Information about interviewee:

Andrejs Elksniņš is the mayor of Daugavpils, Latvia. Interview conducted in Daugavpils, Latvia

R= Respondent – Andrejs Elksniņš

I=Interviewer – Sam Wrighton

## I: What is your position on dual citizenship?

## R: Any ethnic Russian citizens that live here for 10, 20 years are Latvians. Because they have relationships with society here, they have worked here, they lived here. They were born here. Sometimes they don't have any attitudes with their ethnic homeland or place of birth, if we are taking about seniors, or young families who were born here in Daugavpils. A lot of times the Russians speak Russians, but they are Latvian Russians. From my point of view, they are bigger patriots than anyone here in Latvia. I think it is not the right question, to talk about Russians in Daugavpils, to talk about some differences between Latvians, Estonians, Polish, Germans, Jews or anybody else here in our city because we are different, all who live here. Also one of our city success stories is that Daugavpils is a city of differences but all of us we are living in Latvia. A lot of us, a bigger part are citizens of Latvia. Yes, we have some citizens of the Russian Federation here. The main reason for them to take Russian citizenship was to do with pensions. Around 2010 the age to receive a pension from Russia was 57 or 58, but in Latvia it was 63. So from this point of view, non-citizens or aliens took Russian citizenship to receive a pension earlier. A lot of them speak in Russian, but it is also a country and city problem, because we need to support them to learn the Latvian language and receive possibilities that we can give to them. Special activities or cultural activities or defend their interests in some cases.

## I: How has the state's position of stricter Latvian language in school requirements impacted Daugavpils?

## R: It is very difficult. First of all and need to understand. If you are trying to speak with Russians here, you need to speak with them in Russia. Because they don't understand Latvian. This part, about what they are talking about. If you want to try and describe your ideas, you should talk with them in a language that they know. It is like all speaking or debates about big reforms about government reform, strengthening Latvian language and make bigger punishment for people who live here like, not aggression, but you show your power to them, and it’s not a good idea and not a good method to describe what you are interested in and what you want to do. It is like, the bigger part of Russian speakers here, if you are trying to push these ideas, they don't go easy here. It is the main idea of mentality. If I want to describe some person here, what I want from him, then I describe to them in a language that they know. If it is in Latvia, or Latgalian, or in I don't know, Russian. I am trying to talk with Polish people in Polish, because language is a weapon for conversation to understand each other and describe to each other, your ideas more easily. That is first of all. The second point of view, most part of Russian people here they understand that they live in Latvia, they have only one official language - Latvian language, they also send their children to Latvian schools. But they are asking from the government, some support. What kind of support? The possibility to speak in Russian with the municipality. Why? Because cannot in Latvian effectively defend their interests. They are asking from the municipality, they are asking for support to take part in teaching the Latvian language. Also to be concrete in some work place, to defend their own interests in any steps of life. They are asking from the government, not to forget their ethnic past. They are trying to give for them children, their own mother language. From the municipality side, any reforms to strengthen the Latvian language, but it is not possible because we don't have any teachers that can teach well the Latvian language. We open more groups for Latvian kindergarten but we don't have the teachers who agree to teach them and to work here. From this point, what I think the government should first of all, be stable and pragmatic, it is not possible to make any reform from the language side here without finance schools or kindergarten or realising the programmes and their ideas. They should understand that each year we have new reforms, new point of view, for any reforms. Each September we have teacher protest actions.

## I: Do people in Daugavpils people feel excluded?

## R: Absolutely, but the idea from our people is that they are living in Riga like in a big aquarium. They don't understand what happens in the regions. The main problem is not language or ethnic problems. We don't have ethnic problems here. It is a big idea of our parties. Here we have a problem with salaries with middle amount of these salaries. Statistically they are lower than anywhere. Here we have a problem, that our children at secondary schools, go to some other EU countries or to Riga, to get better work and education. We have problems only from the economical side. This is the main reason for people don't trust our government here. Also we some mitigations about other forces being here. We have a joke that we have such bad highways, that they cannot go anywhere. If the government economical side of our region then we will not have so much problems from ethnic side.

## I: Why is Russian/Latvian dual citizenship prohibited in Latvia?

## R: Because there is a debate in parliament that doesn't allow for dual citizenship, with non- EU and non- NATO members. I don't think it is right, because Latvians living in Russians, who are Latvians, with the same idea. But they are not allowed to take Latvian citizenship. So Latvians can be German or British. Why do we have aliens here? Why doesn’t the government make it easier for them to get Latvian citizens? Because they are Russian citizens and they go and vote in parliamentary elections for pro-Russian parties or Russian speaking parties or Harmony. It is part of the political debate, showing the power of each other from society. Government is not interested in it. Because around 10% of people who are living here, they get better results for opposition parties that are involved in the process. The main ideas of or critical reasons about citizenship to allow the second being Russian. I don't see any logical arguments.

## I: Some people have said it is a security threat.

## R: The bigger security threat is poverty, bad roads, no work here, social problems. We don't have here conversation from government with people who work here, I try. It's why I am the mayor. I will speak with any people to solve any problems. They understand it is not easy for us to defend their interests. From the government side, they don't know the real life of real people. Here in Daugavpils in Latgale, or from any region, who is out from the centre of Riga, they imagine that Latvia is Riga. No. If they are trying to speak about some threats it is not language. Absolutely.

## I: There is a position that the Latvian government wish to remove the non-citizenship status by ensuring everyone is naturalised. Do you believe this to be the case?

## R: No they don't want this. Because, them they look for who they will vote for. It is why, similarly, they don't want to allow for people to vote for the president, they are trying to vote for a president from parliament members, they don't want people to vote for city mayors from political parties. It is why, we are not developed our democratic side for not voting from some persons. We need some political parties or abstraction to represent their interest. It is why we don’t have reforms, like the Estonian parliament, for a majority system. Some from parties, some from regions, like representatives. Power tries to defend itself and to stay in this system. It is not good.

## I: What would you do with citizenship policy if you could?

## R: You know citizenship it is like a management. You need to show stories of success. You need to show that this kind of passport will defend you. You need to show that you are needed for the country. For our aliens, I don't see any arguments to take Latvian citizenship, and some of our neighbours are taking advantage of it. They are being opportunistic, absolutely and it is helping them, not us. I told you about the pensions. For them, they have easier border crossing. Or bad stories of our reforms. The government should make it interesting to take citizenship, but they are not interested. From the people they can choose, or they can go to EU and take citizenship there. Or they can go to Russia and take citizenship there. Or live here and be like a protest voters for nobody. We are nothing here. Government shows that they also don't care about them. Sometimes politics use it or don't increase the voters of some opposition party, or an opposition party increases their own voters, who sometimes who were former aliens who came for citizenship to show that they are defending their rights.

## I: Is the number of Russian citizens increasing?

## R: Not now. It was increasing until this sanction period between the EU and Russia, but only for economic reasons.

## I: Daugavpils has a declining population. Why?

## R: Because we are losing our people who are going different EU member states, who are capable to find better job or a better life.

## I: I have heard that the Russian Federation invests in NGOs. Is this happening here?

## R: No.

## I: Is there any relationship between the Russian people here in Daugavpils and the Russian Federation?

## R: Anyone can have some attitudes with some organisation or they are taking part in cultural life in some organisation, but I don't really trust in the big influence of it. Because the main idea, yeah, we can speak about Russian speakers who are living here, but they are Latvians, they are our Russians, not for anyone. No body for example wants to go to Russia and to live in Russia. Their mother country is Latvia. They have a different language, they have a different attitude, they have a different parts in history, but they are Latvians. If they make some debates here, where they would like to stay, it will be Latvia. We don't have any different debates.

## I: What is the biggest challenge?

## R: We have a lot of economic problems here in city.

## I: This needs to come from Riga?

## R: We discuss with Riga that we are not a separate country, we are part of it, we have a lot of questions that need solving. We are working.

## I: Are you optimistic about the future?

## R: I am always optimistic about the future.