

One major goal of human development is to guarantee every member of society the maximum degree of control over his or her life. In a country such as Latvia, where not too long ago society was subject to totalitarianism – a theory and practice based on the absolute subjugation of the individual to the state – the quest for human development is not limited to certain individuals or social groups. To guarantee the opportunities for human development to every member of Latvian society, society as a whole must be transformed from one where the individual is completely subordinated to the state into a society where the individual has the maximum independence to pursue his or her own economic, social and political development, to control his or her own life and to be involved in the societal decisions that affect it. Totalitarianism must be stood on its head – civil society must take precedence over the state.

In examining the transition from a totalitarian to a civil society, one must ask two basic questions: To what extent have people become independent of the state? To what extent can people influence the state? To make the answers to the first question analytically clearer, we can focus on the three traditional subdivisions of civil society: the economic, the social and the political.

Economic Civil Society: The Growth of the Private Sector

At least theoretically, the extent of economic independence from the state is the easiest to measure with a degree of scientific precision. As land and all the means of production were owned by the state under totalitarianism, a valid measure of growing independence from the state is the growth of the private sector. Unfortunately, there are no accurate measures of the percentage contributed to gross domestic product by private enterprise: the Latvian State Statistical Committee calculated it at 58% in 1994, basing this figure on the number of people employed in the private sector. As can be seen in Table 5.1, the private sector has been growing steadily since 1992.

Historically and culturally the family farmstead has been a symbol of economic indepen-

Table 5.1

Percentage of the Total Work Force
Employed in the Private Sector, 1992–1994

1992		
	1st quarter	38
	2nd quarter	45
	3rd quarter	46
	4th quarter	46
1993		
	1st quarter	53
	2nd quarter	54
	3rd quarter	56
	4th quarter	57
1994		
	1st quarter	57
	2nd quarter	58
	3rd quarter	59
	4th quarter	59

dence for Latvians. Thus, it is not surprising that a significant spur to independent economic activity has been the privatisation of collective farms. Even before independence the government gave collective farms the right to lease land and equipment to individual farmers, and in 1991 the legislature passed a law setting in motion full-scale agrarian reform aimed at dismantling collectivised agriculture. As a result, the number of individual family farms burgeoned from 7518 in 1990 to 57,510 in 1993. Of course, many of these family farms have barely gotten off the ground. Nevertheless, their growing number indicates the desire of many people to take their economic fate into their own hands.

Another measure of economic independence from the state is the growth in private ownership, which has not kept pace with the explosion of independent economic activity. The growth in land ownership has been slow: as of February, 1995, only 13,991 plots of land, totaling 197,805 hectares (about 3% of Latvia's total land area), had been registered in the land register. 7891 buildings were denationalised from 1992 to 1994. The privatisation of large enterprises is only just beginning. It is widely believed that the picture is better with regard to small enterprises such as shops and restaurants, but in fact less than a third of these have actual-

ly been sold to private owners – the rest are either leased out or run directly by municipal governments.

Nevertheless, one kind of property ownership has grown rapidly: the share of privately owned apartments and houses increased by more than 50% from 1990 to 1993, when privately owned housing reached 42% of the total available housing space in Latvia. Moreover, the acceleration of privatisation by means of vouchers (*sertifikāti*) promises to considerably increase the number of those who own either real estate (mainly cooperative apartments) or shares in privatised enterprises. Taking into account the significant role of the "grey economy," which does not appear in official statistics, even the above-mentioned figures almost certainly understate the degree to which private initiative has become the basis of economic life in Latvia.

Of course, the shadow economy should not be idealised simply because it is private: workers therein do not pay taxes and are often involved in illegal activities. Freedom must be balanced with responsibility, and lawless freedom for some inevitably leads to oppression and poverty for others. True freedom, which enhances everyone's human development, can only exist within the framework of the rule of law. This is vividly illustrated by the fact that as the state has retreated from many spheres of economic life, its place has been taken not by the independent initiative of law-abiding citizens but by the extortion and racketeering of organised crime. Many people see this problem as pervasive, and some estimates put the proportion of businesses that pay "protection money" as high as 95% (see the Chapter on Rising Crime). As was recognised in the global 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, threats from individuals or gangs are one of the factors undermining human development.

The Media

The life-blood of civil society is the free exchange of information, and in this context it is pertinent to mention a very special kind of private enterprise with a distinctive social function – the media. The growth in the number of media outlets since the collapse of the totalitarian system has been vast. Since 1 January 1991,

1674 publications, 22 radio stations (of which 11 operate outside of Riga) and 34 television stations (of which 16 operate outside of Riga) have been registered in Latvia. Direct interference by the national government – censorship – no longer exists. At the national level all the major newspapers and some nationally broadcast TV channels are privately owned. However, the state still plays a role in the media. At the national level the main TV and radio broadcasts have yet to be completely transformed from state broadcasters, responsible to the political powers-that-be, to public broadcasters with institutional safeguards to prevent direct political interference. At the local level, most regional newspapers are owned by the local governments. If people are to be truly empowered, the

Table 5.2

Largest National Newspapers and Estimated Circulation, March 1995

	Weekday	Saturday
Lauku Avīze (biweekly, Latvian)	125,000	130,000
Vakara Ziņas (daily, Latvian)	70,000	77,000
Diena (daily, Latvian)	58,000	88,000
Neatkarīgā Cīņa (daily, Latvian)	50,000	60,000
Rīgas Balss (daily, Latvian)	34,000	43,000*
Labrit (daily, Latvian)	23,000	23,000
SM-Scgodnya (daily, Russian)	57,000	63,000
Panorama Latvii (daily, Russian)	27,000	30,000
Rīgas Balss (daily, Russian)	17,000	24,000
Diena (daily, Russian)	16,000	23,000
Labrit (daily, Russian)	5,000	5,000

flow of information must be free from even potential government interference not only at the national, but also at the local level. While censorship no longer limits freedom of expression, the existence of a multiplicity of information outlets is increasingly threatened by Latvia's unsteady economy, which has cast doubt on the future viability of some media outlets and created difficulties for some publishers and broadcasters in maintaining financial independence.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

If private economic enterprise and property ownership are relatively easy to quantify, social activity – the voluntary association of individuals in pursuit of common interests – is slightly more difficult to measure. Because Latvian law requires all social organisations to be registered by the Ministry of Justice, some basic numbers are available.

As can be seen in Table 5.3, the total number of voluntary organisations in Latvia is 1676, or

Table 5.3

Registered Social Organisations in Latvia, March 1995

Social organisations	984
Open social funds	185
Sports associations	412
Trade unions	95
Total	1676

approximately one for every 1500 inhabitants. Unfortunately, information about these organisations has yet to be computerised and therefore has not been analysed according to such parameters as number of members, geographical distribution, date of registration, or breakdown along professional, social or ethnic lines (see, however, Boxes 5.1 and 5.2). Some insight into ethnic organisations can be gained from the Latvian Association of National Cultural Societies, an umbrella organisation for 20 cul-

Box 5.1

Religious Organisations: A Source of Stability

A key feature of human development is spiritual and ethical growth, which since time immemorial has been fostered by religious organisations. Since the collapse of the totalitarian policy of state-sponsored atheism, the number of religious organisations has increased by over 30% (see below). Moreover, the main confessions in Latvia are characterised by mutual tolerance and an ecumenical spirit which is a stabilising factor in Latvian society. This was especially apparent during the visit by Pope John Paul II to Latvia in September 1993.

Since 1991 religious organisations have started to play a significant role in providing charity to those most heavily affected by the hardships of the economic transition. Most active in this respect are the Baptist congregations, which support 7 missions such as *Pakāpieni* (Steps) and "Ora International." The Salvation Army has also helped thousands of families receive clothes, medicine and food.

Religious organisations also play a role in strengthening the cultural heritage of various ethnic groups living in Latvia. Notable in this regard is the community of Russian Old Believers, which has maintained a vibrant culture in Latvia since the 17th century. The largest Old Believer congregation in the world, the Grebenshchikov congregation in Riga, has approximately 25,000 members. Other ethnic groups are only beginning to rediscover their religious traditions: since 1991 12 new congregations have been established, including Armenian Apostolic, Greek Orthodox, and Muslims.

Number of Religious Congregations in Latvia, 1939, 1989 and 1994

Confession	1939	1989	1994
Lutheran	319	202	291
Catholic	194	182	192
Orthodox	166	86	100
Old Believer	88	64	56
Baptist	108	60	70
Adventist	28	23	33
Pentecostal	*	2	49
Methodist	27	–	3
Reformed	2	–	3
Jewish	221	4	5
Other	12	–	18
TOTAL	1165	623	819

*Box 5.2***Human Rights in Latvia:
The Role of the International Community,
the Government,
and Non-Governmental Organisations**

A critical aspect of human development is the promotion and protection of human rights. Since the restoration of independence, Latvia has assumed new treaty obligations, engaged in wide-ranging international cooperation, and witnessed the growth of both government and non-governmental activity in the field of human rights.

The International Framework

When Latvia's parliament declared the restoration of independence on May 4, 1990, it also acceded to 52 international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In addition to committing itself to global human rights norms, Latvia has also assumed important regional obligations.

Latvia joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, now the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe or OSCE) in September 1991. All OSCE member states are committed to the protection and promotion of human rights and the strengthening of democratic institutions and the rule of law. Since November 1993, Latvia has hosted a long-term OSCE Mission involved in preventive diplomacy. The Mission has assisted in the implementation of the Russian-Latvian agreements concerning the withdrawal of Russian troops and monitored issues related to citizenship.

In February 1995, Latvia gained entry to the Council of Europe. As a member state, Latvia has signed the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. When it ratifies the Convention – a step that should occur shortly – Latvia will commit itself to fully accept the Convention's control mechanism and the European Court's compulsory jurisdiction. While international and regional obligations can play an important role in guaranteeing the observance of human rights, even more critical are steps taken at the national level by the government and non-governmental organisations.

tural societies. The largest among them are the Jewish and the Polish societies with approximately 4000 and 3000 members, respectively.

A measure of an individual's political independence from the state is his/her ability to form associations to pursue political goals. Although small groups of dissidents were active in Latvia throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, mass political activity outside the strictures of the Communist Party really only began in 1986 with the petition and letter-writing campaign against the environmentally dangerous Daugava hydroelectric station. Over the next two years political participation increased exponentially, and by the fall of 1988 the newly founded Popular Front of Latvia could claim between two and three hundred thousand members. Mass participation in politics remained strong until 1991, when Latvia regained its independence. Since then it has shriveled away as quickly as it grew. Economic problems have taken precedence over the politics of national liberation, and the stifling practices of the Communist Party have made most people averse to organised political activity of any kind. At this writing, there were 43 officially registered political organisations in Latvia. None of them has an active membership of more than 3,500.

Civil society, a society of independent individuals pursuing their economic, social, and political goals in an organised fashion, is growing. But to what extent are people only recently freed from the control and paternalism of the totalitarian state ready to turn around and make the state work for them? There are two sides to this question: the first deals with the efforts made by the state to transform itself, the second with the psychological changes necessary for people to understand the new possibilities available to them.

**Governmental Reform and the
Legacy of "Learned Helplessness"**

Since 1993 the Latvian government has taken important steps to transform the state. It has established the Ministry for State Reform and started to develop and enact changes in state administration aimed at making the state sub-

ject to society. Concrete steps taken in this direction are the decentralisation of power, endowing local governments with more rights and responsibilities; reform of the state administration, clearly defining the role of the civil service as apolitical and service-oriented; the development of standards of ethical conduct for civil servants and elected officials; and the launching of a programme to inform Latvia's residents of their rights. Although there are still problems with implementation, every ministry is now required to consult the relevant social organisations when preparing a law or decree. Certain ministries, such as the Ministry of Welfare, are consciously working to strengthen the role of social organisations by organising forums and consultative committees that give these groups the opportunity to be heard regularly. There is even one social organisation, the Union of Local Governments, which the government is required by law to consult on any draft law or decree that affects its members.

Nevertheless, there is a certain paradox here, best caught in a phrase in the draft Conception for the Reform of the Latvian State Administration: "The reform of the state administration must encourage society *to be more self-confident*" (emphasis in the original), i.e., the state must convince people to exercise greater control over the state. It may seem counter-intuitive, but the problem addressed here by state reformers is real, for the psychological burden of dependence created by the previous totalitarian society is a significant hindrance to the development of a civil society.

Human development cannot be imposed on individuals or a society; the urge for it must come from within. However, the evidence indicates that it will be some time before a large part of Latvian society is ready to step into the gap left by the receding state and assume new responsibilities. While no comprehensive research on this question has been carried out, there are studies which cast light on the phenomenon. In one survey conducted in late 1993, 59% of ethnic Latvians and 67% of non-Latvians said that they had not taken any concrete steps in the last two years to improve their standard of living. Moreover, 47% of Latvians and 58% of non-Latvians agreed with the statement that the state should be responsible for providing for

Human Rights: Governmental Efforts

The Saeima (parliament) has a Standing Human Rights Committee responsible for reviewing draft legislation pertaining to human rights. Members of the Committee hold office hours every other week and review complaints from the population regarding legislative matters. In April 1994, the post of State Minister for Human Rights was established under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice. The State Minister is responsible for promoting an understanding of human rights in the general public. The lawyer for the State Minister's office also examines complaints from the population and seeks to remedy problems. In May 1994 a government working group on the protection of individual rights was created. It serves as a focal point for coordinating the government's human rights policy and its prime responsibility is to create a mechanism which would guarantee that State structures respect human rights.

To further this goal, the Latvian government requested the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to organise a high level international mission to prepare a detailed needs assessment for the preparation of Latvia's National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights. The mission, composed of representatives of the United Nations, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, visited Latvia in July 1994 and prepared a Final Report to serve as a basis for Latvia's National Programme. The Programme, which has been adopted in principle by the government, calls for wide-ranging human rights education, special attention to the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups (children, religious minorities, non-citizens, prisoners, refugees, and people with disabilities), and the creation of an independent Human Rights Office with wide powers. Implementation of the Programme should significantly contribute to promoting human development in Latvia.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a critical role in promoting democratic development and complementing international and government efforts in the realm of human rights protection. The following list illustrates the range of NGOs in Latvia involved in human rights work:

- The International Society for Human Rights Latvia National Section, active in defending chil-
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dren's rights and the rights of individuals in pre-trial detention, prisons and the armed forces;

- The Latvian Human Rights Committee (a member of the *Federation Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme*), involved in assisting individuals on matters related to residency status and citizenship and advising tenants of their rights;
 - The Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, whose mandate includes the compilation, analysis and distribution of information on human rights and ethnic relations, as well as the promotion of education for human rights and tolerance;
 - The Baltic Center – Cooperation for Peace, active in human rights education, the popularisation of preventive diplomacy and sustainable security, and organising environmental projects for youth;
 - New Human Rights (*Nouveaux Droits de l'Homme*), which focuses on promoting the rights and independence of invalids, organising humanitarian assistance, and engaging in environmental projects.
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every household. A prominent Canadian-Latvian psychologist describes the effects of the Soviet system as a syndrome called "learned helplessness."

Naturally enough, if people do not possess the psychological tools necessary to develop their own lives, they will not be able to play an active role in society either. Such passivity can-

not serve the cause of strengthening civil society or furthering human development. Nonetheless, there are signs of hope. After all, in the above-mentioned survey 46% of Latvians and 35% of non-Latvians agreed with the statement that individuals should take responsibility for themselves. A leading sociologist notes the markedly optimistic and motivated attitude of people under 30, who see the new society as offering them great opportunities for development. Moreover, there are organisations taking steps to teach people to take control of their lives. As mentioned above, one such organisation is the Ministry of State Reform, which has launched an extensive programme to raise people's awareness of their rights by distributing booklets on topics such as how to receive child support and by broadcasting commercials about the system of taxation. A leading non-governmental organisation active in this field is the Center for the Advancement of Democracy in Latvia, which has developed a course in civics to be taught in the 9th grade. In 1994, the first year of the programme, the Centre distributed the materials for this course free of charge in 789 schools, that is, more than half of all Latvian-language schools, and is planning to do the same in Russian-language schools during the next school year.

The legacy of "learned helplessness," of economic, social and political dependency will not be erased overnight; civil society will not be built in a day. Time, commitment, and considered policy will be required to achieve the goal of a society where all can achieve the maximum in human development.