Language Politics in Latvia: the Role of Formal and Informal Norms

“Interdisciplinarity and the future of multilingualism research”
Berlin, 28-29 August 2018
Panel: Language, politics and society

Melanie Frank, Augsburg University, melanie.frank@phil.uni-augsburg.de

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement No. 613344 (Project MIME).
Overview

• Introduction
• Theoretical Framework
• Policies Regulating the Language Use in Public Space
• First results
• MIME: identity-building processes in three settings of complex linguistic diversity: Barcelona, Luxembourg City, Riga

• In the Latvian case: Sharp contrasts between official monolingualism and societal multilingualism

• Latvia as case of a post-Soviet context with only one official language (Latvian) but large Russian speaking minority
• Analytical distinction between the level of system integration and the level of social integration (Lockwood 1964; Mouzelis 1974)
• System integration: How do institutions influence the behaviour of (collective) actors?
• Social integration: How do (collective) actors manipulate the institutions?
• Example for formal norm:
  – Language Law, art. 6 and 8: Employees, officials or members of companies or organisations have to speak Latvian and provide information in Latvian “if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public”
  – Compulsory language skills for employees in the public sector
  – Monitored and controlled by State Language Center
• Example for informal norm:

  – Cleavage between pro-Russian and pro-Latvian parties
  – Latvian parties exclude pro-Russian parties from government coalitions
  – Language policies only represent position of ethnic-Latvian parties
• Objective of “[ensuring] the use of the Latvian language in the public space of Latvia” (Cabinet of Ministers 2014: 6)

• Language Policy Guidelines 2015-2020: new emphasis on controlling what languages are used in public
Analysis: The implementation of policies relating to the use of Latvian in public contexts (2)

- Illustration: increase of budget of the State Language Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State budget allocated to the State Language Center</td>
<td>68 298,27 €</td>
<td>785 541 €</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of controls of the language use in institutions and companies</td>
<td>1 931</td>
<td>5 781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Conflict on the level of system integration: Enforcement of Latvian by state vs. Russian-dominated local political elite and (parts of) labour market: lack of incentives for the Russian-speaking population to use Latvian

• Conflict on the level of social integration: Municipal government introduced own language policies which are undermining state policies
Thank you for your attention!