incomprehensible to many in diaspora that a large part of LPF members were also members of the Communist Party.[73] It should be noted that the existence of two approaches – those who denied contacts with Latvia because of this fear and those who supported them – was not new in the political work of the diaspora.[74]

It should also be noted that the fear of communism and its propaganda, as well as the ethnic stereotype that "Russians" are the enemy,[75] were deeply personal for the older generation, the result of the traumatic experience of flight and the somewhat "encapsulated" worldview that was consolidated in diaspora. This fear was significant enough to turn away not only other members of the diaspora community, but even close family members. Inese Birzniece recalls that her father threatened to disown her if she watched the Soviet Latvian film "Pūt, vējiņi!" (1973, directed by Gunārs Piesis), shown in the USA, which her father referred to as a "communist propaganda" tape.[76] This case is one of those which clearly prove

70 ALA valdes sēde Vašingtonā. *Laiks*, 21.06.1989.

71 For D. Īvāns' vision of the difficult beginning of the relationship between the WFFL and the LPF, see: Īvāns 2017, 115–129.

72 Kadeģis 2001, 142–143.

73 Ko sprieda ALA kongress. *Čikāgas Ziņas*, 07.–08.1989.

74 See, for example, reflections on this issue published in 1984: Zēgners1984.

75 Plakans 2021, 545.

76 Īvāns 2001, 169.

that the image of communism as the enemy, the inability to trust and tolerate anything coming from the occupied Latvia, was for a part of the diaspora society unbreakable. This problem had been already evident in the past, in the context of cultural relations with Latvia.[77] Emotional fears, based on deeply traumatic experiences, uncontrollable by practical reason, manifested themselves the more vividly with regard to cooperation on political issues.

Another widespread call against the formation of LPF support groups was not to fragment the forces of diaspora by forming more and more new organisations. This argument is heard in both mildly critical and unequivocally dismissive contexts, as in this article: "[the Latvian choir; K. B.] *Ave Sol* performed with undeniable success on the North American continent and with equally undeniable success split the unity of Latvian exiles. [...] I mention this *Ave Sol* affair because the Popular Front founded in Latvia and led by local communists is the Kremlin's next weapon to destroy Latvian unity and national-political activity."[78] Of course, it cannot be denied that from the point of view of the internal unity of diaspora society, the emergence of LPF support groups might appear as a division – but, objectively speaking, it was rather an expression of the pre-existing diversity of opinion in diaspora. The issue of the potential split due to the formation of LPF groups was obviously very topical for the central organisations, as this issue was raised as a possible problem by the WFFL and discussed as late as at the "Abrene" meeting in mid-May 1989,[79] when most of the LPF support groups had already been formed.

Many of the arguments also reflect the concern of the existing organisations not to lose their influence, their somewhat controlling function, their pre-planned political "line of action". A number of such notions of the above nature are vividly illustrated, for example, in an article by Vilis Hāzners, a former Latvian Legion officer and one of the ideological leaders of the *Daugavas Vanagi* (*DV*) organisation, published in the newspaper *Latvija Amerik*ā in May 1989 (apparently written shortly before Hāzners' death on 12 May 1989). In it, he repeatedly stresses the fact that, in his opinion, it is an actual prerogative of the central diaspora organisations to be the guarantors of the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Latvia: "[...] the *DV* are convinced that the political leadership for the restoration of the freedom of Latvia is in the hands of the WFFL and, therefore, of the central organisations of all our countries, and not by any groups of individuals or even individual people. [...] The Latvian Popular Front [...] is

77 For cultural contacts, see: Eglāja-Kristsone 2013.

78 Ķegumnieks 1988.

79 Latvijas un trimdas tautas pārstāvju apspriedes "Abrenē". *Laiks*, 24.05.1989.

the most active in seeking cooperation with us in the West. But this search for cooperation is not with the centres of our exile leadership, but its contacts are with politically irresponsible persons or groups."[80] Further, interpreting the LPF's demand for Latvian sovereignty as equivalent to the 1917 slogan "free Latvia in a free Russia", V. Hāzners says: "At present, going along (let alone cooperating) with the LPF is many times more dangerous, although we can help them a lot in many places and things, especially when it comes to the sovereignty of the nation. But this should be done by our political leadership and not by some "know-it-alls" with whom the LPF is friends."[81] Finally, the author concludes with a vivid formulation, which very aptly expresses the opinion of a part of the diaspora about their own importance: "The key of freedom is still in the hands of the exiles, and it can be used only if the LPF starts talking to the central organisations of exile (WFFL, exile leaders of the countries, Latvian diplomatic missions, others)."[82]

Such attitudes reflect certain processes in diaspora society – the large diaspora organisations that had existed for decades were inevitably strongly conservative. Their contribution to the preservation of the idea of Latvian independence in the West cannot be denied, but by the mid-1980s their leading role in diaspora society had become formal, rigid, and firmly based on the customary practices of political work developed over time and their own self-understanding of their role and place in diaspora society. It was particularly difficult for them to adapt to the rapidly and radically changed situation in the Baltic States.

Certain separateness of the activities of the LPF support groups, even an opposition to these already existing conservative diaspora organisations was emphasised, for example, by the LPF group in Stockholm themselves. They called on the broader masses to get involved in the founding of the Swedish chapter of the LPF: "We would especially like to encourage those Latvians who may not have been able or willing to participate in the "traditional" activities of the exiles so far, but who might now, in their professional field, think of devoting some time to a specific Latvian project."[83]

In general, it is characteristic that the LPF support groups were attended by such people – most of whom had not previously been involved in diaspora social and political activities.[84] The question of the individual motivation of these

80 Hāzners 1989.

81 Ibidem.

82 Ibidem.

83 Time for the Swedish branch of the LPF to be constituted. February 1989. Riksarkivet, folder "Ev Peteris Vasarins arkhiv".

84 Zaķe 2010, 164.

people to act just outside the existing organisational structures and their apparent unwillingness to do anything within the existing structures is one that offers significant potential for future research and can significantly add to understanding of the functioning and nature of the organisational structures of diaspora.

The LPF, for its part, consistently distanced itself from dissent and diversity of opinion in diaspora, while at the same time emphasising the importance and value of LPF support groups. Already during the 1988 ALA Extraordinary Congress, Sandra Kalniete noted that support groups were absolutely necessary for the LPF, while relations between the support groups and other diaspora organisations were an internal matter of the diaspora; the LPF, for its part, was ready to cooperate with any organisation whose activities did not contradict the LPF's goals.[85] During the talks in "Abrene", the LPF noted that it was not the founder of the LPF support groups and implied that it could not take any responsibility for potential divisions in the diaspora community, and continued to stress the importance of the support groups and its willingness to cooperate with all, especially with the central organisations.[86]

It is easy to understand that, not knowing the details of the internal organisational structure of the diaspora, and consequently not being limited in their opinions and attitudes by the central diaspora organisations' self-perception of their role and importance in the diaspora society, the LPF were ready to cooperate and accept any available help from the diaspora, even if it did not initially come from the main organisations. A symbolic and vivid proof of this is the fact that the 2nd LPF Congress elected the diaspora activist Valdis Liepiņš as a Board member.[87] Liepiņš was one of the founders of LATS in Canada and the founder of the LPF support group in Toronto, but since the 1970s he had not been involved in the activities of the central Latvian diaspora organisations.

The attitude change in diaspora was gradual, and it is very noticeable that personal contacts significantly contributed to it. Indeed, the founding of many LPF support groups was a direct result of personal contacts with LPF leadership or representatives. As a result of the closer geographical location and the consequently closer personal contacts and exchange of information, the first LPF support group was established in Sweden, in Stockholm. But the role of personal meetings is true for geographically remote places as well. The LPF Support Group in Melbourne was created as a result of a visit to Riga and personal contacts with

85 Mīklaini "radioklausītāji" brīdina Inkenu un Kalnieti. *Laiks*, 31.12.1988.

86 Latvijas un trimdas tautas pārstāvju apspriedes "Abrenē". *Laiks*, 24.05.1989.

87 Īvāns 2001, 85.

the LPF by its founders, Anita and Graham Anderson.[88] But the formation and membership increase of the Australian LPF chapter began as a direct result of the visit of D. Īvāns to Australia in early December 1989.[89] Similarly, G. Slaidiņš, the initiator of the support group in San Francisco, emphasises the contacts with Latvians from Latvia as inspiration for the establishment of the group: "In the San Francisco Bay area we are also awakened to these Latvian spring floods in periodicals, letters, personal contacts, but especially from Latvian guests: Sarmīte Ēlerte, Imants Ziedonis, dean [Modris; K. B.] Plāte, who have brought us the plea for help."[90] The formation of the Los Angeles Group began after the visit of Sarmīte Ēlerte, Head of the LPF Information Centre at the time, to the USA at the end of 1988.[91] Uldis Grava, one of the most prominent second generation diaspora public figures in the USA, noted his emotional uplift and readiness to cooperate with the LPF after their visit to New York in the spring of 1989, writing in a letter to the LPF delegation: "I still had to tell you that this meeting was one of the most significant events in my life. For the first time in my life, I am convinced that under the enlightened leadership of the Popular Front, the Latvian people have a future of their own. Until now I had only hope."[92]

This trend, or the decisive role of direct contact in changing the long-standing attitude, can be traced not only in the case of individuals or small groups. In general, the process of political rapprochement between Latvian Latvians and diaspora in the late 1980s can best and most accurately be described through a series of joint meetings and discussions. These meetings represent the steps from virtually no contact to close cooperation in a number of mere months.

The first major step in this process of attitudinal change and, consequently, rapprochement was the LPF's first visit to North America in 1989, which lasted 26 days, from 2 to 28 April. Participants were the LPF's leadership, scientists, cultural figures, among them Dainis Īvāns, Ramona Umblija, Elmārs Grēns, Rūdolfs Plēpis, Kaspars Dimiters, etc. – a total of 23 people.[93] This visit is best known by the name of the meeting of LPF and diaspora representatives in Gananoque (Canada) or the "Gananoque Conference". However, the visit was much broader and, in addition to the events in Gananoque, it also included visits

88 Liepiņa 2011, 127–129.

89 Ibidem, 131.

90 Appeal by Raimonds G. Slaidiņš in support of the LPF, 30.03.1989. LNA-LVA, 2241–1v–1.

91 Īvāns 2001, 168.

92 Letter from U. Grava to the LPF delegation, 26.04.1989. LNA-LVA, 2928–1v–64, p. 19.

93 LPF Group List, 00.04.1989. LPF Museum, TFMP 2595.

to various Canadian scientific institutions, public lectures by members of the LPF delegation at Latvian diaspora centres in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Hamilton, and several other Canadian cities. For example, Dainis Īvāns repeated his lecture "The Latvian Popular Front, the People, and the Interfornt" at least five times. On 15 April, a public seminar was held in Toronto, where discussions on nature protection and tourism in Latvia, the economic situation and the cultural foundation took place. From 17 to 27 April, the LPF group was in the USA, visiting Latvian centres there.[94]

The Gananoque Conference proper lasted three days, from 6 to 9 April. During these days, intensive work took place in several thematic groups, such as: the LPF and diaspora organisations, the LPF and its support groups, the ecology, academic exchange, economic, legal and agricultural topics, as well as separate groups to discuss the Latvian Cultural Foundation and the group on the Ēdole Castle project.[95] The project of Ēdole Castle was to renovate the castle and turn it into a high-quality cultural, tourist, and conference centre.[96] However, this project was not realised.

It should be noted that the main organisers of this extensive visit were the LPF Support Group in Toronto, established under the auspices of the LATS, who, by organising this visit, directly and unequivocally contributed to bringing the two sides closer together. "The conference organised by the LPF Support Group in Canada and financed by the exiles [...] was the first time the LPF was behind the Iron Curtain, the first meeting with the West and the beginning of the LPF's people's diplomacy. [...] The Gananoque Conference certainly encouraged the WFFL and the ALA not to stand on the sidelines and be afraid of losing their innocence, but to participate boldly in the processes of Latvia's rebirth."[97]

The next big meeting of the diaspora and the LPF was initiated by the WFFL and took place on 15–18 May 1989 at the "Abrene" Folk University in France, a property of the diaspora Latvians, from where the meeting got its name. The leadership of the WFFL and *Daugavas Vanagi* met with eight members of the LPF Board, as well as representatives of three other parties – Latvian National Independence movement, Rebirth of Latvia Party, and Social Democratic Workers Party of Latvia.[98] During this meeting, as before in Gananoque, various topics

94 LPF Group programme in Canada and the USA. 4th Met, 18.02.1989. LPF Museum, TFMP 2595.

95 Ganonoque Working Group, 00.04.1989. LPF Museum, TFMP 2595.

96 The Ēdole Project. 00.04.1989. LPF Museum, TFMP 2595.

97 Īvāns 2017, 122.

98 Ritenis 1999, 57–60.

(economic, cultural, educational) were discussed, but by far the most important was the discussion on the political situation in Latvia. At the end of the event, the WFFL Board adopted the following resolution: "The WFFL observes and follows with great interest the organisation and activities of the LPF in Latvia and supports all efforts of the LPF that strengthen the position of the Latvian people and contribute to Latvia's regaining full independence."[99] This meeting marked the end of the often-emotional discussion on whether cooperation with the LPF was necessary for the diaspora, turning into more practical talks on how to organise this cooperation in practice.

The new programme of activities adopted at the LPF's 2nd Congress on 7–8 October 1989, which officially set the restoration of Latvia's independence as the LPF's goal, also played a huge role in further changing attitudes within the diaspora. With this decision, the publicly stated aims of the diaspora and the LPF were fully aligned and cooperation developed further even very rapidly. The LPF support groups had been the guiding force in the early period of change, as Dainis Īvāns puts it: "[...] intermediaries in negotiations with the old exile organisations."[100]

Conclusions

Although in the more progressive circles of diaspora certain contacts with Latvia, or so-called cultural contacts, had already previously been taking place in increasing amounts, with the later development of broad support for the Latvian *Helsinki-86* group, and other social and national movements, the establishment of cooperation with the LPF is the first case in which this cooperation is not only generally national, but directly political in nature. In this context, the LPF support groups are a fundamental novelty in diaspora. They simultaneously expressed, shaped, and contributed to a fundamental change in the thinking and attitudes of the diaspora in relation to the homeland.

From the point of view of the internal dynamics of the diaspora, the LPF support groups in the diaspora are a grassroots movement and a unifying phase that helped to establish the transition from the already quite extensive cultural relations with Latvia in the late 1980s to the beginning of practical political cooperation between the central diaspora organisations and a political force in Latvia, as represented by LPF. It was largely thanks to the initiative and enterprise

99 Kalnciema 2009, 159.

100 Īvāns 2001, 53.

of the LPF groups, especially the opportunities created for personal meetings between diaspora and activists from Latvia, that the change of opinion in diaspora and in its conservative central organisations took place so quickly. A very close association with personal visits is characteristic to this change, both visits by diaspora people to Latvia and, in particular, visits by LPF officials and prominent figures abroad. Accordingly, with the "Abrene" meeting in May 1989, political cooperation between Latvia and the leading diaspora organisations can be considered to have been established. Of course, this does not rule out the continued existence of a certain number of sceptics, but in the majority represented by the central organisations, the attitude had changed.

LPF support groups are the forerunners of the rapid change of shifting from public relations activities in host countries to concrete cooperation with Latvia and support for developments within Latvia. Although they continued to use the methods of attracting attention in their host countries that had long been developed in the diaspora, this was accompanied by conceptually new areas of activity, such as sending material aid to Latvia, organising foreign visits of Latvian political leaders, etc.

The changes in the internal politics of the Baltic States in general and the founding of LPF support groups in particular are the catalysts that revealed the multilayered nature of the diaspora society in the late 1980s, their remoteness from the central organisations, and the diversity of opinions – as such, this phenomenon is comparable to what happened in the Latvian diaspora after the founding of the Republic of Latvia in 1918. It also demonstrates the close connection of diasporas with their home countries and the fact that any sufficiently large upheaval or change in the homeland is reflected and has a ripple effect on diaspora society.

Overall, it can be concluded that mirroring processes in the Latvian society itself, the LPF was simultaneously a dividing and a unifying force in the diaspora society as well. But this force, however, ultimately achieved the goal of both divided parts of the Latvian people – the restoration of the Latvian statehood.

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LATVIJAS TAUTAS FRONTES ATBALSTA GRUPAS ĀRZEMĒS: LATVIEŠU DIASPORAS ATTIEKSMES IZMAIŅU IZPAUSMES PRET DZIMTENI

Kristīne Beķere

Pētījuma mērķis ir analizēt diasporas attieksmes maiņu pret dzimteni laika posmā no 1988. gada beigām līdz 1989. gada beigām, vienlaikus nosakot Latvijas Tautas frontes (LTF) atbalsta grupu ārzemēs lomu šajā procesā un no tā izrietošo ciešas politiskās sadarbības veidošanos ar dzimteni. Raksts aplūko LTF atbalsta grupu dibināšanu un to raksturu – dalībnieku skaitu, pastāvēšanas ilgumu utt., kā arī analizē personisko kontaktu ar LTF pārstāvjiem vai Latviju ietekmi uz grupu dibināšanu. Galvenie argumenti diasporā pret sadarbību ar LTF savukārt bija bailes no komunistiskās partijas ietekmes LTF, nevēlēšanās sadrumstalot diasporas aktivitātes, kā arī diasporas organizāciju rūpes nezaudēt savu ietekmi. 1989. gada laikā šo argumentu svars aizvien mazinājās.

Atslēgas vārdi: latviešu diaspora, Atmoda, Latvijas Tautas fronte, LTF atbalsta grupas, tikšanās Gananokvē

Kopsavilkums

20. gadsimta 80. gadu beigās, Baltijas valstīs iesākoties Atmodas procesiem, kuri eventuāli noveda pie to valstiskās neatkarības atjaunošanas, pasaulē pastāvēja ievērojama un hierarhiski organizēta latviešu diaspora, kurai bija raksturīgs vienojošs mērķis – Latvijas Republikas neatkarības atjaunošanas veicināšana. Diaspora veltīja plašas pūles, lai ietekmētu savu mītnes zemju sabiedrību un politiķus, tādējādi ar ārējas ietekmes palīdzību mēģinot panākt izmaiņas PSRS prettiesiski iekļautajās Baltijas valstīs. Ideja par Baltijas valstu iedzīvotāju pašu iespējamu rīcībspēju neatkarības atjaunošanā diasporā faktiski nepastāvēja.

Šī situācija strauji izmainījās ļoti īsā laika periodā no 1988. gada otrās puses, kad Baltijā notiekošās pārmaiņas kļuva skaidri pamanāmas, līdz diasporas un LTF sanāksmei "Abrenē" Francijā 1989. gada maijā, kas iezīmēja praktiskas sadarbības starp abām pusēm noformēšanos. Iepriekš dominējusī attieksme, proti, ka pārmaiņas Baltijas valstīs iespējamas tikai diasporas vadīta spiediena no ārpuses rezultātā, krasi izmainījās, un latviešu diaspora uzsāka ļoti plašu un intensīvu sadarbību ar dažādām nacionāli noskaņotām organizācijām Latvijā politikas, ekonomikas u. c. jomās. Raksts analizē šo pārmaiņu dinamiku trimdas kopienas iekšējās attīstības kontekstā, aplūkojot arī LTF atbalsta grupu Rietumos lomu šajos pārmaiņu procesos.

Skatoties no diasporas iekšējās attīstības dinamikas, LTF atbalsta grupas diasporā ir *grassroots* kustība un vienojošais posms, kas palīdzēja izveidot pāreju no 20. gadsimta

80. gadu beigās jau visnotaļ plašajiem kultūras sakariem ar Latviju uz praktiskas politiskas sadarbības uzsākšanos starp diasporas centrālajām organizācijām un LTF Latvijā. Lielā mērā tieši pateicoties LTF grupu iniciatīvai un uzņēmībai, to īstenotajām aktivitātēm – īpaši atbalsta grupu nodrošinātajām personīgas tikšanās iespējām starp diasporu un aktīvistiem no Latvijas, viedokļu maiņa trimdā un arī tās konservatīvajās centrālajās organizācijās notika tik īsā laika posmā. Šim izmaiņu procesam ir raksturīga ļoti cieša piesaiste personīgiem sakariem – gan diasporas pārstāvju vizītēm Latvijā, gan īpaši LTF amatpersonu un redzamu darbinieku vizītēm ārvalstīs. Līdz ar "Abrenes" tikšanos 1989. gada maijā var uzskatīt, ka politiska sadarbība starp Latviju un trimdas vadošajām organizācijām bija izveidojusies. Protams, tas neizslēdz zināma skaita skeptiķu trimdā arī turpmāku pastāvēšanu, taču savā vairumā, ko pārstāvēja centrālās organizācijas, attieksme bija izmainījusies.

LTF atbalsta grupas ir diasporas ātri notikušās attieksmes maiņas priekšvēstneši, ierosinot pāreju no politiskā lobija darba mītnes zemēs uz konkrētu sadarbību ar Latviju un atbalstu norisēm Latvijas iekšienē. Lai arī savā darbībā tās turpināja izmantot diasporā jau sen izstrādātās uzmanības piesaistīšanas metodes savās mītnes zemēs, tam klāt nāca konceptuāli jauni darbības virzieni, tādi kā materiālās palīdzības sūtīšanas uz Latviju, Latvijas politisko līderu ārzemju vizīšu organizēšana u. c.

Izmaiņas Baltijas valstu iekšpolitikā kopumā un LTF atbalsta grupu dibināšanās ir specifisks katalizators, kas 20. gadsimta 80. gadu beigās atklāj trimdas sabiedrības daudzslāņainību un viedokļu dažādību – kā tāds šis fenomens salīdzināms ar notiekošo latviešu diasporā pēc Latvijas Republikas dibināšanas 1918. gadā. Tas vienlaikus arī lieliski demonstrē diasporu ciešo saistību ar savām mītnes zemēm un to, kā jebkurš pietiekami liels satricinājums dzimtenē vai izmaiņas tajā atspoguļojas un viļņveidīgi ietekmē diasporas sabiedrību.

Kopumā jāsecina, ka, atspoguļojot Latvijā notiekošos procesus, Latvijas Tautas fronte bija vienlaikus gan diasporas sabiedrību vienojošs, gan to šķeļošs spēks. Taču šis spēks arvien pieaugošā sadarbībā ar diasporu sasniedza abu nodalīto latviešu tautas daļu mērķi – Latvijas valstiskuma atjaunošanu.

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