

University of Turku
Faculty of Humanities
Baltic Sea Region Studies

Master's Thesis

The Rebirth of *Dinamo Riga*: From the Glorious Soviet Past to the
Kontinental Hockey League

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of Cold War rivalries, the world of international hockey was deemed to becoming increasingly homogenized along western sportization patterns. The introduction of the Russian-sponsored Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) signified a new era in the global diffusion of modern sports. Its recent expansion in the post-Soviet space and European countries significantly reshuffled the landscape of international hockey, offering new prospects for the studies of the intersection of sports, history, geopolitics and nationalism in the age of globalization.

The aim of this study is to conceptualize the KHL and illuminate the role of ice hockey in post-Soviet Latvia. I treat the creation of the KHL and the integration of a Latvian-based team, "Dinamo Riga," into the KHL within the broader discussion on the globalization of sports and its effects on national communities. The research is based on a case study of the modern rebirth of "Dinamo Riga" and its participation in the KHL and is confined to the scholarly themes in sports research, such as the history of modern sports and globalization, sports and nationalism. The study pays special attention to unveiling the geopolitical links between the restart of Latvian-Russian relations after the EU's eastern enlargement and the re-emerging Latvian-Russian contacts in ice hockey.

The research concludes that with the creation of the KHL, European hockey received a new charismatic "zone of prestige" for sports interaction. The project of "Dinamo Riga" became the new global phenomenon in Latvian sports in terms of its capabilities to transcend the post-Soviet geopolitical stereotypes in relation to Russia and serve as a new national symbol in the promotion and celebration of Latvian sporting nationalism. Further sociological research would require the clarification of the impact of Latvian-Russian cooperation in hockey on the bilateral relations of both countries and the formation of a national community in Latvia.

Keywords: ice hockey, sports, nationalism, national communities, national identity, sporting nationalism, globalization, culture, history, geopolitics, Cold War, Soviet sports, Latvian sports, Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), National Hockey League (NHL), Dinamo Riga, Latvia, Russia, Soviet Union, Baltic, Latvian hockey fans.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. THE KHL AND DINAMO RIGA

Since its inception in 2008, the Russian-sponsored (Continental) Kontinental Hockey League, KHL (*Kontinental'naja Hokkejnaja Liga, KXJL*) is the fastest-growing global sports network on the super continent of Eurasia. The project is of such a scale that the geographical landscape of competition covers the territory from the Central Europe to the Far East of Asia. The league was organized on the basis of the Russian Super League (*Superliga*) including the teams from the post-Soviet space and driven towards the European and Eurasian market as well. The KHL is divided into two conferences - East and West, with four divisions, bearing the historical names of the famous Soviet-Russian coaches and players: Vsevolod Bobrov, Anatoli Tarasov, Valery Kharlamov and Arkady Chernyshev. The Sixth Championship of the League will be attended by 28 teams, representing the post-Soviet countries of the CIS like Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and the newly accepted members of the EU like Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Croatia, who will compete for the Major trophy, the "Gagarin Cup," awarded to the best team in the league at the end of the playoff series.¹

In the last five years, the KHL teams, being sponsored by the Russian oil and gas tycoons like Gazprom and Rosneft as well as a wide-range of national industries and financial sector organizations attracted a significant number of foreign players and coaching staff from the major hockey countries like Canada, the United States, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, becoming widely-recognized as the second strongest league in the world. After four years of growth, in the 2012 IIHF conference in Barcelona, the chairman of the KHL, Aleksander Medvedev has announced an ambitious plan to continue expanding the network and by the 2014/2015 season reach the number of 64 teams participating in the league, including the teams from the countries of Western Europe.² When in the autumn of 2012, the KHL started to get populated with

¹ "Obschaja Informatsija o Lige [*About KHL*]." *Official Website of the KHL*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.khl.ru/official/22007/KHL.ru>>. There is also confirmation of the "Nordic" expansion of the KHL. In the season 2014/2015, the Finnish team, "Jokerit Helsinki," will join the league, which will make the Pan-European contours of the league more apparent. In "KXJL Становится Общевропейской Лигой [*KHL is Becoming a Pan-European League*]." *Official Website of the KHL*. 28 Jun. 2013. Web. 10 Jul. 2013. <<http://www.khl.ru/news/2013/06/28/171935.html>>.

² "Hockey Forum: Improving the Game in Europe." *Annual Report: July 2011-June 2102*. IIHF General Congress, Tokyo. (Sep. 2012): 68, *IIHF.com*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <http://www.iihf.com/fileadmin/user_upload/BigFiles/AnnualReport/2012AnnualReport.pdf>.

the world's class superstars, due to the NHL lockout in the season of 2012/13, the ambitious statements of re-establishing the North American vs. Pan-European competition have received a considerable attention in the international hockey community.

In 2008, the ex-Soviet/Latvian hockey club, "Dinamo Riga," made history by entering into an agreement with the Kontinental Hockey League. After nearly 17 years of absence, the return of "Dinamo Riga" has certainly been a shocking miracle to many supporters of the hockey club, which history traces back to the great traditions of Latvian hockey since the post-war times. From the sole perspective of the game, the rebirth of the hockey club was certainly the moment of pride and the elevation of self-esteem. We are back on the big hockey stage and for good. I believe these positive feelings of rebirth and remaking history have been shared among the ordinary fans of the legendary "Dinamo Riga." At last, this is what it seems like right now if one witnesses the fully packed home arena in Riga cheering for the team playing against its historical rivals like "CSKA," "Spartak," or "Dinamo Moscow."

The team's history is deeply rooted into the glorious past of Soviet hockey. During Soviet times, the club belonged to the top league on which traditional values the KHL has been recently organized. Today, these symbols of Soviet hockey are encoded in the KHL, including the name of "Dinamo." Certainly, within the context of the contemporary historical narratives, associating the Soviet era with traumatic experiences of the loss of independence still haunting the Latvian national discourse, this issue may spoil the festivity of the great return. There has been a growing sentiment in especially the nationalist camp of Latvia, that the whole participation of "Dinamo Riga" in the KHL project may feature the expansionist politics of Russia on Latvian soil.³

Moreover, the hockey club of "Dinamo Riga" began to prepare for its inaugural season in the KHL in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, which certainly changed the official attitude towards Russia in the post-Soviet Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states.⁴ In the meantime, notable foreign policy theorists,

³ In Nils Muiznieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations: Dynamics since Latvia's Accession to the EU and NATO* (Riga: University of Latvia Press. 2011) 62. *Latvijas Universitāte Sociālo Zinātņu Fakultāte*. Web. 1 Mar. 2012. <<http://szf.lu.lv/files/petnieciba/L-R-Relations-gramata.pdf>>.

⁴ For instance, the Estonian President, Ilves, has concluded that after the Georgian war the world will never be the same; moreover, the events of "08.08.08" have far-reaching consequences for the Baltic states. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, "NATO in Estonia, Estonia in NATO: Our Common Security in the 21st Century." President of the Republic of Estonia: NATO in Estonia, Estonia in NATO: Our Common Security in the 21st Century - Speech at Atlantic Council of Finland, in Helsinki (1 Jan. 2008), Web. 1 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.estemb.fi/puheet/aid-812>>.

such people like, Robert Kagan (2008), would argue about the return of power politics practices in Russia's foreign affairs with its former Soviet satellites.⁵ Surprisingly, however, this chilling representation of threat to the fundamental security of the Baltic states did not deteriorate the ongoing cooperation between the Latvian hockey club and their partners in Russia. Notwithstanding the apocalyptic rhetoric, "Dinamo Riga" found its way to opening its first 2008/2009 season, eventually becoming the only KHL co-founding team from the EU that participated in all seasons since the league's inception.

B. PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE

With the introduction of international sports networks like the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), the post-Cold War development of global sports takes a new spin. I believe that the historical rebirth of "Dinamo Riga" and its participation in the cultural and economic initiative in the realm of sports, organized and centered in Russia, opens a new chapter in the studies of the intersection of sports, history, geopolitics, international relations, nationalism and globalization. For the scope of this research, I treat the creation of the KHL and the integration of a Latvian-based team into the new hockey league within the broader discussion on the global diffusion of modern sports and their impact on national communities. Thus, examining the changing national trajectories of the Russian-Latvian hockey exchange, the aim of this research is to conceptualize the nature of the sports networks like the KHL and highlight the role of ice hockey in the post-Soviet countries, such as Latvia. I propose that the project of "Dinamo Riga" could be appropriated as the newly-emerging global phenomenon in Latvia in terms of its ability to transcend the post-Soviet geopolitical stereotypes in relation to Russia and serve as a new national symbol in the celebration of Latvian sporting nationalism on the global stage.

The significance of sports studies has been somewhat marginalized in the major disciplines of social inquiry. For instance, Allen Guttman (2003) argued that the earlier historians of sports of the 19th Century engaged themselves in "uncontextualized interests," focusing their research rather on the trivial subjects of "how the game is

⁵ Robert Kagan, "Putin Makes His Move." *Washington Post*, 11 Aug. 2008, Web. 1 Mar. 2012. <http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2008-08-11/opinions/36871972_1_vladimir-putin-georgia-and-ukraine-caucasus>. Robert Kagan is also famously known for revitalizing the concept of "History" in the post-9/11 world. He argues about the return of the old Cold-War power politics and the ideological battle between world's democracies and autocracies. His ideas are used in the realist analysis of the political affairs in the North Eastern Europe, with focus on Russia's policies towards its former satellites.

played” like rules and regulations, and “the notable exploits of athletes.”⁶ It is not until the end of the devastating epoch of the two consecutive world wars, the contemporary historians started to pay more attention to the intersection of sports and history, memory, national identity, politics, economy, and culture.⁷

Despite the gradual recognition of the importance of the domain of sports in different streams of social and political sciences, humanities and cultural studies, the selection of sports related themes is still primarily made by those scholars, who have also happened to be great enthusiasts of sports games and other physical culture activities.⁸ Certainly, being a self-confessed sports nut will not automatically reduce the academic significance of research. Yet, the greatest task of any scholar, who works with the less fashionable topics of social inquiry like sports, is to convince the contemporary academic community to take sports matters more seriously in their social analysis of *change*. As Jeffrey Hill (2003) correctly observed:

“[s]port is perceived as something *reflecting* or *illustrating* other historical processes. But what is lacking in this emphasis is any sense of sports being in itself something capable of exerting social and cultural influence; of being a process, a language, a system of meaning through which we know the world.”⁹

In fact, sports has the capability to create and renegotiate identities and histories, convey and transform ideological meanings, cross and expand borders, reproduce and foster new forms of political, cultural, and economic interactions. Hence, it is with this acknowledgment and admiration of these important attributes that I am compelled to further the debate on the role of sports in the age of globalization. Ultimately, I believe that studying sports is critically important to broadening the range of cross-disciplinary methods and the theoretical approaches we use in the fields of Contemporary History, International Relations and Nationalism Studies to achieve a greater understanding of the ways that people and nations interact and perceive their respective identities and interests.

⁶ Allen Guttman, “Sport, Politics and the Engaged Historian.” *Journal of Contemporary History*. 38.3 (Jul. 2003): 363. *Sage Journals*. 10 Mar. 2013.

⁷ Guttman, *Sport, Politics* 363.

⁸ Many notable scholars of the history of sports had long-times careers related to sports. For instance, one of the most notable historians of Soviet sports James Riordan had a successful career in soccer. While another important historian of spectator sports in the Soviet Union, Robert Edelman, a self-confessed “sport nut”, was a professional sports writer for many years to come.

⁹ Jeffrey Hill, “Introduction: Sport and Politics.” *Journal of Contemporary History*. 38.3 (Jul. 2003): 361. *Sage journals*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Global Sports Interactions in the 20th Century's Historical Context

The historical accounts of globalization of sports interactions between nations are deeply embedded into the primeval times of the development of human civilization. Using the Classical History perspective on sports we can learn that the Olympic Games between the city-states of Ancient Greece were an example of the first regional festivals, intensifying the political, economic, and cultural contacts between the neighbors of Hellenic civilization. The PanHellenic Games became of the tremendous importance as a diplomatic platform of the cities to form multiple political, cultural, and economic alliances, promote the glory of each City-State, and enact the monitoring mechanisms of seizing violence and hostilities at the times of the sports festivities.¹⁰

In the late 19th Century, the ancient Olympic Games became an inspiration for the revival of the great traditions of “Olympism” to indorse “sincere internationalism” amongst the modern nations through intensifying sports contacts. International sports could become the “vessel of goodwill,” “solidarity,” and “mutual respect” between cultures and nations.¹¹ Although critical theorists of sports like Allen Guttman (1992) would identify these “universal” ideals as primarily being the cultural products of western civilization, William Morgan (1994) sees these humanistic inclinations standing on very pragmatic grounds.¹² It was the response to evolving “stringent nationalism,” which became a serious obstacle to developing genuine internationalism between nations, aiming at “talking nations out of the urge to kill one another off.”¹³ Nonetheless, the humanistic message to the world community by the Olympic enthusiasts like Baron Pierre

¹⁰ Kristine Toohey and Anthony J. Veal, *The Olympic Games: A Social Science Perspective* (UK, Trowbridge: Cromwell Press, 2007) 20-21. Despite its certain achievements in mediating violence, “Olympic Truce”, however, was not always successful in terms of its functionality to completely curbing the hostilities between the cities at the time of festivities.

¹¹ William J. Morgan, “Coubertin’s Theory of Olympic Internationalism: A Critical Reinterpretation.” *Critical Reflections on Olympic Ideology: Second International Symposium for Olympic Research*, ed. Robert K. Barney and Klaus V. Meier (Canada, London: The University of Western Ontario, Center For Olympic Studies, Oct. 1994), 14. *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR1994g.pdf>>. For more readings on Baron Coubertin’s ideology of Olympic Internationalism see e.g., Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of Modern Games* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002); John Hoberman, “Toward a Theory of Olympic Internationalism.” *Journal of Sport History*. 22.1 (Spring 1995): 1-37. *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013.

¹² Morgan, *Coubertin’s* 21.

¹³ Morgan, *Coubertin’s* 14-15.

De Coubertin had not achieved yet the historical momentum to embrace the healthier ways of performing national identities on the global stage.¹⁴

Indeed, the 20th Century's world had entered the period which was characterized by the critical theorists like Eric Hobsbawm (1995), as *the Age of Extremes*, with intensifying military violence, extreme nationalism and ideological confrontations.¹⁵ So did in many ways sports, becoming the international venue of ideological competition of the major *isms* of the time, such as capitalism, communism and fascism. For an illustration of this case, Barbara Keys (2003) gave a very good account on the ideological exclusion of the Soviet Union from the Olympic membership, which was seeking instead to organize parallel structures of international sports exchange (*Sportintern*) amongst the working people of the world.¹⁶ Whereas, Allen Guttman (1984) provided an insight on the darkest sides of the international exchange in elite sports, being exemplified in the outrage of Nazi racism at the 1936 Olympic Games in Munich.¹⁷

Yet, the interwar period was also the beginning of the “age of the masses” and the transnational universalization of sporting life.¹⁸ The global nature of technological progress in communications and transportations had paved the way for the rise of the twentieth Century's mega sports events.¹⁹ In this respect, Tony Mason (2005) gives a very good version on how the FIFA World Cup kicked in, rapidly spreading the popularity of football game across the globe and becoming a sports tournament,²⁰ which in its initial steps unified the countries from different continents around the game of football that would be closely related to England in socio-economic and cultural terms.²¹ Christopher Young (2005) goes further claiming that the Olympic Games in the age of “technical reproduction” epitomized the emergence of spectator sports as a “modern cultural form,”

¹⁴ For a more sceptical argument on the practical promotion of the ideals of the Olympic movement in our time see e.g., John Hoberman, “The Myth of Sport as a Peace-Promoting Political Force.” *SAIS Review*. 31.1 (Winter-Spring 2011): 17-29. *Project Muse*. 10 May. 2013.

¹⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*. (London: Michael Joseph, 1995).

¹⁶ Barbara Keys, “Soviet Sport and Transnational Mass Culture in the 1930s.” *Journal of Contemporary History*. 38.3 (Jul. 2003): 413-434. *Sage journals*. 10 Mar. 2013; For further reading on the ideological competition in the interwar international sports: Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-64.

¹⁷ Allen Guttman, *The Games Must Go on: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), 62-82. See the chapter on “the Nazi Olympics.”

¹⁸ Keys, *Soviet Sport* 413. (cited in José Ortega y Gasset 29).

¹⁹ Tony Mason, “When Was the First Real World Cup?” *Presented in the Globalization and Sport in Historical Context Conference* (University of California, San Diego Mar. 2005), 1. *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/UCSD/UCSDMason.pdf>>.

²⁰ Mason, *When Was* 1-11.

²¹ Bill Murray, *The World's Game: A History of Soccer* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996) 22.

which had set the tone for the globalization of elite sports.²² Barbara Keys (2003) argues that all countries of the opposing ideologies of the time became largely “susceptible” to “internationalized forms of mass culture”, including Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany²³ and even the isolationist USSR, which broke the ideological ice by stepping into professionally-oriented “bourgeois” sports to become more “visible” and sporadically competing against the western countries especially in football.²⁴

When, after a brief period of the post-war excitement, the Soviet Union was finally included into the international system of sports, the international sports entered into the Cold War era of bipolar globalization. According to John Hoberman (1977), in the post-war times, the international sports became a very significant “metaphor” for the competing ideologies of both Right and Left.²⁵ In one of the most classical articles on this sports epoch, *The Cold War and the Olympics*, Allen Guttman (1988) outlined some of the most dramatic events of the 1952-1988 Olympic history, exemplified in the outrageous competition between the Soviet and American sports ideologies.²⁶ Throughout the last decades, multiple collection studies (Lincoln Allison 1986; Arnd Krüger and James Riordan 1999; Allen Guttman 2002; David L. Andrews and Stephen Wagg 2007) of the Cold War sports have been conducted to analyze the ways in which the countries of the Eastern and Western blocs promoted their political and ideological agendas in the realm of international sports.²⁷ In the more recent literature on the Cold War epoch, John Soares (2007) gives an overview on the intersection of geopolitics and international hockey, outlining the global events like the building of the Berlin Wall, Cuban Missile Crisis, and national uprisings in Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968 Spring shaping the direction of the rivalries between the United States and the USSR as

²² Christopher Young, “When Pierre Met Adolf? The Olympic Games in the Age of Technical Reproduction.” *Presented in the Globalization and Sport in Historical Context Conference* (University of California, San Diego Mar. 2005), *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/UCSD/UCSDYoung.pdf>>. 4.

²³ Keys, *Soviet Sport* 414. Further reading on ideological confrontations in the interwar international competition: Keys, *Globalizing Sport*.

²⁴ Keys, *Soviet Sport* 431. The informal soccer competition against the western countries laid the basis for acquiring full membership in the western sports systems after WWII.

²⁵ John M. Hoberman, “Sport and Political Ideology.” *Journal of Sports and Social Issues*. 1 (Jun. 1977): 80-114. *Sage journals*. Web. 10 Dec. 2012.

²⁶ Allen Guttman, “The Cold War and the Olympics.” *International Journal*. 43.4 (Autumn 1988): 554-568. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013.

²⁷ See the collection of essays on the topic related to the Cold War era of sports in Lincoln Allison, ed. *The Politics of Sports*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Arnd Krüger, and James Riordan, ed. *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*. (London: E& FN Spon, 1999); Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of Modern Games*; Stephen Wagg, and David L., Andrews, ed. *East Plays West: Sport and the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

well as the internal conflicts in the Eastern bloc.²⁸ While Markku Jokisipilä (2006) gives a good account on Cold War rivalry in the international hockey, featuring the most passionate and finest moments of the global hockey rivalry and its political and ideological implications.²⁹

Yet, despite the threats of Olympic boycotts of the 70-80s and multiple political crises, the global sports continued to be a very significant venue of the political and economic changes and internationalization of social and cultural values of the bipolar world. For instance, Thomas Damion (2005) argues that the failure of the 1950-60 “good will tours” of African-American sportsmen as part of the US propagandistic policy to lessen the international criticism of the American race relations forced the US government to enact significant improvements in civil rights legislation.³⁰ Analyzing the Canadian “hockey diplomacy” of rapprochement with Moscow during the Ice Hockey Summit Series in 1972, Donald Macintosh and Donna Greenhorn (1993) argue that hockey served as “a common bond between the two countries” to strengthen bilateral relations and repair the image of Canadian hockey abroad.³¹ While, Barbara Keys (2005) giving an account on the participation of the Soviet team in the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, argues that “sports competitions opened up a *back door* to subtle but arguably significant openings to global culture, eventually playing a role both in undermining the closed nature of the Soviet system and in spurring the kinds of global cultural flows that led to the current era of globalization.”³²

²⁸ John Soares, “Cold War, Hot Ice: International Ice Hockey, 1947-1980.” *Journal of Sport History*. 34.2 (Sum. 2007): 207-230. *LA84 Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013.

<<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH2007/JSH3402/jsh3402g.pdf>>. More reading on the Eastern Europe crisis in the mirror of sports see e.g., Mikhail Prozumenschikov, *Большой Спорт и Большая Политика [Big Sport and Big Politics]*. (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004).

²⁹ Markku Jokisipilä, “Maple Leaf, Hammer, and Sickles: International Ice Hockey During the Cold War.” *Sport History Review*. 37 (2006): 36-53. Print.

³⁰ Thomas, Damion, “American Politricks: Sport, Civil Rights, and the Cold War.” *Presented in the Globalization and Sport in Historical Context Conference* (University of California, San Diego Mar. 2005), *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/UCSD/UCSDThomas.pdf>>; Further reading on the issue see: Thomas Damion, *Globetrotting: African American Athletes and Cold War Politics* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press 2012).

³¹ Donald Macintosh and Donna Greenhorn, “Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Hockey Policy.” *Journal of Canadian Studies*. 28. 2. (Sum. 1993): Mid Para. *Literature Online*. Web. 1 Mar. 2013. <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk/searchFulltext.do?id=R04235518&divLevel=0&queryId=../session/1366475875_4063&trailId=13D8DD05ABB&area=abell&forward=critref_ft>.

³² Barbara Keys, “The Soviet Union, Global Culture, and the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.” *Presented in the Conference on Globalization and Sport in Historical Context Conference* (University of California, San Diego Mar. 2005), *LA84Foundation*. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/UCSD/UCSDKeys.pdf>>.

2. Cultural Homogeneity and Diversity in the Global Diffusion of Sports

After the end of the Cold War, modern sports entered the epoch of intensifying globalization, with the expanding network of political, cultural, economic, and technological interdependencies, being capable of transcending the boundaries of the nation-states. Interestingly, notable sports globalization theorists like Joseph Maguire (2002) argued that the development of sports worlds has always been patterned along these “global flows” but also “uneven power relations” of the interdependent transnational and global culture.³³ Such scholars as Joseph Maguire (1990), Bruce Kidd (1991), Allen Guttmann (1991), Barrie Houlihan (1994) and John Hargreaves (2002) studied the effects of global sports processes on the national sports communities. The debate focused on the division of power in the global diffusion of sports, exemplified in the conceivable homogenization of global sports practices along British and American patterns.³⁴ Moreover, with the growing commercialization of sports in the 1990s and early 2000s, the world of sports has also witnessed an uneven international flow of professional athletes. Perhaps, the “Western triumph” over the Soviet sports system was particularly illustrative in the mobility patterns of athletes. For instance, the fall of the Iron Curtain, created the possibility of opening a “talent pipeline” from the Eastern European countries, whose athletes flooded the western sports networks throughout the 1990s, continuing the same patterns in the early 2000s.³⁵

Recently, within the context of the discussion on the ways in which different nations have responded to the challenges of the new global sports order, Joseph Maguire’s (1994, 2005, 2012) has offered a figuration perspective, encouraging to study the global

³³ Joseph Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds: A Sociological Perspective* (IL, Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2002) 4-9.

³⁴ Joseph Maguire, “More Than a Sporting Touchdown: The Making of American Football in England 1982-1990.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 7.3 (1990): 213-237. *EBSCO Host*. Web 10 Apr. 2013; Allen Guttmann, “Sport Diffusion: A Response to Maguire and the Americanization Commentaries.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 8.2 (1991): 185-190. *EBSCO Host*. Web 10 Apr. 2013; Bruce Kidd, “How Do We Find Our Own Voices in the New World Order? A Commentary on Americanization.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 8.2 (1991): 178-184. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013; Barrie Houlihan, “Homogenization, Americanization, and Creolization of Sport: Varieties of Globalization.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 11.4 (1994): 356-375. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013; John Hargreaves, “Globalization Theory, Global Sport, and Nations and Nationalism.” *Power Games: A Critical Sociology of Sport*. Ed. John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) 32-41; Joseph Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 18-22.

³⁵ Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 27. See e.g., the discussion on the labor mobility patterns in hockey in Joseph Maguire, “Blade Runners: Canadian Migrants, Ice Hockey, and the Global Sport Process.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 20.3 (Aug.1996): 340. *Sage journals*. Web.10 Apr. 2013; Richard Elliott and Joseph Maguire, “Getting Caught in the Net: Examining the Recruitment of Canadian Players in British Professional Ice Hockey.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*. 32.2 (2008): 158-176. *Sage journals*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

sports interactions through the lens of “diminishing contrasts” and “increasing varieties.” This approach abandons the argument of a complete homogenization of sports on the basis of the practices of the Western civilization and implies that the national responses to “global sportisation” occur and have been evident around the world, stressing that “there is no single global flow.”³⁶ Indeed, as Alain Bairner (2001) correctly observed concerning the problems of oversimplification of the one-dimensional civilizational effects of globalization on sports development in national communities, “if the world is becoming homogenized, then nationalism or national identities in all of their manifestations are rapidly losing their social significance.”³⁷

Thus, “by adopting a *multicausal*, multidirectional analysis that examines the production of both *homogeneity* and *heterogeneity*, we are better placed to probe the global cultural commingling that is taking place ...” in sports.³⁸ In this instance, Joseph Maguire (2012) maintains that the national responses to “global cultural homogeneity” in sports in non-Western cultures can take a variety of forms. They can be either the “emulations” of the charismatic “zones of prestige” of western sports, as it had happened with the national development of cricket in the post-colonial countries of the Caribbean islands or Indian subcontinent, or more hostile national “resistances” to the sports practices of the more “established groups,” with the aim of promoting local indigenous sports and physical activities of respective cultural traditions. Moreover, with the changing balance of power, indicated by the modern rise of the non-Western economic powers in South America and the Eurasian continent, these “outsiders” of the western sports systems are also willing to challenge western hegemony and acclaim the prestigious positions in the global diffusion of sports. As it has already happened with Russia, China or Brazil, whose national status in the development of global sports has been rapidly increased by the recent victories over the western countries to host the “mega sports events,” like the FIFA World Championships and the Olympic Games.³⁹

³⁶ Joseph Maguire, “Sport, Identity Politics, and Globalization: Diminishing Contrasts and Increasing Varieties.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 11.4 (1994): 402. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 1 Mar. 2013; Joseph Maguire, “European Body Cultures and the Making of the Modern World: Zones of Prestige and Established–Outsider Relations.” *Human Figurations*. 1.1 (Jan. 2012). Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/h/humfig/11217607.0001.105?view=text;rgn=main>>; Joseph Maguire, ed., *Power and Global Sport: Zones of Prestige, Emulation and Resistance* (London: Routledge, 2005).

³⁷ Alan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives*. (NY, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001) 163.

³⁸ Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 22.

³⁹ On “emulation” or “resistance” of “the established groups” by the “outsiders” in global sports development see In Maguire, *European Body Cultures and the Making of the Modern world: Zones of Prestige*; Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds*, 18-22; More reading: Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities*

3. Globalization, Sports, National Communities and Identities

Since the emergence of the concept of modern nationalism as a socially constructed phenomenon, Anderson's definition of the nation as the "imagined political community" instantly entered the world of sports studies.⁴⁰ Indeed, perhaps as nowhere else, excluding perhaps the war times, sports have the capability to reinforce those people's *images* of their national *communities* in the international sporting events, whose venues provide an exceptionally effective platform for a "flag waving nationalism."⁴¹ Moreover, within the context of the role of sports in the making of nations, sports have become an important vehicle for the cultivation of national unity. As Eric Hobsbawm (1990) put it in a more radical fashion:

What has made sport so uniquely effective a medium for inculcating national feelings, at all events for males, is the ease with which even the least political or public individuals can identify with the nation as symbolized by young persons excelling at what practically every man wants, or at one time in his life has wanted, to be good at. The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people.⁴²

In the context of globalization, sports are also perceived as a perfect realm for governments to promote their official sportive ideologies and national identities in world affairs. Perhaps this political role of sports as a mere reflection of the official national ideologies was exemplified vigorously in the ideological competition in the Cold War era of sports development.⁴³ Whereas it is difficult to deny the state influence in the articulation of the official nationalism on the global stage, sports as an "intersection" of social life can be also a valid medium contributing to wider political processes and

Societies, Civilizations (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001); Alan Bairner also agrees that it is not always the case when the "Empires" subordinate their satellites completely in sports exchange. They sometimes transform the games "in such a way as to contribute to the development of unique sporting cultures," or promote alternative games, as it happened with the "British" games in Ireland. In Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization* 13, 69-91; On the British role in the sportisation of the world see e.g., Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 9-13.

⁴⁰ In Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 137; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006) 6. Further debate on nationalism: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Anthony D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Alan Bairner and Gyozo Molnar, *The Politics of the Olympics: a Survey* (London: Routledge, 2010) 214; Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 6.

⁴² Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* 143.

⁴³ Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 137-138.

exerting social and cultural changes.⁴⁴ Moreover, when it comes to the expressions of “sporting nationalism” in the global venues of competition, the question of the relationship of national identity to the existing ideologies of state-sponsored nationalism may become very complex and vary in different countries. Studying the role of political actors and institutions to promote sporting nationalism, John Hoberman (1993) acknowledged that the “symbolic potency” of the athletes for modern societies is not fully uncovered, defining “sportive nationalism” as “not a single generic phenomenon,” but “a complicated sociopolitical response to challenges and events, both sportive and non-sportive, that must be understood in terms of the varying national contexts in which it appears.”⁴⁵ In this instance, outlining the complex nature of “sporting nationalism,” Alan Bairner (2001) goes further to argue that at times, a specific sport “has the capacity to help to undermine official nationalism by linking itself to sub-nation-state national identities and providing a vehicle of the expression of alternative visions of the nation.”⁴⁶

The debate on the intersection of sports, globalization and nationalism was focused extensively on the western countries (see e.g., Hargreaves 2000; Bairner 2001; Scherer 2001; Silk and Falcous 2005; Lechner 2007).⁴⁷ However, there is a limited research focusing on the post-Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Rarely, scholars attempt to fill this gap. Mojca Doupona and Jay Coakley (2010) address the role of soccer in the formation of national identity in Slovenia and how these new images of the country are reflected on the global stage.⁴⁸ Peter Barrer (2007) shows how the modern Slovakian national identity was affected by the IIHF successes of the national hockey team in the early 2000s and its wider relevance to the formation of the post-Soviet

⁴⁴ For more reading on the political role sports in terms of its ability to impose social change see e.g., Hill, *Introduction: Sport and Politics*; Guttmann, *Sport, Politics and the Engaged Historian*.

⁴⁵ John Hoberman, “Sport and Ideology in Post-Communist Age.” *The Changing Politics of Sport*. Ed. Lincol Allison (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) 18.

⁴⁶ Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization* 18-19.

⁴⁷ John Hargreaves, *Freedom for Catalonia? Catalan Nationalism, Spanish Identity and the Barcelona Olympic Games* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization*; Jay Scherer, “Globalization and the Construction of Local Particularities: A Case Study of Winnipeg Jets.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 18.2 (2001): 205-230. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Aug. 2013; Michael Silk and Marc Falcous, “One Day in September/A Week in February: Mobilizing American(Sporting) Nationalisms.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 22.4 (Dec. 2005): 447-471. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Aug. 2013; Frank Lechner, “Imagined Communities in the Global Game: Soccer and the Development of Dutch National Identity.” *Global Networks*. 7.2 (2007): 215-229. *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Aug. 2013.

⁴⁸ Mojca Doupona and Jay Coakley, “Complicating the Relationship between Sport and National Identity: The Case of Post-Socialist Slovenia.” *Sociology of Sport Journal*. 27.4 (Dec. 2010): 371-389, *EBSCO Host*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

and post-Czechoslovak identity in Slovakia.⁴⁹ Additionally, in a sociological research, Tamás Dóczi (2011) assesses the role of sports in the articulation of Hungarian identity on the global stage and its potency of being a vehicle for national integration.⁵⁰

4. Sports in the Soviet Union and Latvia

The success of the Soviet Union teams in the Cold War international sports competitions drew attention in the West. Sovietologist, Henry W. Morton (1963), pioneered the studies of sports in the USSR during the intensifying Cold War. It is not surprising that Soviet sports were depicted in gray colors. They were portrayed as the mirror of the totalitarian nature of Soviet society.⁵¹ Perhaps, a more balanced account on the organization of elite sports and physical culture activities was given by the British historian of sports, James Riordan, whose work immensely contributed to the development of the contemporary studies of sports in the USSR. Unlike other western scholars, he was an insider, who spent some time living in the Soviet Union.⁵² His contributions, such as *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (1977), revitalized the field, offering a unique perspective by using the Russian sources on Soviet sports systems.⁵³

Even more revisionist accounts of the history of Soviet sports had emerged after the fall of the Iron Curtain. One of the leading Western experts on the Soviet elite sports, Robert Edelman (1993, 2009) extensively explored the spectatorship culture in Soviet football. In his work, Edelman departs from the Cold War focus on sports in the Soviet Union as a military form of control or ideological extension of the state. Edelman explores the heroic aspects of sports and its relation to people and state ideology, thus penetrating deeply to the spectators' sub-cultures in Soviet sports from the pre-revolutionary Russia to present times.⁵⁴ In post-Soviet times, James, Riordan (1993, 2007)

⁴⁹ Peter Barrer, "Šatan is God!: Re-imagining Contemporary Slovak National Identity through Sport." *Sport in Society*. 10.2 (Mar. 2007): 223-238. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <http://www.volkskunde.uni-muenchen.de/vkee_download/g__tz/sportinsociety.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Tamás Dóczi, "Gold Fever(?): Sport and National Identity – The Hungarian Case." *Sociology of Sport*. 47.2 (2011):165-182. *Sage Journals*. Web. 10 Aug. 2013.

⁵¹ Henry W. Morton, *Soviet Sport: Mirror of Soviet Society* (New York: Collier Books, 1963).

⁵² In Kevin O'Flynn, "Introducing the First Briton ever to Play in the USSR." *The Guardian*. 7 Nov. 2006. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.theguardian.com/football/2006/nov/07/europeanfootball.sport1>>.

⁵³ James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society: Development of Sport and Physical Education in Russia and the USSR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁵⁴ Robert Edelman, *Serious Fun: A History of Spectator Sport in the USSR* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), *LA84Foundation*. Web. 10 Dec. 2012.

worked on reviewing the Soviet history of sports and also focused on the capitalist developments in the post-Soviet sports, critically assessing the consequences of the oligarchs' control of the modern football in Russia.⁵⁵ There is also a new generation of scholars, whose work has contributed to the field. Notably, besides Barbara Keys (2003, 2005, 2006), who have written extensively about the interwar and post-war history of the diffusion of modern sports in the Soviet Union, Mike O'Mahoney (2006), focuses his work on exploring the relationship between Soviet sports ideology and art.⁵⁶

Whereas the topic of the politics of Soviet hockey has been greatly explored within the context of Cold War era competition, there is scarcity of scholarship devoted to the development of hockey in the USSR. Notwithstanding, the work of Robert F. Bauman (1988) and Markku Jokisipilä (2006) are good historical overviews of the Soviet hockey system and its secrets.⁵⁷ While the recent Russian history of Soviet hockey is largely dominated by popular history books (Petrov 2010; Kukushkin 2010), the monograph of Mikhail Prozumenschikov, *Big Sport and Big Politics* (2004), gives a scholarly account on the affairs in Soviet sports, including hockey. Based on the documents of the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, the study shows the impact of the Soviet leadership on the fate of the elite Soviet sportsmen, who had to compete hard to establish a view of the Soviet Union as a great sports power.⁵⁸

Sports in Soviet and Post-Soviet Latvia

In Soviet times, two opposite historiographies of Latvian sports appeared on both sides of the Iron Curtain, showing how conflicting the development of Latvian sports was

<<http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/Books/seriousfun.pdf>>; Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the Peoples Team in the Workers' State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁵⁵ James Riordan, "Rewriting Soviet Sports History." *Journal of Sports History*. 20.3. (Winter 1993): 247-258. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <<http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1993/JSH2003/jsh2003c.pdf>>;

James Riordan, "The Rise and Fall of Soviet Olympic Champions." *The Olympika: The International Journal of Olympic Studies*. 2 (1993): 25-44. *LA84 Foundation*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/Olympika/Olympika_1993/olympika0201c.pdf>; James Riordan, "Football: Nation, City and the Dream. Playing the Game for Russia, Money and Power." *Soccer & Society*. 8.4 (Oct. 2007): 545-560. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14660970701440840>>.

⁵⁶ Mike O'Mahoney, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture – Visual Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

⁵⁷ Robert F., Baumann. "The Central Army Sports Club (TsSKA): Forging a Military Tradition in Soviet Ice Hockey," *Journal of Sport History* 15 (1988): 151-166. *LA84 Foundation*. Web. 1 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/JSH/JSH1988/JSH1502/jsh1502d.pdf>>; Jokisipilä, *Maple Leaf*.

⁵⁸ Prozumenschikov *Большой Спорт*; Aleksander Petrov, *Тайны Советского Хоккея [The Secrets of Soviet Hockey]* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2010). Vsevolod Kukushkin, *Стенка на Стенку: Хоккейное Противостояние Канада-Россия [Wall to Wall: The Canada-Russia Hockey Standoff]* (Moscow: Chelovek, 2010).

during the epoch of the Cold War. The sports historiography of the Latvian SSR, Anna Ķīse (1965) and Aija Kehre (1983), positively addressed the incorporation of Latvian sports into the Soviet system of sports, prizing its remarkable impact on the sports development in Latvia and often favorably contrasting it with the malfunctioned elitist sports societies of the bourgeois Latvia.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the sports historiography of Latvian WWII exiles, Vilis Čika and Gunars Gubiņš (1970), stressed the illegal occupation of the Baltic states, maintaining the continuity of the national identity of Latvian sports with the first Republic and also outlining the sports life of the Latvians in exile.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding the problem of the occupation, the international achievements of the Soviet-Latvian athletes were often prized. Interestingly, Gunars Gubiņš (1979) pointed out how the Latvians were “indirectly” responsible for the Soviet achievements in international hockey, highlighting the words of the Soviet coach Vsevolod Bobrov that “[i]t all started with the Baltic Republics.” This confession on the Baltic origins of Soviet hockey was made at the press conference after the first round of the 1972 Canada-USSR series.⁶¹

After the restoration of independence in 1991, the history of Latvian sports was reassessed. The first comprehensive work on the history of Latvian sports (Forands and Kehris 1994) was written during the times of the quest for the international recognition of Latvian sports (late 1980s and early 1990s) and required a significant reformulation of the earlier version to the new political context of regained independence.⁶² The contemporary history of Latvian sports highlights the illegal nature of the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union. In the most recent work on the Olympic history of Latvia, Guntis Keisels and Dainis Caune (2003) reconstruct the core dynamics of the Latvian sports development, by putting an emphasis on Latvia’s aspirations to re-join the international sports community after decades of absence.⁶³

⁵⁹ Anna Ķīse, *Fiziskā Kultūra un Sports Latvijā [Physical Culture and Sports in Latvia]* (Rīga: Liesma, 1965); Aija Kehre, *Sports Padomju Latvijā [Sports of Soviet Latvia]* (Rīga: Latvijas PSR Ministru Padomes Fiziskās Kultūras un Sporta Komiteja, 1983).

⁶⁰ Vilis Čika and Gunārs Gubiņš, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture. 1918—1944 [Latvian Sports History. 1918-1944]* (Sweden: American Latvian Association of Physical Education and Sports Bureau, 1970); More readings: Dzintra Grundmane, *Trimdas Latviešu Sporta Vēsture, 1945-1995 [The Latvian Exiles Sports History]* (Canada: Latviešu Sporta Padome Ārzemēs, 2001).

⁶¹ Gunārs Gubiņš, *Hollow Glory: Baltic Athletes on Soviet Olympic Teams 1952-1976* (Stockholm: Latvian National Foundation, 1979) 21.

⁶² Ilgvars Forands and Ēriks Kehris, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture [Latvian Sports History]* (Rīga: Latvijas Izglītības Fonds, 1994).

⁶³ Guntis Keisels and Dainis Caune, ed., *The Olympic History of Latvia* (Rīga: Latvijas Olimpiskā Komiteja, 2003); More reading: Juris Baldunčiks and Artūrs Vaiders, *Latvia in the Olympic Movement* (Rīga: Latvian Sports Committee, 1992).

D. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

1. The Methodological Perspective, Research Framework and Content

This research is based on a case study of the historical rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” and its participation in the KHL. The inquiry employs a blend of interdisciplinary perspectives in studying the intersection of sports, history, politics, globalization and nationalism. While the methodological perspective is eclectic in its nature, the research is confined to the specific scholarly themes in sports studies, such as the global history of modern sports and globalization, sports and nationalism. Significantly, identifying the new national trajectories in Latvian sports, the study pays special attention to unveiling the geopolitical links between the restart of Latvian-Russian relations after the EU’s eastern enlargement and the re-emerging Latvian-Russian contacts in the realm of ice hockey. Drawing on a wide range of sources in English, Latvian and Russian languages, including the interviews with the actors of historical sports exchanges, press releases, significant statements, and newspaper accounts, the research illuminates the key factors behind the international revival of “Dinamo Riga” and its confinement into a national sports project. The study of the participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL addresses the symbolic role of the team in the promotion of Latvian identity on the global stage.

The exploration begins with the conceptualization of the newly-emerged sports networks, such as the KHL within the context of the global development of hockey. Using the figurational perspective in studying the global diffusion of modern sports and its relation to sporting nationalism, the aim of the chapter, *The Emergence of the KHL in the Global Context*, is to offer a global sports perspective to the new development in international hockey. This section elaborates the theoretical frameworks of Joseph Maguire on the global developments in modern sports to explain the nature of the KHL. Despite the unfavorable conditions of change in terms of commercialization of professional sports and uneven international flow of professional athletes within the newly-emerging global economic system, the increasingly globalized nature of sports development after the fall of the Iron Curtain has also provided Russia with a range of transferable mechanisms of the western sports systems for the national resurgence in hockey. As a result, this national response to global homogeneity paved the way for the creation of an alternative “zone of prestige” for European hockey in the international hockey competition with the NHL. The qualitative study of the emergence of the KHL is based on the analysis of significant statements and press releases made by the principal

organizers of the league as well as the sports materials on the affairs of Russian hockey after the collapse of the Cold War system of international hockey competition.

Secondly, the historical part of the case study on the modern rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” investigates the Soviet experiences in the development of Latvian hockey. The chapter, *The Haunting Soviet Heritage of Dinamo Riga*, begins with the chronological reconstruction of the unique origins of the Latvian-Russian sports contacts in the realm of ice hockey in the context of the interwar and post-WWII developments in modern sports. It then goes further to illuminate the golden moments of Soviet-Latvian hockey during the Cold War era of international hockey development. These experiences have become indispensable to the future progress of Latvian hockey in international competition after regaining independence in 1991. Despite the changing national trajectories of Latvia, the common Latvian-Russian bonds in the realm of hockey continued to remain strong shaping the cultural grounds for future cooperation. The exploration of the historical background of Latvian hockey is based on the analysis of the Latvian SSR, post-Soviet, Soviet, modern Russian and Latvian historiographies of sports as well as the published interviews with the Soviet and Latvian SSR hockey authorities’ functionaries, Soviet and Latvian hockey players and coaches.

Thirdly, the study unveils the state of affairs in Latvian hockey in the newly-emerged global context of international hockey. The chapter, *Modern Rebirth of Dinamo Riga*, begins with the investigation of the recent geopolitical constructions in bilateral relations of Latvia and Russia, arguing that the historical revival of the Latvian-Russian sports contacts in the realm of ice hockey was favorably shaped by the geopolitical restart of bilateral relations after the EU’s eastern enlargement. Analyzing the official constructions of the Latvian foreign guidelines for the years 2006-2010 and the Cabinet Ministry press releases, the study shows that despite the fundamental concerns over history, between the years 2006 and 2008, Latvia was on the verge of significantly improving bilateral relations with Russia. Moreover, it also demonstrates that the key Latvian architects of the restart were also the fundamental actors in the historical revival of “Dinamo Riga,” foreseeing in the emergence of the new “zone of prestige” in international hockey a great opportunity for Latvian hockey. The analysis of significant statements of the political, economic and cultural agents of the Latvian “hockey diplomacy” of the rapprochement with the Russians shows that the special cultural status of Latvia as a historical member of Soviet hockey was re-enforced. Coupled with the good partnership in the energy sector and the recently built informal friendships on the

highest political level, this special status of Latvia significantly eased the atmosphere of the formal discussions over the acceptance of the Latvian team in the KHL.

Finally, the case study of the participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL examines the role of the team in the global promotion of Latvian sportive identity. The chapter, *Dimamo Riga in the Kontinental Hockey League*, explores the ways in which the re-instated team, “Dinamo Riga,” becomes the sports vehicle for the promotion of sporting nationalism in Latvia. The study examines the historic revival of Latvian-Russian contacts in the realm of hockey within the context of the ongoing cultural politics in Latvia. Studying the national discourses in the media and the recently emerged Latvian scholarship on soft power activities of Russia in the “near-abroad,” it argues that the historical concerns over the hegemonic practices of Russia have certainly influenced the identity politics of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL. Following the national insurgence to the global cooperation with the Russians, the co-founders of “Dinamo Riga” had to significantly re-shape and confine the team’s identity into the national contours to attain the higher level of acceptance of the project in Latvian society. The qualitative analysis of the Latvian participation in the KHL shows that “Dinamo Riga” has established itself as a nationwide project for the promotion of Latvia’s sportive identity on a global scale.

2. Primary and Secondary Sources

For the primary sources, I utilized the official printed publications of the Latvian SSR Ice Hockey Federation, printed publications of the Latvian Sports History and the Soviet Sports History; publications of the international and national sports organizations and federations, which included the materials from the IIHF, the Latvian Ice Hockey Federation, the Russian Ice Hockey Federation, the KHL, and HC “Dinamo Riga”; the official online governmental publications of the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation; Russian publications from the major online newspapers and magazines, and news agencies: (*Sports Express, Soviet Sport, Sport Daily, Commersant, Championat.com, Sports.ru, Gazeta.ru, Dni.ru, RIA News, Lenta.ru, Novaya Gazeta, and Novye Izvestiya*); Latvian publications from the major online newspapers and magazines: (*Chas, Diena, Delfi.lv, TVNet.lv, Baltic-Course.lv, SportaCenters.lv, and Appollo.lv*); the research also includes the autobiographies of the legendary Soviet players and coaches. The secondary sources include the academic journals, books, and online newspapers articles related to the discussion on the global development of international hockey.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF THE KHL IN THE GLOBAL SPORTS CONTEXT

The origins of the introduction of the Kontinental Hockey League are deeply rooted into the process of globalization of the 20th Century's international sports exchange. Since its inception, the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL) has become one of the most important events in the history of the international ice hockey since the end of the Cold War sports rivalries. Yet, the development of the KHL is not conformed to a single universal pattern. It is rather a complex product of the global sports processes as well as the socio-political changes, which took place in post-Soviet Russia. On the one hand, the KHL can be seen as the ideological product of Russian sporting nationalism in resistance to the post-Cold War pressures in the global diffusion of modern sports, which forces were explicitly seen in the triumph of the western sports practices and the sweeping NHLization of the post-Soviet hockey talent. Simultaneously, however, the KHL significantly embraced the western patterns in global hockey development, weighing its success on the increasingly commercialized and cosmopolitan nature of the international hockey markets. In this respect, the Joseph Maguire (1994, 2012) analytical tool of understanding the global sports diffusion through the lens of “diminishing contrasts” and “increasing varieties,”⁶⁴ can be a very useful set of guidelines in illustrating the complex blend of the globalization of sports coupled with the historical international power relations and national struggles put at work, paving the way for the creation of such sports networks as the KHL.

A. The Stockholm Swansong: The Collapse of the Soviet Hockey System

Indeed, after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the shifting balance of power in the international system, it seemed that there was a historical momentum to proclaim an undisputed victory of the western sportive values over the Soviets. This triumphal victory of the West over the Communist bloc epitomized in the political collapse of the Soviet system of sports and physical culture as well as the intensifying homogenization of global

⁶⁴ Maguire, *Sport, Identity Politics* 398-427; Maguire, *European Body Cultures and the Making of the Modern World: Zones of Prestige*.

sports practices along Western and American lines,⁶⁵ with the commercialization of professional sports and uneven international flow of professional athletes within the newly-emerging global economic system.⁶⁶ These two aspects of the “global sporting homogeneity”⁶⁷ were particularly manifested in the world of mega sports, such as soccer and ice hockey, two widely-popular sports in Russia, which were particularly important to the Soviet performances of sporting nationalism at the age of the Cold War rivalries.⁶⁸

In fact, the magnitude of the national loss in the Cold War struggle to the West was at most radically evident in the performance of Russian hockey, which was experiencing a painful transition and adaptation to the new unfavorable conditions in professional sports. It should be noted first that in Soviet times, hockey was a rudimentary part of the country’s national pride and an important political tool to establish a view of the Soviet Union as a great world power. Moreover, during the Cold War era of international contests, the Soviet excellence in hockey reflected the overall quality of the communist system.⁶⁹ This national pride goes back to the long-lasting achievements of Soviet hockey on the global stage. Throughout the period from 1954 to 1991, the Soviets won 19 World Championships and 7 Olympic gold medals, rarely giving up the top spot to their rivals. The tradition of the never-ending victories has established the Soviet hockey squad as the major hockey powerhouse alongside the great inventors of the game, the Canadians, who a long time ago monopolized the idea of ice hockey as being their own game.⁷⁰ The global manifestation of the excellence of the Soviet sports organization and values of sportsmanship was epitomized in the epic rivalry over the dominance in world hockey with Canada in the 1972 Summit Series. The following victories of the “Big Red Machine” against the National Hockey League (NHL) superstars in the 1979 Challenge Cup and the 1981 Canada Cup had only cemented this core status globally. The special recognition of the Soviet hockey contribution to the game was given in a 1984 friendly game between the USSR and Team Europe, organized in Moscow in honor

⁶⁵ On the global “triumph” of the Western sports values see the Sections: “Debating Point: Who is Winning the Global Game?” and “Power, Cultural Struggles and Global Diversity,” In Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 18-22.

⁶⁶ See Chapter “Sport, Labour and Migration.” In Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 26-43.

⁶⁷ Alan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives* 13.

⁶⁸ More reading: Prozumenschikov, *Большой Спорт*.

⁶⁹ Prozumenschikov *Большой Спорт*; further readings: Markku Jokisipilä, *Maple Leaf*.

⁷⁰ For further reading on Hockey and Canadian Identity: Bruce Kidd, *How Do We*.

of the departure from the sports of Vladislav Tretiak, Valeri Vasiliev and Aleksander Maltsev.⁷¹

However, all that was solid in the outstanding state of affairs in Soviet hockey started to melt into air in the tumultuous realities of the late 80s and early 90s. During the collapse of the Soviet regime, Russia was undergoing a very troubled process of post-Communist transformations realized in economic restructuring, modeling the capitalist style of western countries, as well as the liberalization of society. The policies of democratization of Russian society had effectively eliminated those aspects of the late 70s and 80s Soviet hockey system, whose success heavily relied on subduing the Soviet athletes to military discipline with extensive periods of training in the sports camps as well as the uneven assignment and transfer of hockey players from the periphery to the Moscow core in order to consolidate the best talent under the umbrella of the flagship of Soviet hockey – “CSKA” (Central Sports Club of the Army) – the base-team of the Soviet national squad.⁷²

Already in the late 1980s, the Soviet system of hockey received its first blow following the process of *Glasnost* (“Openness”) and *Perestroika* (“Restructuring”), initiated by the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev. The Soviet hockey community was shaken up and unraveled in October 1988 by the “open letter,” written in the popular magazine, *Ogoniok*, by a member of the national team, Igor Larionov, where he harshly criticized the totalitarian methods of the national coach, Viktor Tikhonov.⁷³ In the following January 27, 1989, the revolt against the system escalated when the USSR

⁷¹ Vaihansky Semyon, *Золотая Книга Сборной СССР по Хоккею [The Golden Book of Soviet National Hockey Team]* (Saint Petersburg: Publishing House Neva; Moscow: Olma-Press 2002) 199.

In the years of 1928-1938, before going home after the World Cup, Canadians “charmed” Europeans by playing in highly prestigious exhibition games against the unified team of the Old World. But never before, the unified team of the European continent was on a visit to a national hockey federation. Vaihansky argues that there was a very good reason for this to happen: the only time the world saw off the ice such an amazing “trio” – goalkeeper, defender and attacker – who owned, in total, 34 gold medals at world champions and Olympic Games. [translation mine].

⁷² For further reading on the Soviet hockey system see eg., Petrov, *Тайны Советского Хоккея*. Petrov describes the Soviet hockey as an extremely closed-system, also giving the account on the highly politicized and uneven transfer system of hockey players in Soviet hockey; Baumann, *The Central Army Sports Club (TsSKA)*. Baumann gives an overview of the CSKA organization. On the organizational aspects of the Soviet Sports and Physical Cultural see: Riordan, James. *Sport in Soviet Society*.

⁷³ “Ларионов – Тихонову. Письмо, Изменившее Хоккей Навсегда [Larionov to Tikhonov. The Letter that Change the Hockey Forever].” (Reprinted from Igor Larionov’s Open Letter to Viktor Tikhonov – “В Долгу Перед Хоккеем... [In Debt to the Game of Hockey...]” *Ogonek*. Oct. 1988). *Sports.ru*. 3 Oct. 2012. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sports.ru/tribuna/blogs/centre/372410.html>>. Para. 6.

One of the letter’s passages stated: “Those who work with you [Tikhonov] for years had studied your methodology. Ten month of the year we are in isolation from home: the endless trips, games, and when there is no games – training camps... the regime is severe. It is easier to say what we are allowed to do, than what we are not. You can eat to satiety, we are being fed at best, you can play chess or backgammon, you can get some sleep. The rest is a workout.” [translation mine].

national team captain, Vyacheslav Fetisov, openly refused to play on Tikhonov's team because of the systematic "mistreatment" of the players.⁷⁴ Moreover, Fetisov publicly revealed his scandalous desire to play in the NHL, which led him to the open conflict with the Soviet system.⁷⁵ However, fearing the debacle on the international stage, the Soviet sports authorities reached a compromise with Fetisov. Together with Larionov, he was promised to be allowed to play in the NHL after playing in the 1989 world Championship in Stockholm, which represented the ultimate spark of the Soviet hockey greatness on international stage with perfect results.⁷⁶

These emotional events fostered the grounds for the political split in the 1989 Plenary Session of the Soviet Hockey Federation. The heated discussions on the restructuring and liberalization of the highly-centralized hockey system and adaptation of Soviet hockey to the western standards of professional sports organizations had entered the stage.⁷⁷ Moreover, the Plenary also witnessed the attempt of the removal of the national coach from his duties. The loss of Aleksander Mogilny, who defected to the NHL, was blamed on Tikhonov, who was also falsely accused of beating him up.⁷⁸ Despite the uneasy accusations, Tikhonov remained in power.⁷⁹ However, with the gradual softening of the top-down system of control over the players, the "Big Red Machine" simply lost its organizational steam it was feeding on in the previous years of success. Consequently, the first Soviet hockey players like Sergei Pryakhin, Vyacheslav Fetisov, Igor Larionov, Vladimir Krutov, Sergei Makarov and Helmut Balderis received

⁷⁴ Gennady Kamennyi, "Фетисов Против Тихонова [*Fetisov Against Tikhonov*]." *Soviet Sports*. 22 Jan. 2004. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/141022>>. Para 1. In the 1989 interview to the newspaper, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, Fetisov confessed: "For Tikhonov we are ice robots. But we are also human beings – with our own joys, sorrows, emotions, and worries... I am a strong man, but cannot tolerate all this. I am tired of the dictatorship of Tikhonov, because of this there is an unhealthy situation in the team. I do not want to play any more for the coach who I do not trust!" [translation mine].

⁷⁵ Vyacheslav Fetisov, *Овертайм [Overtime]* (Moscow: Vagrious, 1998). 36-50. In the autobiography, Fetisov gives his account on the story over his quest to play in the NHL, mentioning the sabotaging role of the Soviet authorities and Tikhonov in postponing his contract with New Jerseys Devils in fall 1988, which led to the open conflict with the system.

⁷⁶ Kamennyi, *Фетисов Против Тихонова* Mid Para. Top CSKA's players made an ultimatum to Tikhonov, demanding to bring back Fetisov for the 1989 WC in Stockholm.

⁷⁷ Mariss Andersons, "С Пленума Федерации Хоккея СССР [*From the Plenary Session of the USSR Hockey Federation*]." *Хоккей 1989-1990* (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press.1989) 64-66.

⁷⁸ Andersons, *С Пленума* 60-61.

⁷⁹ Besides harsh criticism, there was still strong support of Tikhonov in the Soviet hockey community. For instance, the legendary ex-Soviet Latvian goalkeeper, Arturs Irbe, who could be hardly accused of being loyal to the Soviet system, said after the 1989 WC in Stockholm: "much could be disliked in the actions and character of V. Tikhonov, but you won't find nowadays a better specialist than him in the country." [translation mine]. In Mariss Andersons, "В Стане Чемпионов: В Роли Гида - Артур Ирбе [*In the Rank of Champions: As a Guide – Artur Irbe*]." *Хоккей 1989-1990* (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press.1989) 122.

official permission to leave the country to play in the NHL.⁸⁰ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the system that made Soviet hockey a global power finally ceased to exist, opening the “talent pipeline” of Russian hockey players to the western countries.⁸¹

B. The Dark Ages of Russian Hockey

The end result of the Cold War on western terms was very prominent in terms of hockey players’ migration patterns. The next day after the 1992 NHL draft, the New York Times proclaimed that the fall of Eastern-European communism was a huge “gain” for the NHL draft system; now the owners of the NHL teams should not worry any longer about drafting the Russian hockey players in the first round, fearing that they would not be let go by the Soviet authorities.⁸² Indeed, the post-Cold War reduction of ideological contrasts surrounding the developments in global sports realized in the mass exodus of ex-Soviet players abroad, who were seeking the new lucrative opportunities to continue their professional careers in the western countries. According to the IIHF statistics, during the 1990s, the former Soviet Union together with Canada became the major exporter of hockey players worldwide.⁸³ The only difference in this global phenomenon was that while the Canadian superstars stayed on their continent, the cohort of the finest of ex-Soviets players went overseas to the National Hockey League. Although it was the time positively characterized by the intensified mobility of professional hockey players, a new opportunity arose especially for the hockey talent from the post-Soviet countries; the period has been also strikingly exemplified by the overall weakening of the domestic leagues and the emergence of triumphal global hegemony of the National Hockey League for the next coming decades. The NHL had become “the economic and cultural core” of world hockey, which was located in North America.⁸⁴ Being the kind of “zone of prestige,” in Maguire’s terms, the NHL attracted young players from the post-Soviet

⁸⁰ *Овертайм [Overtime]* 26-33. Fetisov speculates on the rationale behind the authorities decision to let players go overseas, arguing that the times were changing. The “Sovintersport,” which was responsible for negotiation with the NHL teams, saw the Soviet players as a “good commodity” for a state enterprise. This attempt failed miserably due to the old “Soviet” approaches in dealing with the new opportunity.

⁸¹ Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 32. The term is coined to note the flooding of the Western European soccer clubs by the Eastern Europeans after the collapse of the “Iron Curtain.”

⁸² Joe Lapointe, “HOCKEY; A Loss for Communism Is a Gain for N.H.L Draft.” *The New York Times*, 21 Jun. 1992, Web. 1 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/21/sports/hockey-a-loss-for-communism-is-a-gain-for-nhl-draft.html>>. Further reading on drafting sagas of Soviet players, see a personalized story of Tretiak and Montreal Canadiens In Vladislav Tretiak. *Хоккейная Эпопея [Hockey Saga]* (Moscow: Leonardo Insitute, 1991); Fetisov, *Овертайм*.

⁸³ Maguire, *Blade Runners* 340.

⁸⁴ Maguire *Blade Runners* 340. Elliott, and Maguire, *Getting Caught in the Net* 163.

space, who would be dreaming of going to play overseas, sometimes at a very early age, which put Russian hockey in the position of donor countries in relation to the host NHL countries like the United States and Canada.

In the Russian hockey community, the period of the 1990s and early 2000s has been characterized as the “times of troubles” of national hockey.⁸⁵ The post-Communist Russian system of hockey, being the “outsider” in the professional hockey management, has struggled to keep pace with the superior business standards of the western professional leagues. The poorly organized post-Soviet leagues like the International Hockey League (IHL) and the later Professional Hockey League of *Superliga*, (“Super League”) were a desperate national response to “emulate” the patterns of “the established groups” like the NHL but lacked the financial resources and necessary business culture and expertise to compete against the well-established western leagues to retain the hockey talent at home or recruit players from abroad.⁸⁶ Due to the unstable economic situation in Eastern Europe, the ex-Soviet Russian players would still prefer to settle in the more economically lucrative Western European leagues or even go to the minor North American leagues rather than stay in their home country. Although there was a certain degree of pride exuberated by an outstanding profile of the Russian hockey superstars in the NHL, the highly successful performance of the Soviet school overseas did not transpire in the international competition on the same level to satisfy the always higher expectations set in the Russian hockey community.⁸⁷ After the sole victory in 1993, Team Russia had significantly lowered its performance on the global stage, being unable to achieve a major victory in the international competition during the next 15 years.

This failing performance on the international stage was also greatly caused by the ongoing conflict between the Ice Hockey Federation of Russia (FHR) and the NHL legionnaires. In the 1990s, the relations of the FHR’s representatives with the overseas superstars were plagued by hostility and mutual charges. Since the collapse of the USSR, Russian superstars were often accused by the FHR for not committing enough and being

⁸⁵ The analogy traces back to the times of interregnum in the 17th Century’s Russia.

⁸⁶ On “emulation” or “resistance” of “the established groups” by the “outsiders” in global sports development see the Section “Power, Culture and Global Interchanges.” In Maguire, *European Body Cultures and the Making of the Modern World: Zones of Prestige*; On the labor migration patterns in professional hockey and how it affected the European hockey leagues in mid 90s see Maguire, *Blade Runners* and Elliott and Maguire, *Getting Caught in the Net*.

⁸⁷ Aleksei Dospëhov, Все Российские Обладатели Кубка Стэнли [*All Russian Holders of the Stanley Cup*].” *Коммерсантъ*. 06 Jun. 2008, Web. Mar. 1. 2013. <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/900705>>. For instance, since 1994 (except 2001) to 2002, at list three Russian players represented the winners of the NHL Stanley Cup.

“unpatriotic” to their own country while the former responded that the Russian hockey officials were mired in corruption and lacked professionalism.⁸⁸ The accusations over the lack of patriotism were commonly made in Russia before each major international tournament, but the flurry of charges over lack of patriotic commitment was unleashed when the country hosted the 2000 World Ice Hockey Championship in Saint Petersburg. The first global tournament on Russian soil since the dissolution of the Soviet Union was launched with great expectations. The team, made up of the 15 NHL players, included such world class superstars as Pavel Bure, Alexei Yashin, and Valery Kamensky. However, the 25-time world champion suffered a humiliating defeat. Russian hockey had touched its absolute ground zero, ending the tournament on 11th place and losing four games in a row to those countries which no one would even consider tournament favorites. The Russian NHL superstars received an unprecedented criticism across the country for their poor performance. The “Disgrace on the Ice”⁸⁹ in Saint Petersburg was the last straw that considerably damaged the country’s national self-esteem and international reputation as a great hockey power.

C. Russian National Insurgency to a Global Hockey Homogeneity

Certainly, all these exerting pressures of commingling with the West paved the way for a very specific revival of hockey nationalism in Russia. While the nostalgia over the glorious achievements of Soviet times served as an important catalyst for the restoring the national pride in the realm of international hockey, the resistance to the unfavorable outcomes of the global hockey homogenization has also coincided with the very important period of national revival in Russia, which was going through a recovery from the 1998 economic crisis and seeking ways of restoring its national prestige and finding a

⁸⁸ Igor Rabiner, *От Нагано до Ванкувера [Hockey Madness: From Nagano to Vancouver]*. Moscow: Olma Media Group, 2010. *Чемпионат.com*. 19 Dec. 2009. Web. 11 Mar. 2013.

<<http://www.championat.com/hockey/article-45537.html>>. Intro Para. The conflict escalated during the preparations for the 1996 Canada Cup, the organization was in as state of total “anarchy.” Aftermath the tournament, Vyacheslav Fetisov, Igor Larionov, Aleksander Mogilny, Vladimir Malakhov, Nikolai Khabibulin, Sergei Zubov and Vyacheslav Kozlov refused to join the 1998 Olympic team in Nagano.

⁸⁹ Aleksei Zhuk, Aleksei Dospheov, “Ледовое Позорище [*The Disgrace on the Ice*].” *Коммерсантъ*. 16 May 2000. Web. 1 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/16918/print>>. The words like “disgrace” and “shame” were common in describing the end result of the 2000 WC in Saint Petersburg. This shared disappointment by the situation in Russian hockey was expressed by the wide-range of Russian and post-Soviet hockey experts and enthusiasts. The president of the FHR, Aleksander Steblin, proposed to stop calling the Russian NHL players for the major international tournaments and rely solely on players from the Russian *Superliga*.

better place under the sun in the new global economy.⁹⁰ It should be noted that within the national revival of ice hockey comes along the new social policies of Russia consolidating the efforts of government and major corporate enterprise in propelling sports development in Russia. After the swift recovery from the economic crisis, the chronic conditions of national sports and physical culture received wider attention in the Russian government, which started to perceive sports as a very important medium of promoting national well-being and prosperity as well as furthering the international prestige of the country.⁹¹ Re-establishing the traditionally strong position of Russia in the international sports competition required the allocation of significant economic and human resources in the popularization of sports and physical culture in society as well as financial investment in the elite sports and rebuilding the outdated Soviet sports infrastructure across the country.⁹² It would be still premature to argue that the role of ice hockey in this paradigm became central to the political construction and the reproduction of the official nationalism of Russia, what is, however, important to indicate for the scope of this research is that the ongoing problems with Russian hockey as well as the global tendencies of the sport development have received significant political attention in the highest echelons of the new Russian political establishment.

State intervention was increasingly evident in the reorganization of the Russian system of sports governance. The new generation of leaders with an outstanding record of international achievements has emerged to populate influential leadership positions to support the revival of Russian hockey on the global stage. In April 2002, Putin invited the ex-Soviet hockey legend and the former NHL superstar, Vyacheslav Fetisov, to head the

⁹⁰ In the early 2000s, Russia defined its vast mineral and raw resources as country's strategic competitive advantage in the global economy, which export would help to recover the country from the devastating economic crisis. The focal point of this new vision was the "economization" of Russian strategic sector of natural resources by creating the state-controlled national corporations, which would be able to effectively compete on the world markets of natural gas, thus increasing the sustainability of economic growth and modernization of Russia. For further reading on practical aspects of the strategies in the energy sector see e.g., "The Summary of the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period of Up to 2020. *Ministry of Energy of Russian Federation.*" Moscow, 2003. Web. 1 Mar. 2013. <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/russia/events/doc/2003_strategy_2020_en.pdf>.

⁹¹ In 2005, the Russian government adopted the Federal Program for Development of physical culture and sports in Russia for years 2006 - 2015. The progress of the program can be followed at the official site of the program: "Федеральная Целевая Программа: Развитие Физической Культуры и Спорта в Российской Федерации на 2006-2015 Годы [*Federal Program: Development of Physical Culture and Sport of the Russian Federation in 2006-2015*]." *Ministry of Sport of Russian Federation.* 2010-2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://fcp-sport.ru/>>.

⁹² For more reading see e.g., Ben Aris, "Russia's Use of Sport in Regional Development Policy." *Russian Analytical Digest.* 95.6 (Apr. 2011): 2-5. Web. 6 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-95.pdf>>.

Federal Agency for Physical Culture and Sports, *RosSPORT*.⁹³ During his tenure, Fetisov launched a crusade against the national sports federations. He urged an end to the “unacceptable situation” when the officials remain completely unaccountable for the poor results while their respective departments are subsidized by the state.⁹⁴ Fetisov’s immediate intervention in the affairs of Russian hockey faced an organized resentment by the eternal leader of Russian hockey, Aleksander Steblin, who at that time singlehandedly controlled the Russian Hockey Federation (FHR) and the Professional Hockey League (PHL), *Superliga*. During the lengthy confrontation, Fetisov associated the unsuccessful performances of the national hockey team in the prestigious international tournaments with Steblin’s usurpation of two different hockey organizations as well as his personal inability to build good relations with the Russian NHL stars. Formally, the conflict was resolved with the resignation of Steblin after the unsuccessful results in the 2006 Olympic Games in Turin. Another hockey legend and the former Chairman of the Duma Committee for the Sport Education of Youth, Vladislav Tretiak, was unanimously voted for the presidency in the FHR. Immediately after the election, Tretiak announced that the main goal of the Federation would be the revival of the “glory of national hockey.” According to Tretiak, the success of this task would be also heavily dependent on the ability of the Federation to improve the relations with the Russian NHL players, who must be treated at home with great respect and “love.”⁹⁵

Already in the mid-2000s, Vyacheslav Fetisov initiated the campaign for the creation of the Euro-Asian Hockey League (EAHL). The new League was supposed to challenge the “powerless” position of European and Asian teams in relation to the NHL and give a new “impulse” to the global hockey development.⁹⁶ The prime concern of the powerlessness of the European hockey leagues in relation to the NHL was the inadequate

⁹³ Roman Vishnev, “Силовой Прием: Президенты Спортивных Федераций Ответили Вячеславу Фетисову [Body Check: Presidents of Sports Federations Responded to Fetisov].” *Новые Известия*. 22 Nov. 2004. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.newizv.ru/sport/2004-11-22/15670-cilovoj-priem.html>>.

Vladimir Putin signed a decree, according to which, the Federal Agency for Physical Culture and Sport went under the direct subordination of the Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov. It was the sign that the state took up the matters of sports and the activities of independent federations under its direct supervision.

⁹⁴ Afsati Dzhusoiti and Alexei Dospheov, “Славься: Функционерам Показали, Кто в Спорте Хозяин [Heil to Slava: The Functionaries Were Shown, Who is the Boss in Sports].” *Коммерсантъ*. 20 Nov. 2004. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/526550>>.

⁹⁵ Pavel Savchik, et al., “День Рождения Президента [Birthday of President].” *Sport Express*. 26 Apr. 2006. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2006-04-26/7_1/>. Mid Para. In his interview, Tretiak mentioned the important role of Putin, who supported his candidature for the presidency.

⁹⁶ “Декларация о ЕАХЛ Подписана Рядом Руководителей Клубов Суперлиги [The Declaration about the EAHL was Signed by a Number of Club Managers of Superliga].” *РИА Новости*. 27 Oct. 2005. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://ria.ru/sport/20051027/41915474.html>>. Para 3.

system of compensation for the European players going to play in the NHL.⁹⁷ The Russians were first to declare war on the NHL when they opted out from the collective IIHF-NHL transfer agreement for the period of 2004-2006. However, the FHR had failed to provide the *Superliga* with an efficient legal framework to retain those players who were under contract with the local teams at home. As a result, the young Russian talents, including the rising superstars like Nikolai Zherdev or Evgeny Malkin, continued to defect to the NHL, disregarding their contracts with domestic teams, which caused the *Superliga* clubs to claim significant financial losses.⁹⁸

Consequently, the prime objective of Fetisov's plan was to introduce a palpable "alternative" to the NHL that would become an economically feasible hockey platform to adequately protect the interests of the teams from the Eurasian continent.⁹⁹ The new global league was supposed to gradually expand its geographical borders across the post-Soviet space, Western Europe and Far East Asia. Moreover, Fetisov pointed out that the Hockey Federations and team owners of post-Soviet countries like Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Latvia had already shown a desire to participate in the project.¹⁰⁰ Although the creation of a new league was aimed at resisting the global dominance of the NHL, the EAHL also must have had a lot in common with the NHL, emulating the system of draft pick and salary cap, and become, in effect, its Eurasian competitor.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Beginning 1996, the agreements with the NHL were organized under the umbrella of the IIHF defining the amount of compensation for teams from each European hockey federation. After the expiration of 2004 agreement, Russia refused to sign the new collective agreements. Later, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Sweden and Finland started to express disappointment about the way in which the IIHF-NHL compensations were handled. In 2007 Czechs threatened to opt out from the 2007-2011 transfer agreement. In "Европа - НХЛ: Русский Фронт - Европейский Аффронт [*Europe - NHL: Russian Front - European Affront*]." *Чемпионат.ком*. 12 Dec. 2007. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.championat.com/hockey/article-16658.html>>; Alan Hougaard, "IIHF Transfer Agreement Falls Apart after Czechs Opt not to Extend Deal." *The Hockey News*. 1 May 2008. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.thehockeynews.com/articles/15728-IIHF-transfer-agreement-falls-apart-after-Czechs-opt-not-to-extend-deal.html>>.

⁹⁸ See e.g., Vladimir Mozgovoy, "Притяжение Магнитки: Как Его Преодолил Малкин: Процесс по Делу Сбежавшего Хоккеиста Пошел. [*How Malkin Overcame the Attraction of Magnitka: The Trial of a Defected Hockey Player Began*]." *Новая Газета*. 25 Sep. 2006. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <<http://2006.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2006/73n/n73n-s43.shtml>>; For a juridical debate surrounding the transfer wars between the NHL and Russia see: Chris Miller, "Hockey's Cold-War: Russia's Defiance of the IIHF and the Malkin Saga." *Seton Hall Journal of Sports and Entertainment Law*. 17.1 (2007): 163-210. *Hein Online*. Web. 1 May. 2013; James Larry, "Wanna Go?: A Discussion of the Potential Fight Between NHL Owners and Players over Participation in the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi." *Northwestern Journal of International Law and Business*. 32. 3A (2011): 3-37. Open Web Access, 11 May 2013.

⁹⁹ "Фетисов: Проблемы Малкина не Возникло, Если бы у Нас Был Аналог НХЛ [*Fetisov: "The Problem of Malkin" Would not Have Arisen, if We Have Had an Analog of the NHL*]." *РИА Новосту*. 17 Aug. 2006. Web. Mar. 11. 2013. <<http://ria.ru/sport/20060817/52772097.html?id=?id=>>.

¹⁰⁰ Вячеслав Фетисов Предложил Создать Хоккейную Лигу Для Бывших Стран СССР [*Vyacheslav Fetisov Proposed to Create the Hockey League for the former countries of the USSR*]." *Lenta.ru*. 17 Sep. 2005. Web. Mar. 20. 2013. <<http://m.lenta.ru/news/2005/09/17/fetisov/>>.

¹⁰¹ "Фетисов Подался в Азию [*Fetisov Gone to Asia*]." *Газета.ру*. 27 Oct. 2005. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <http://www.gazeta.ru/sport/2005/10/a_463565.shtml>.

Accordingly, on October 27, 2005, after lasting negotiations, 11 teams of the Russian *Superliga* and the minister of Sports of Tatarstan met with Fetisov to sign a historical memorandum for the creation of the Euro-Asian Hockey League.¹⁰²

However, in its initial stages, Fetisov's project was confronted by the internal national resistance in the FHR, which at the time exercised the strong control of the *Superliga*. Aleksander Steblin constantly accused Fetisov for offering "an ambiguous parody" of the NHL with a "mythical" cup, and instead recommended that the Russian hockey community begin the revival of the Russian school under the umbrella of the national championship.¹⁰³ Fearing the internal competition, Steblin hastily decided to transform the *Superliga* into a joint-stock company to generate interest from national sponsors and thus make it more attractive to the leading Russian clubs to stay in the league from the economic point of view.¹⁰⁴ When in 2006 Vladislav Tretiak replaced Steblin, the FHR reclaimed the control over the *Supeliga*. For the next two years, Tretiak made continuous efforts to preserve the power of the Hockey Federation over the national championship, expressing skepticism towards the feasibility of Fetisov's project. The ultimate resolution of the confrontation with Fetisov over the destiny of the national championship would be decided in the corridors of the Kremlin.

D. The Emergence of a New "Zone of Prestige" in International Hockey

The geopolitical prospect of taking a leading role in creating an international alternative to the NHL was met with great enthusiasm in the Kremlin. The "father"¹⁰⁵ of the KHL, Vladimir Putin, would later confess that the global networks, such as the KHL could play a positive role in "restoring a single humanitarian space on the post-Soviet

¹⁰² "Хоккей: 11 Клубов Суперлиги Вчера На Встрече с Фетисовым Подписали Хартию о Создании Евро-Азиатской Лиги [*Hockey: 11 Super League clubs Yesterday at a Meeting with Fetisov Signed the Charter on the Establishment of the Euro-Asian League*]." *Sport Express*. 28 Oct. 2005. <http://www.sport-express.ru/newspaper/2005-10-28/6_1/>. The teams' owners signed the memorandum under the condition that the project will find support in the Federal government.

¹⁰³ "Хоккейная война продолжается [*The Hockey War Goes On*]." *Dni.ru*. 15 Nov. 2005. Web. 11 Mar. 2003. <<http://www.dni.ru/sport/2005/11/15/72826.html>>.

¹⁰⁴ Aleksei Zhuk, "Хоккей Пошел в Коммерцию [*Hockey Went into Commerce*]." *Коммерсантъ*. 1 Jan. 2006. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/645437>>.

¹⁰⁵ "Владимир Шалаев: КХЛ – это Действительно Проект Путина [*Vladimir Shalaev: KHL is Indeed Putin's Project*]." *Sports.ru*. 9 Feb. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sports.ru/hockey/136243334.html>>. Mid Para. From the interview of the Vice President of the KHL, Vladimir Shalaev: "Yes, Putin is the father of the League. This is true. Let us, however, be perfectly honest; I would say that Fetisov was the first to propose the program of the Eurasian Hockey League. It was long time ago. But then the project was not properly developed. But the KHL, as everyone knows, came up with Putin." [translation mine].

territory” and “unite people on the basis of common interest in hockey.”¹⁰⁶ Moreover, after the expansion of the membership to the Central Europe and Nordic countries, the Pan-European configuration of the league could “revive” the best features of the global hockey competition between the European and North American continents, “breathing new life”¹⁰⁷ into the international hockey development, which had lost its steam while being divided into “national flats.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, when on May 23, 2007, Putin, invited the national hockey team to the Kremlin to personally congratulate them with winning Bronze medals in the 2007 World Ice Hockey Championship in Moscow, he actively supported Fetisov’s idea of organizing the Euro-Asian Hockey League.¹⁰⁹ In his post-meeting interview with the President, Fetisov pointed out:

The President has supported us; he understands that there is a chance to create something global. [...] Now we have to sit down and talk with those who invest in hockey and understand the globality of the project. The clubs will benefit, as they will no longer be an appendage of the North American hockey and will receive an international platform. This is a completely different level of sponsorship interest in hockey, especially since Russia is ready to be the major guide and partner.¹¹⁰ [translation mine]

Accordingly, in the following year, the ambitious idea of creating a continental hockey league mushroomed from a single declaration to a large project that would significantly reshape the post-Cold War landscape of Euro-Asian hockey. Within this new paradigm of the official sporting nationalism, the so-called national champions, the

¹⁰⁶ “В.В.Путин Провел Рабочую Встречу с Заместителем Председателя Правления Газпрома, Президентом Континентальной Хоккейной Лиги А.И.Медведевым и Главным Тренером Хоккейной Сборной России В.А.Быковым [V.V. Putin Held a Working Meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the Management Board of “Gazprom,” the President of the Kontinental Hockey League, A.I. Medvedev, and the Head Coach of Russian National Hockey Team, Vyacheslav Bykov].” *Government of Russian Federation*. 8 Oct. 2008. Web. 20 Apr. 2013. <<http://archive.premier.gov.ru/events/news/2090/>>. End Para. [translation mine].

¹⁰⁷ “Путин Надеется, Что КХЛ Станет Общеευропейским Хоккейным Чемпионатом [Putin Hopes the KHL will Become a Pan-European Hockey Championship].” *РИА Новости*. 20 Jul. 2009. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://ria.ru/sport/20090720/178015244.html>>.

¹⁰⁸ “Владимир Путин: “Память о Суперсерии-72 Вдохновила Нас на Создание КХЛ” [Vladimir Putin: “The Memory of the Summit Series-72 Inspired Us to Create the KHL”].” *Sport Express*. 24 Feb. 2012. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://news.sport-express.ru/2012-02-24/495496/>>. Putin also repeatedly pointed out that the memories of the 1972 Superseries were the inspiration for organizing the Kontinental Hockey League, which would be able to uplift the global hockey competition.

¹⁰⁹ “Фетисов Обсудил с Путиным Создание Евро-Азиатской Хоккейной Лиги [Fetisov Discussed with Putin the Creation of the Euro-Asian Hockey League].” *Sports.ru*. 23 May 2007. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sports.ru/hockey/3010577.html>>.

¹¹⁰ *Фетисов Обсудил* Mid Para.

leading publicly and privately owned corporations, have been assigned the key role to expand the national project of Russian hockey on the local and continental level.¹¹¹ On September 29, 2007, at the meeting with the First Deputy Prime Minister, Sergei Naryshkin, the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Gazprom and the chairman of the Board of Directors of HC “SKA” St. Petersburg, Aleksander Medvedev, and the head of *RosSPORT*, Vyatcheslav Fetisov, were given the *carte blanche* to re-organize the current *Superliga* into the Open Russian Hockey League (ORHL), so that it could be launched already in September 2008. The plan of the league’s organizers was to create a joint-stock company, whose principal founders would be the largest public and private companies that “were already active in hockey” and have significantly “invested in this sport’s facilities” in Russia. Moreover, the financial composition of the league’s founders, which included such major gas and oil tycoons as Gazprom as well as the high standards for entrance requirements must have also shown the potential partners from the post-Soviet, Central European and Nordic countries about the “seriousness of intention” of the Russians to establish on the continent a feasible alternative to the National Hockey League.¹¹²

Already on November 24, 2007, in the office of Gazprom, the project leaders held a meeting with the representatives of the clubs from the *Superliga* to present the new league. This time, the project received wide support from the clubs’ owners.¹¹³ As the General Manager of “Metallurg Magnitogorsk” and the teams’ delegate in the working group on the draft of the ORHL, Gennady Velichkin, gladly reported, the Chair of the Organizing Committee of the ORHL, Aleksander Medvedev, told the teams’ representatives that the Russian authorities and big business were serious enough to address the people’s game and make it a “national sport,” urging the stakeholders to “take

¹¹¹ See e.g., Markku Jokisipilä, “World Champions Bred by National Champions: the Role of State-Owned Corporate Giants in Russian Sports.” *Russian Analytical Digest*. 95 6 (Apr. 2011): 8-11. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/RAD-95.pdf>>. In his analysis, he ties up the concept of Vladimir Putin’s “national champions” with the national development of Russian sports supported by the big national companies. With significant investment into sports, Russia was able successfully to put bids for hosting the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi and 2018 FIFA World Cup. For further reading on the Putin’s concept of “national champions” see: Harley Balzer, “The Putin Thesis and Russian Energy Policy.” *Post-Soviet Affairs*. 21.3 (Aug. 2005): 210-225. *Bellwether Publishing Ltd*. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://bellwether.metapress.com/content/e785522573627620/>>.

¹¹² Tatyana Chernova, “Наш ответ НХЛ [*Our Answer to the NHL*].” *Спорт День За Днем*. 29 Sep. 2007. Web. Mar. 20. 2013. <<http://www.sportsdaily.ru/articles/nash-otvet-nhl-10880>>. Mid Para.

¹¹³ The figure of the first Deputy Prime Minister, who stood behind the ORHL project, had certainly influenced the club leaders’ “unanimous” decision to be recruited under the new banner. In Vladimir Mozgovoy, “Фетисов Перестал Быть Защитником у Третьяка. [*Fetisov Stopped Playing Defense for Tretiak*].” *Новая Газета*. 20 Mar. 2008. Web. 11 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/sports/41007.html>>.

the bull by the horns.”¹¹⁴ The ultimate goal of the new league was to make a “demanded product” with “sell-out in the stands” and self-sufficient advertising, television, and financial system that would also become the foundry of players for the national hockey team. Furthermore, to make the project more attractive for the teams, on its initial stages, the state-owned companies were going to give the new league the financial investment it needs, covering 55 percent of the league’s share:

They [the state-owned companies] will become the kind of locomotive of the League, which drags along the carriages with the clubs and new sponsors. And when the League will get stronger, the shares of state-owned companies will be given to the clubs. The task of big business – to give impetus to the development of hockey in the country. They do not want to make hay out of this project - this is the most important [outcome].¹¹⁵ [translation mine]

Simultaneously, the Kremlin urgently encouraged Tretiak, Medvedev, and Fetisov to cooperate constructively for the implementation of the continental hockey league. However, both hockey structures found themselves in a natural disagreement on how to operate the new league due to their different and to a certain extent antagonistic mandates. Tretiak, being encouraged by the government to increase rich traditions of Russian hockey, was eager to preserve the “national” status of the league and keep the control over the decision-making process in the FHR’s hands so that its “global” status does not hinder the needs of the national hockey team.¹¹⁶ On the other hand, Medvedev and Fetisov, receiving a full mandate to create an ambitious global business project with the

¹¹⁴ Kyrill Belyakov, “Клубам Наконец-то Показали Лигу. Вчера Руководители Открытой Российской Хоккейной Лиги Показали Свой Проект Представителям Наших Клубов [*The League was Finally Revealed to the Teams. Yesterday the Organizers of the Russian Open Hockey League Presented their Project to the Representatives of Our Teams*].” *Soviet Sports*. 24 Nov. 2007. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/274927>>. Intro Para.

¹¹⁵ Kyrill Belyakov, *Клубам Наконец-то Показали Лигу* End Para; On January 24, 2008, Aleksander Medvedev announced the appointment to the Board of Directors of the ORHL. The first Deputy Prime Minister of Russia, Sergei Naryshkin, agreed to take the post of the chairman. Medvedev himself, along with the head of *RosSport*, Vyacheslav Fetisov, went to the Board of Directors. The financial “locomotive” of the league would be formed by the parent companies of the league, such as Gazprom, Rosoboronexport, Rossgosstrah, VTB, Vnesheconombank, Transneft, Ingosstrakh and Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, whose representatives also received seats in the Board of Directors. From the interview with Medvedev *In “Открытая Лига Огласила Список Острых Вопросов [The Open League Announced the List of Sharp Questions].” Чемпионат.com*. 24 Jan. 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.championat.com/hockey/article-17990.html>>.

¹¹⁶ Mihail Voronov, “Запахло Расколом: Владислав Третьяк Хочет Привлечь Владимира Путина в Качестве Арбитра к Споры о Будущем Нашего Хоккея [*The Smell of Split: Vladislav Tretiak Wants to See Vladimir Putin as the Arbitrator in the Dispute about the Future of Our Hockey*].” *Новые Известия*. 5 Mar. 2008. 2013. Web. Mar. 20. 2013. <<http://www.newizv.ru/sport/2008-03-05/85807-zapahlo-raskolom.html>>.

potential to extend its geographical network beyond the Russian national borders, were looking to distance the new league operations from the influence of the FHR and thus make it more attractive to the foreign stakeholders. Therefore, both parties were required by the government to work out a sustainable formula so that the interests of Russian national hockey would be preserved and enhanced with the implementation of an international business project.¹¹⁷ Consequently, on February 6, 2008, Tretiak and Medvedev announced the covenant on the creation of the Kontinental Hockey League (KHL); after two months of heated negotiation, it was finally ratified by both parties on March 28, 2008.¹¹⁸ Transferring hosting rights of the national championship to the KHL, the FHR received in return the financial support from the KHL and the guarantees of having a casting vote regarding the matters related to the national team.¹¹⁹ Finally, on April 10, 2008, the newly established president of the KHL, Medvedev, officially presented the KHL regulations to the participants.¹²⁰ In the inaugural season of 2008/2009, the KHL featured 24 teams from Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the only member of the European Union, Latvia. Moreover, after the historical joining of the league by the ex-Soviet Latvian team, “Dinamo Riga,” the road map to the *khilization* of Europe and becoming “the world’s biggest hockey league” in the near future has attained more concrete configurations.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ In his interview, Medvedev admitted that they were told by the government that “the split in Russian hockey should not be allowed” and the new league must work together with the FHR to find a viable solution to cease the conflict. In Aleksander Shevchenko, “Александр Медведев: Цели ФХР Мне Непонятны [*Aleksander Medvedev: The Goals of the FHR are Difficult to Comprehend*].” *Sports.ru*. 18 Mar. 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sports.ru/hockey/4337811.html>>. Mid Para.

¹¹⁸ Vitaly Slavin, “Президент ФХР Владислав Третьяк: Нам Война не Нужна! [*Vladislav Tretiak: We Do not Need War!*].” *Soviet Sports*. 18 Mar. 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/285766>>; “Федерация Хоккея России Отказалась от Прав на Проведение Чемпионата страны [*Ice Hockey Federation of Russia Renounced the right to Host the National Championship*].” *Lenta.ru* 21 Mar. 2008. Web. 20. Mar. 2013. <<http://lenta.ru/news/2008/03/21/fhr/>>.

¹¹⁹ “Лига Пишет Письма... КХЛ и ФХР По-прежнему не Могут Найти Компромисс [*The League Writes Letters... KHL and FHR Still Cannot Reach a Compromise*].” *Soviet Sports*. 20 Mar. 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/285983>>. The FHR was also offered a 28.6% share of the votes in the top management bodies. In addition, the organizers of the KHL committed themselves to financial, organizational and other support of the league and were willing to fund the FHR for at least 125 million rubles per year.

¹²⁰ “Президент КХЛ Александр Медведев: Наша Лига Должна Стать Лучшей в Мире! [*KHL president Aleksander Medvedev: We Must Become the Best League in the World!*].” *Soviet Sports*. 8 Apr. 2008. Web. 20 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/288176>>.

¹²¹ “KHL to Conquer Europe-League Pesident.” *Ria Novosti*. 13 Jun. 2012. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://en.rian.ru/sports/20120613/174008462.html>>.

III. THE HAUNTING SOVIET HERITAGE OF DINAMO RIGA

A. At the Cradle of Soviet Hockey

The history of Latvian hockey is closely intertwined with the global emergence and development of Soviet hockey. Canadian hockey had already arrived in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th Century. Perhaps the first shared Latvian-Russian debut of the new sport was held on February 15, 1909 in Riga when two local bandy teams “Union” and “Strēlnieku Dārzs” attempted to play the game by the Canadian rules. However, the new winter sport had not taken its roots instantly on the Eastern shores of the Baltics.¹²² After WWI, Soviet Russia and the first Republic of Latvia were still predominantly accustomed to playing Scandinavian hockey, called bandy. However, in Latvia the situation with the Canadian game had gradually changed in the middle of 1920s. While the ideologically-inclined Soviets were still preoccupied with the collectivist game of bandy, the various Latvians sports unions, including the members of *Sportsintern*, “SSS,” became more susceptible to the western flows of the Canadian game through the sports contacts with its neighboring Central European and Scandinavian countries of the Baltic Sea littoral.¹²³ Thanks to the intensifying ice hockey exchange with their German, Swedish, and Finnish neighbors, by the beginning of 1930s, the Canadian game gained numerous admirers amongst the Latvian enthusiasts of bandy, who

¹²² Juris Baldunčiks, “У Истоков Хоккея [At the Cradle of Hockey].” *Хоккей 1986-1987 Календарь-Справочник [Hockey 1986-1987 Yearbook]*. ed. Mariss Andersons. (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1986) 52-53; Ainis Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas Bruņinieki [The Knights of the Black Puck]* (Rīga: Latvijas Hokeja Federācija, 1998) 7. *Web LHF*. 10 Mar. 2013; Even though in 1911, Russia entered into the Ligue International de Hockey sur Glace (LIHG), the predecessor of the IIHF, due to the lack of interest in the game, the Russian Hockey Union soon left the LIHG. After 1917, the Bandy enjoyed greater popularity in Soviet Russia. “Наша история. Часть 1. 1946-1947 [Our History. Part 1. 1946-1947].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013.

<http://fhr.ru/history/history_milestones/championships/card/?id_4=7070>. Mid Para.

¹²³ The first attempt to cultivate the game in the USSR failed miserably. In 1932, the German labor union, “Fichte,” visited Moscow to play against the Soviet masters of bandy from the Central House of the Red Army. The Russians won all matches. However, unlike football, the Soviets did not see yet the full potential in the Canadian game to be Sovietized. The Soviet journal of “Physical Culture and Sports” denoted this bourgeois game as “very individual and primitive,” which bears no comparison with bandy and recommended to withstand from developing the sport in the Soviet Union. *Наша история. Часть 1. 1946-1947* Mid Para; The father of Russian hockey, Anatoli Tarasov confessed that the Russians became aware of the fact that they were going to play the Canadian shinny when they met “Fichte” at the station terminal. Moreover, in 1938, the soccer theorist in the Central Institute of Physical Culture, Mikhail Tovarovsky, tried to cultivate the new game but found resentment from his ardent bandy students, including Tarasov, who were unable to appreciate the game at that time. In Anatoli Tarasov. *Совершеннолетие [Adulthood]* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardia, 1968) 116-118. For more reading on the interwar attitude of the Soviet Union towards the embracement of western sports see e.g., the Chapter: *The Soviet Union and the Triumph of Soccer* in Keys, *Globalizing Sport* 158-181.

started to adapt their play to the Canadian standards much earlier than the Soviets.¹²⁴ The first official international game in the history of Latvia was played on February 15, 1930 in Riga when the team from the workers sports union, “Strādnieku Sports un Sargs” (SSS), crossed their sticks with their “associates” from the “Labor Sports” of Königsberg, Germany.¹²⁵ When the Latvian Winter Sports Union applied for the membership in the IIHL, the Canadian game began to gain momentum, winning the popularity race against the bandy hockey.¹²⁶ Throughout the 1930s, Latvia had become “the leader” in hockey development amongst the “three Baltic countries,” regularly competing in the major international ice hockey tournaments against the top hockey nations until the outbreak of WWII and the loss of independence.¹²⁷ When the devastating war was over, the Canadian game did not die out in Soviet Latvia. On the contrary, due to the rich hockey traditions of the pre-war times, the Latvian SSR became one of the key centers of ice hockey exchange on the post-war Soviet space. Moreover, in 1946, the Latvian members of the newly-emerged, “Dinamo Riga,” became the ambassadors of the Canadian game on Russian soil, giving the impetus to the development of the game in the Soviet Union.

The hockey team of “Dinamo Riga” originated at the crossroad of two conflicting epochs in the sports history of Latvia.¹²⁸ Following the dramatic events of the summer of 1940, the first Latvian Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union. During the political changes in the country, under the supervision of the new head of Latvian SSR Sports Committee, Sergejs Marģers, all interwar Latvian sports unions and societies were liquidated. By late autumn 1940, Latvian sports underwent rapid transformation and were integrated into the All-Union sports organizations. The sports historiography of the

¹²⁴ Perhaps the first postwar hockey exchange occurred when the hockey team, “VfK,” from Königsberg paid the visit to Riga in 1924 to play shinny against the bandy team, “Rīgas Airētāju Club.” In 1929, due to the lack of competition, the Riga bandy enthusiasts from the workers union, SSS, were the first to shift to the Canadian game. Following the contacts with Swedes, Liepāja got infected by the game a few months later. Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 8-14; Baldunčiks *У Истоков Хоккея* 53-54; In Dec 1930, Swedish specialist Sven Jensen visited Riga for hockey lectures. Čika and Gubiņš, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture* 150.

¹²⁵ Baldunčiks, *У Истоков Хоккея* 53-54.

¹²⁶ Already in 1926/27, the Council of the Latvian Winter Sports Union (LWSU) decided to explore the new sport and find out if the hockey rule books can be obtained in Sweden, Finland, and Poland or even Estonia and Lithuania. Mariss Andersons, “У Истоков Латвийского Хоккея [*At the Roots of Latvian Hockey*].” *Хоккей 1989-1990* (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989) 58.

¹²⁷ Baldunčiks and Vaiders, *Latvia in the Olympic Movement* 8; The domestic championships were held in Latvia since 1932 until 1940. On February 22, 1931, Latvia received membership in the IIHF. The national Latvian team took part in a number of major international tournaments, including the 1936 Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, albeit without a significant success. More reading on the interwar development of Latvian hockey see: Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 7-65.

¹²⁸ For more reading on the Soviet transformations in Latvian sports during the 1940’s see e.g., Kīse, *Fiziskā Kultūra un Sports Latvijā*; Čika and Gubiņš, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture. 1918-1944*; Forands and Kehris, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture*.

Latvian SSR dated the birth of “Dinamo” on September 16, 1940. On that date, with the help of the Moscow workers of the Central Council, Alexei Kupriyanov and Viktor Teterin, and under the supervision of the notorious People's Commissar of Internal Affairs in Latvia, Alfons Noviks, the Latvian branch of the All-Union “Dinamo” sports society was officially established in Riga.¹²⁹ In late 1940, the Republican organizations of “Dinamo” were set up in almost all parishes of Latvia. As a result, before the outbreak of the Soviet-German War in 1941, many prominent Latvian athletes, including such notable pioneers of local ice hockey as Edgars Klāvs, Kārlis Paegle, Leonids Vedējs, Arvīds Pētersons, brothers Roberts and Voldemārs Šūlmanis, were enlisted under the banner of “Dinamo Riga.”¹³⁰ With the approaching winter, two ice hockey teams, “Dinamo I” and “Dinamo II” were formed to represent the Riga branch of “Dinamo” in a brief 1940/41 ice hockey championship against another local team from the All-Union sport society, “RDKA” (Riga House of Red Army).¹³¹ Although the development of the Canadian game was still marginalized in the Soviet Union, this short-term winter tournament generated great interest among the bandy enthusiasts from Moscow, who paid a visit to Riga to watch closely the Canadian game played by the Latvian experts.¹³² However, the outbreak of the war with Nazi Germany on June 22, 1941 postponed Latvian-Russian hockey contacts under the Soviet umbrella for further five years.¹³³

After WWII, the international sports development had entered the formative years of Cold War competition. With the growing international prestige of such Olympic

¹²⁹ “Dinamo” was an influential All-Union sports society in the Soviet Union, established in 1923 by a personal initiative of the director of *Cheka* (Secret State Policy), Felix Dzerzhinsky. “The main aims of the *Dinamo* Society are to make physical culture and sport an integral part of the lives of all employees and servicemen of the MVD and KGB and of their families, to promote mass sport and, above all, to encourage military and service sports in accordance with the physical training manual of the Soviet Armed Forces, to train proficient sportsmen and to prepare members of the Society for labor and the defense of their country.” Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society* 293.

¹³⁰ Ēriks Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai – 50* (*Латвийской Организации Общества Динамо – 50*) [50 Years to the Latvian Society of Dinamo] (Rīga: Avots, 1991) 19; Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 61.

Leonids Vedējs became the Latvian exile in Germany after the return of the Red Army.

¹³¹ Two Dinamos recruited players from hockey team “US” whereas “RDKA” incorporated players from the army sports club “ASK,” Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 59; The level of both interwar teams was relatively high. Their members with various successes regularly took part in the World Championships and Olympic Games. Arvīds Pētersons, *Hokejs Ar Ripu: Otrajs - Pārstrādātais un Papildinātais Izdevums [Hockey with Puck: Second – Revised and Expanded Edition]* (Rīga: Latvijas Valsts Izdevniecība, 1955) 6.

¹³² Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 59.

¹³³ Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 23. During the Nazi Occupation of Latvia (1941-44) all the Soviet sports unions were dismissed. In the late summer 1941, many Latvian athletes of “Dinamo” volunteered to the 201st Latvian Riflemen Division of the Red Army. More reading on Latvian SSR sportsmen during the war: Kīse, *Fiziskā Kultūra un Sports Latvijā* 62-72; However, many notable Latvian players, such as Edgars Klāvs, Arvīds Pētersons, Leonids, Vedējs, Harijs Vītoliņš, Kārlis Zilpaušs and brothers Šūlmanis stayed in the occupied Latvia and continued playing hockey in local championships. Further reading: Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 61-65; Kehris, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture* 69-73.

disciplines as Canadian ice hockey, the capital of Latvia, Riga, became one of the major hubs in the cultivation and expansion of the game in the Soviet Union. With the restoration of Soviet rule in Latvia in 1945, the republican sports organizations were quickly reestablished across the republic.¹³⁴ All the best Latvian hockey players began to gather in the capital of the Republic, which, at that time, had remained the only center of the game activities in Latvia.¹³⁵ Already in the autumn of 1945, the re-established hockey team, “Dinamo Riga,” was preparing for the participation in the first official republican ice hockey Championship.¹³⁶ Simultaneously, a considerable interest in the game was growing in the Soviet Union. The official attitudes towards the game were rapidly shifting from the ideological denunciation to a serious promotion and cultivation of the Olympic game on Soviet soil. This desire followed the overall foreign policy of the Soviets, who were planning to join the western sports system of international competition to bolster the political image of the country abroad.¹³⁷ To put it into the words of the British historian of Soviet Sports, James Riordan:

The stage was now set for international qualification, the expansion of all Olympic sports, the setting up of special sport talent schools and, in some cases (e.g. ice hockey), starting the sport anew. In the immediate postwar years, therefore, Soviet sports federations affiliated to nearly all the major world sports bodies and Soviet athletes were competing regularly at home and abroad against foreign “bourgeois” opposition as well as against the 10 Soviet-aligned states.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Kehris, “Dinamo” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 23-24. More reading: Ķīse, *Fiziskā Kultūra un Sports Latvijā*.

¹³⁵ Aija Kehre, *Sports Padomju Latviā* 30; One of the Latvian pioneers of ice hockey, Arvīds Pētersons, noted that the game was not developed well enough in the periphery (in Liepāja was one team for a few years). The peripheral sports societies did not have enough funds to buy relatively expensive inventory and maintain the ice rink. Only Riga maintained 5-6 hockey teams with 3 suitable ice rinks. Massive development of the sport did not come yet, and every year the number of teams remained the same. Pētersons, *Hokejs Ar Ripu: Otrajs* 6.

¹³⁶ In his interview, Harijs Vītoliņš, who was widely considered one of the best Soviet-Latvian defensemen at the time, noted that after the war all the best players started to gather at the newly-built stadium of “Dinamo” naturally forming the first official team of “Dinamo Riga.” Gunārs Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1972-1973 [Hockey: 1972-1973]* (Рига: Лиесма, 1972) 7.

¹³⁷ The post-war global sports development witnessed first steps made by the Soviet Union to join the world sports system. It started with the famous tour of the soccer team, “Dinamo Moscow,” to England in the autumn 1945 and ended with the permission to the Soviet athletes to participate in the Summer Olympics in 1952, granted by I.V. Stalin not long before his death. Prozumenschikov, *Большой Спорт* 3. More reading on the post-war foreign policy of Soviet sports see e.g., James Riordan, “Soviet Sport and Soviet Foreign Policy.” *Soviet Studies*. 26.3. (Jul 1974): 322-343. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013.

¹³⁸ Riordan, *Rewriting Soviet Sports History* 248.

Thus, in the mid-1940s, the Soviet Sports authorities began to look for the efficient ways of expanding this winter Olympic discipline on Soviet ice. The head of the Committee for Physical Culture and Sports of the USSR, Nikolai Romanov, asked the head of the Sports Committee of the Department of football and Russian hockey, Sergei Savin, to “investigate” if the Canadian game, which is played around the world, could be cultivated in the Soviet Union.¹³⁹ Since the first Latvian Republic had already been involved in major international ice hockey tournaments, Sergei Savin had turned his attention to the Latvian hockey comrades. In Moscow, Savin met the Latvian hockey specialist, Edgars Klāvs, who invited him to Riga to find out “anything he needed” about the Canadian game. In the Latvian capital, Klāvs presented to Savin the hockey rulebook, stick, skates, gloves and a few pucks and also showed him the pre-war footage chronicles of the Latvian national team participating in major international ice hockey events.¹⁴⁰ Here is, for instance, another account of this historic meeting in Riga by another pioneer of Soviet hockey, Anatoli Seglin, who played for “Spartak Moscow” in the inaugural 1946/47 Soviet ice hockey championship:

It was the spring of 1946. There was zero information in Moscow about the peculiar game with the puck. Savin was advised to go to the Baltics – Canadian hockey was apparently played over there before the war. From Riga, he brought Canadian skates, a hockey stick and puck, as well as a brochure with the rules of hockey in the Latvian language. Hastily, the translation was made.¹⁴¹ Actually, Savin long kept the stick and the puck in his office at the *Skatertny Alley*. Thereby, in fact, Canadian hockey, “Shinny,” had appeared in our country, as it was called in opposition to “Bandy.”¹⁴² [translation mine]

¹³⁹ “Наша История. Часть 3. 1948-1949. [*Our History. Part 3. 1948-1949*].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <http://fhr.ru/history/history_milestones/championships/card/?id_4=7068>. Intro Para. In both Russian and Latvian historiography of ice hockey, Sergei Savin is portrayed as the matchmaker linking Latvian hockey with Russian bandy enthusiasts.

¹⁴⁰ Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 68-69.

¹⁴¹ According to Ulmanis, Savin received the copy of the rules translated by Klāvs. Savin: “a couple of days before the end of my trip to Riga, Edgar brought me the most precious gift, the Canadian hockey rules translated into Russian. Not one thing was so carefully kept, as these few pages written by his diligent hand.” [translation mine]. Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 69.

¹⁴² From the interview with Anatoli Seglin to *Soviet Sports*. In *Наша история. Часть 1. 1946-1947* Mid Para. It should be noted that in his book, *Восхождение на Олимп [The Road to Olympus]* (Москва: Советский Спорт, 1993), Nikolai Romanov, perhaps due to the patriotic and propagandistic motives, downplayed the role of Latvia in Soviet hockey, arguing that the Baltic teams were included in the inaugural championship only because up to 1940 they were “supposedly” playing ice hockey “a little.” But “they did not have specialists” and had a rather “vague” idea about the game, which does not correspond with the accounts of Savin, Bobrov, Tarasov, Seglin, Vītolīņš and Klāvs. The interview quoted in Nikolai

Back in Moscow, Sergei Savin gathered the coaches of the leading teams of Russian hockey and proposed to develop the new game.¹⁴³ Soon, the Latvian team, “Dinamo Riga,” was invited to Moscow. The first “tour” of Canadian hockey in Moscow was attended by Harijs Vītoliņš, Edgars Klāvs, Alfons Jēgers, Harijs Mellups, Elmārs Bauris, Roberts Pakalns, Arvīds Pētersons, brothers Roberts and Voldemārs Šūlmanis, and Laimonis Zilpaušs.¹⁴⁴ Already in March 1946, the head of the Committee for Physical Culture and Sports of the USSR, Nikolai Romanov, signed the order to draw the first Soviet Championship in Canadian hockey. Consequently, in May 1946, the group of famous Moscow football and bandy players invited the player of “Dinamo Riga,” Edgars Klāvs, and his colleague, the lecturer of the Riga Institute of Physical Culture, Aleksanders Rehtšprehers, to Moscow for consultations on the rules and technical aspects of the game.¹⁴⁵ At the 10-day workshop in Moscow, 25 bandy coaches and referees of the capital and the Moscow region engaged in the 6-8 hours daily seminars, studying the game theory, practice and teaching methods. After the hockey seminars in Moscow, the ice hockey teams were organized in a number of other cities whereas teams’ coaches and referees were ordered to prepare for the extensive autumn camps in the northern city of Archangelsk.¹⁴⁶ On October 19, 1946, the All-Union Committee for Physical Culture and Sports of the USSR adopted a decision to hold the first Soviet Championship in “Canadian hockey” in the season of 1946/47.¹⁴⁷

Later, in his memoirs about the first years of the postwar transition from bandy to Canadian hockey, the father of Soviet-Russian hockey, Anatoli Tarasov, confessed that “Rizhane” (Riga residents) were their first teachers. “It is from them, who were tested by the Canadians, we learned what real hockey is.”¹⁴⁸ However, the “pupils” were talented enough to quickly surpass their “teachers,” due to the higher physical fitness and skillful

Vukolov, “Николай Романов: Мне Пришлось Стать Шефом Хоккея с Шайбой [*Nikolai Romanov: I Had to Become the boss of Ice Hockey*].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <http://fhr.ru/history/history_milestones/history/card/?id_4=7143>.

¹⁴³ This time, the consent was given by many bandy enthusiasts, including Arkady Chernyshev, Anatoli Tarasov, and Aleksandr Igumnov. *Наша история. Часть 1. 1946-1947* Mid Para.

¹⁴⁴ Kehris, “Dinamo” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 27.

¹⁴⁵ Kehre, *Sports Padomju Latviā* 30; Kehris, “Dinamo” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 27; In his interview, Harijs Vītoliņš acknowledged that he was also invited but could not go to Moscow seminars due to his poor knowledge of Russian at the time. Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1972-1973* 4.

¹⁴⁶ *Наша история. Часть 1. 1946-1947* Mid Para.

¹⁴⁷ Oleg Belichenko and Yuri Lukashin, *Хоккей. Большая энциклопедия. В 2 томах. Том 1 [Hockey. Great Encyclopedia. In 2 Volumes. Volume 1.]* (Moscow, Терра-Спорт, Олимпия Пресс, 2006) 25; In the next season the official name of the sport was changed to “the Ice Hockey with Puck.”

¹⁴⁸ Tarasov, *Совершеннолетие* 121. [translation mine]. Tarasov specifically prized the physical part, like body-checking, as well as stickhandling aspects of the Canadian game introduced by the players of “Dinamo Riga,” which was unfamiliar to the Russian masters of bandy at the time.

skating abilities that they had already possessed thanks to the Russian bandy.¹⁴⁹ In the first Soviet Ice Hockey Championship, the more experienced body-checkers and technically-advanced stickhandles of “Dinamo Riga” were countered by the superior physical fitness, speed, and the “will to win” of the Russian bandy players. “Dinamo Riga” had to settle with the fourth place in the first two seasons.¹⁵⁰ In the several coming years, the Latvians steadily represented the Republic in the elite group of the All-Union Ice Hockey Championships albeit without earning the medals.¹⁵¹

A number of the postwar players of “Dinamo Riga” have been celebrated in the Russian history of the Canadian game for their contribution to the international expansion of Soviet hockey. The Latvian names of Harijs Mellups and Roberts Šūlmanis are inscribed on the list of the first Soviet national squads competing against Czechoslovakian and Polish teams. In the early postwar years, Soviet hockey was still in the process of preparing for the international debut. The Soviet Union could not afford epic failures in the emerging Cold War sports rivalries.¹⁵² Thus, before going into a direct confrontation with the top western countries of the bourgeois sport, throughout the years of 1948 to 1953, the Soviet authorities initiated a number of hockey series between “Team Moscow” and the Soviet-aligned states like Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Poland. If the results of the international matchups with the satellite nations were positive, it would demonstrate the readiness of the Soviets for participation in major international tournaments. Following the 1948 Olympic Games in Switzerland, Sergei Savin invited the powerhouse of European hockey, “LTC Prague,” to play three matches in Moscow, which would become the first serious international contest for the Soviet squad.¹⁵³ In this crucial moment in the development of Soviet hockey, the legendary goalie of “Dinamo

¹⁴⁹ Kehre, *Sports Padomju Latviā* 30.

¹⁵⁰ Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 27; From the Harijs Vītoļiņš recollections on the first encounters with the Russian bandy players in the inaugural championship. In Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1972-1973* 7-8.

¹⁵¹ From 1950 to 1958, “Dinamo Riga” was reorganazized and played under the name of “Daugava Riga.”

¹⁵² For instance, Nikolai Romanov recalled: “Once we decided to take part in foreign competitions, we were forced to guarantee victory [...], otherwise the “free” bourgeois press would fling mud at the entire nation as well as at our athletes... In order to gain permission to go to international competitions I had to send a special note to Stalin guaranteeing victory...” Quoted in Riordan, *Rewriting Soviet Sports History* 249.

¹⁵³ The Soviet sports leaders, including Sergei Savin, had returned from their tour to the 1948 Olympic Games in Switzerland where they were “astonished” by the performance of the Canadians and Czechoslovaks, which made them more skeptical about the “readiness” of the Soviets to make a solid debut on the international stage. The destiny of the game was also complicated by the bandy activists, who began an ideological campaign in the media against Canadian hockey, arguing that it ruins the traditions of Russian hockey. In Farid Bektemirov, “Строительство Красной Машины. Часть 2 [*The Construction of the Red Machine. Part 2*].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. Web 19 Mar. 2013. <http://fhr.ru/history/history_milestones/history/card/?id_4=7126>.

Riga”, Harijs Mellups, was recruited by Tarasov to play all three games for the “Team Moscow.” The Soviets were able to pool a heroic draw in the series against the skillful Czechoslovakian players, who just a couple of weeks earlier competed for the Olympic gold medals against the mighty Canadians.¹⁵⁴ Another well-known participant of the memorable matches against the Czechoslovaks, the Soviet-Russian hockey legend, Vsevolod Bobrov, highly regarded the professional and “cool-headed” goaltending of Harijs Mellups against the Czechoslovaks, referring to him later in his memoirs as the “forefather” of the Soviet pleiad of goalkeepers.¹⁵⁵

However, being later conscripted with the best Soviet defenseman, Roberts Šūlmanis, to the leading Soviet team, “VVS MVO Moscow” (The Air Force of the Moscow Military District) Harijs Mellups tragically died with the whole team in the plane crash near Sverdlovsk in January 1950.¹⁵⁶ It would take another four long years of intensive development before the future “Big Red Machine” would regain its strength and enough trustworthiness from the Soviet authorities to start the triumphal road to the Olympus of the international hockey, beginning with the historic victory in the 1954 Ice Hockey World Championship in Stockholm. When, in the mid-1960s, Soviet hockey was already at the top of its glory, Vsevolod Bobrov, paying the tribute to the memory of his Russian and Latvian teammates, stated: “... [i]n those victories and the glory that our hockey is harvesting today, there is a large proportion of their talent, sweat and labor.”¹⁵⁷

B. The Passion Returns! The Golden Age of Latvian Hockey

When in the mid-1950s the Soviets began to establish their dominant positions in the international competition, Latvian hockey had found itself in the position of gradual decline.¹⁵⁸ By now, Soviet hockey development was strictly confined to the dominion of Moscow managed by the new Soviet trendsetters of the Canadian game, Anatoli Tarasov

¹⁵⁴ Pētersons, *Hokejs Ar Ripu: Otrajs* 9. Most of the players from “LTC Prague” played on the Czechoslovakian national team that won the 1947 European and World Championships and later received Silver medals in the 1948 Olympic Games dominated by the Canadians only because of goals differential.

¹⁵⁵ Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1972-1973* 10-11. Vsevolod Bobrov also referred to his teammate, Roberts Šūlmanis as the best Soviet defender of the postwar time; In his memoirs, Tarasov prized the contribution of Mellups to the overall success of the series. Tarasov *Совершенстволетие*, 139-140.

¹⁵⁶ The legendary team, “VVS MVO,” was patronized by Vasily Stalin, who was a “fanatical” admirer of Bobrov’s talents. From the interview with the son of Vasily Stalin, Aleksander Burdonsky. In Nikolai Vukolov, “Александр Бурдонский: Василий Сталин был Фанатиком Футбола и Хоккея [*Aleksander Burdonsky: Vasily Stalin was a Fanatic of Football and Ice Hockey*].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. Web. 10 Oct. 2013. <http://fhr.ru/history/history_milestones/history/card/?id_4=7141>. Mid. Para.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1972-1973* 10-11. [translation mine]. Bobrov was not on the plane.

¹⁵⁸ On Latvian hockey in exile read: Dzintra Grundmane, *Trimdas Latviešu Sporta Vēsture, 1945-1995*.

and Arkady Chernyshev. Such influential hockey powerhouses as “CSKA,” “Dinamo,” and “Spartak” became the major suppliers of the national squad. They would use all their powerful resources to either conscript or recruit hockey talent from the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union. By the end of the 1960s, “CSKA Moscow” had gained the status of the undisputed leader of Soviet hockey, becoming the base club for the Soviet squad in the international rivalries. With the ongoing retirement of the interwar pioneers of the Canadian game, the flagship of republican hockey, “Dinamo Riga,” which in 1950 went under the umbrella of the Latvian national sport society, “Daugava Riga,” had gradually moved from the core to the periphery of Soviet hockey.¹⁵⁹

Viktor Tikhonov's era – The Revival of Latvian Hockey

The years 1958 to 1968 are characterized as a state of deep crisis and stagnation in Latvian hockey. The post-war republic stopped reproducing enough competitive players due to the lack of advanced sports infrastructure and hockey schools. Moreover, the Latvians were still accustomed to using an outdated philosophy of training routines and tactics, which were commonly used in the early stages of Soviet hockey development.¹⁶⁰ As a result, already by the late 1960s, “Dinamo Riga” had found itself in the lowest possible cellars of Soviet hockey competition. At that time, the great traditions of Latvian hockey were facing the danger of being reduced to oral histories of the lost past. To put it in the poetic words of a well-known Latvian historian of the Soviet rebirth of “Dinamo Riga,” Miķelis Rubenis, Latvian hockey needed a “selfless” navigator, one who would form a group of “dedicated hockey players” and steer “the Latvian hockey ship” from the “shallow waters” it had been stationed in for the past ten years.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Already in the season of 1957/58, “Daugava Riga” was put in the so-called “handicap division” of the higher division. Some notable players like Alfred Brauns (1951) and Juris Reps (1967) were recruited to “Dinamo Moscow.” By 1967, “Daugava Riga” was relegated to Class B (Third Rated League). For brief seasons in the 1960s the team was renamed to “RVR,” sponsored by the Riga Carriage Works. The team was officially renamed to “Dinamo Riga” in 1967 after the “RVR” decided to halt the sponsorship of the team. Further readings on the late 60s history see e.g., Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 176.

¹⁶⁰ The first palace with artificial ice was built only in 1968. Thus, due to the meteorological peculiarities of the game, for nearly two decades the players from Riga had to rely solely on weather conditions; Gunārs Krastiņš, who played for the team from 1950s to early 1970s pointed out that the flagship of Latvian hockey lacked consistency, continuously changing coaches. Hockey development was still unsystematic; some coaches were coaching-players whereas many players continued playing soccer during the summer time without serious preparations for the next hockey season. Aivars Pastalnieks, “Gunārs Krastiņš – Pirmais Rīgas Dinamo Kapteinis [Gunārs Krastiņš - Prominent Captain of Dinamo Riga].” *Dinamofans.eu*. 22 Apr. 2010. Web. May 10. <<http://dinamofans.eu/2010/04/gunars-krastins-%E2%80%93-pirmais-rigas-%E2%80%9Edinamo%E2%80%9D-kapteinis/>>.

¹⁶¹ Miķelis Rubenis, *Sešas Sezonas [Six Seasons]* (Rīga: Liesma, 1975) 5. [translation mine].

The historic revival of Latvian hockey began in 1968 when the authorities of the republican hockey federation were advised by the legendary head coach of “Dinamo Moscow” and the Soviet national squad, Arkady Chernyshev, to invite his young student, Viktor Tikhonov. “Take Vitya Tikhonov. He’s got no star syndrome and was my assistant coach – a real hard worker. In my opinion, it will work out.”¹⁶² Soon in the middle of the 1967/68 season, the Latvian delegation led by the Deputy Chairman of the Republican Council of “Dinamo”, the second coach, Jānis Šulbergs, and the team manager, Alfons Jēgers, went to Moscow where, after detailed conversations, Tikhonov agreed to take over “Dinamo Riga.”¹⁶³ Arkady Chernyshev was more than right. Together with his disciples, Tikhonov promoted “Dinamo Riga” from the Second League to the fourth place in the Soviet Elite Championship in 1977. His memorable nine seasons with “Dinamo Riga” would not only “reawaken” Latvian hockey, but also solidify the international prospects of post-Soviet Latvia as a hockey nation for years to come.¹⁶⁴

After the Christmas holidays, the players of “Dinamo Riga” were introduced by their management to the new coach, Viktor Tikhonov, who was going to replace the Czechoslovakian specialist, Stanislaw Motl, for the remainder of the season in the spring of 1968.¹⁶⁵ In his first meeting with the team, Tikhonov told the Latvian players that he came to the capital of Latvia with a single goal – to bring “Dinamo Riga” back to the higher division of Soviet Championship. To achieve this goal, it would require the players, who had spent the most part of their careers in minor divisions, “years of relentless work and improvement” and an absolute devotion to the preparation camps for a new season.¹⁶⁶ According to the long-serving goalie of “Dinamo Riga,” Mikhail

¹⁶² Mārtiņš Pagodkins, “He Расстанусь с Хоккеем [Will not Part with Hockey].” *Хоккей 1989-1990*. Ed. Mariss Andersons (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989) 4. From the interview with the head of the Latvian Hockey Federation, Anatoli Raskolov (from 1965 to 1992); Viktor Tikhonov started his career in 1949, training alongside the legendary Latvian members of “VVS MVO Moscow” Harijs Mellups and Roberts Šulmanis. From 1963-68 – assistant coach of “Dinamo Moscow.”

¹⁶³ From his interview, Tikhonov admitted that he refused two offers from the Soviet Elite teams, “Dinamo Leningrad” and “Dinamo Gorky,” because of the full Cart Blanche he was given in Riga. In Petrov, *Тайны Советского Хоккея* Chapter 2; Second coach, Jānis Šulbergs, worked closely with Tikhonov for three seasons until his tragic death and was replaced by his teacher from the Riga Institute of Physical Culture, Edgars Rozenbergs. In Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 68.

¹⁶⁴ Anatolijs Kreipāns, “Viņš Pamodināja Latvijas Hokeju [He Reawakened Latvian Hockey].” (*Hokejs Sporta Āvize*. Sep. 2011): 108-113.

¹⁶⁵ The Czechoslovakian specialist was the only “foreign” coach in the Soviet Union at that time. However, he lacked authority amongst the Latvian players and lost motivation in the middle of the season, being absent for the most of games. Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 177; Tikhonov received the team in spring 1968 when it was on the last place in the Second Soviet League, In Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 65, 111.

¹⁶⁶ In Gunārs Ernštreits. *Latvijas PSR Hokeja Federācija: Hokejs 71. – 72.* [Latvian SSR Hockey Federation: Hockey 71 – 72] (Rīga: Latvijas PSR Ministru Padomes Fiziskā Kultūra un Sporta Komiteja. Ciņa, 1970) 43-44.

Vasilyonok, the young Tikhonov was a hard-core “perfectionist,” who was able by his own selfless example to “infect players with the idea” and subdue the Latvian team to achieving the ultimate goal of promotion, “cold-bloodedly” parting “with all of those, who did not believe in it, although among those were good players.”¹⁶⁷

For the next decade, the summer training camps near the small Latvian town of Kandava became the sacred place of hard-working training, which tempered the will of the players and paved the way for the future Latvian victories. The veterans of “Dinamo Riga” referred to the camps in Kandava as sheer hell. The old-time captain of “Dinamo Riga” and very respectful youth coach, Gunārs Krastiņš, pointed out that when he “survived Kandava” he “felt like a god.” “On this solid foundation you could continue to play hard.”¹⁶⁸ Notwithstanding the suffering element and a certain ruthlessness of Tikhonov’s approach to his players, the means justified the ends. Since 1969 “Dinamo Riga” began to use Tikhonov’s groundbreaking 4-lines system, allowing the team to impose its will on the opponent by a total power pressure throughout the whole game. Due to the superior physical fitness and tactical discipline, “Dinamo Riga” was able to simply “outrun” their contenders already by the mid-season.¹⁶⁹

Within five seasons, “Dinamo Riga,” which got promoted to the First Soviet League in 1970, made a triumphal return to the elite division of Soviet hockey in 1973. The comeback to the elite Soviet division caused an “unthinkable excitement” amongst the hockey fans of Latvia, experiencing a sense of building anticipation of the return of the elite level competition to Riga. Before the opening of the 1973/74 season, the season tickets were quickly divided between the republican sports organizations whereas ordinary fans stood in long lines on a nightly basis just to get the precious ticket to the Riga Sports Palace.¹⁷⁰ In the first season, the Latvian team did not disappoint their fans, immediately receiving the reputation of “the disturber of peace” in the Soviet elite league. Being the youngest team, “Dinamo Riga” successfully imposed its extremely disciplined and physical game style on the top teams from Moscow in the next years to come.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Mariss Andersons, “Несколько Вопросов Михаилу Василенку Покидающему Ворота [A Few Questions to Mikhail Vasilyonok Who Retires the Net].” *Хоккей 1987-1988 Календарь-Справочник [Hockey 1987-1988 Yearbook]*.” (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1986) 50. [translation mine]. From the interview with Mikhail Vasilyonok (In service 1967-1986).

¹⁶⁸ Pastalnieks, “Gunārs Krastiņš – Pirmais Rīgas Mid Para.

¹⁶⁹ Gunārs Ernštreits, *Latvijas PSR Hokeja Federācija: Hokejs 70. – 71* 17-19; Kehris, “Dinamo” Latvijas Organizācijai 65.

¹⁷⁰ Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 217-18; Further reading: Kreipāns, *Viņš Pamodināja Latvijas Hokeju* 108.

¹⁷¹ In a very tight 8-team Elite division of Soviet hockey, newly elevated teams would not be able to keep longer than a year, becoming known as the “lift” teams. “Dinamo Riga” was able to break this stereotype,

From the very start of the ascent to the elite of Soviet hockey, Latvian hockey began to experience an unprecedented growth whereas domestic players re-entered the international venues of global hockey competition. The ongoing progress of “Dinamo Riga” activated the work of the Latvian hockey schools. Although Tikhonov brought up to Riga several Russian players, including a very talented defenseman, Vyatcheslav Nazarov, and forwards alike Pyotr Vorobyov and Aleksander Klinshov, the future success of “Dinamo Riga” steadily relied on the solid performance of local players.¹⁷² The best of the Latvian younger generation of “Dinamo Riga” began to compete again on the highest level of the international competition. In his first season, Tikhonov assigned a young 16 year old Helmut Balderis to the first team, where the rising Latvian superstar was later referred by Tikhonov to the bosses of the Soviet youth development. However, the first Latvian, who broke on through to the international youth competition, was the “Dinamo Riga” defenseman, Valery Odincov, who was assigned to the victorious Soviet junior team in 1970. A year later, in 1971, the 18-year old Balderis returned to Riga with a Gold Medal from the European Junior Championship. The 1970s continued to witness a growing number of the young Latvian talent of “Dinamo Riga,” such as Edmunds Vasiljevs (1973), Viktor Hatulev (1975), Mikhails Šostaks (1976), representing Latvian hockey abroad under the umbrella of Soviet Junior teams.¹⁷³ In 1974/75, a very talented forward/defensemen, Viktor Hatulev, came back to Riga with the Gold Medal from the first unofficial World Junior Hockey Championship in Winnipeg where he was chosen as the best forward of the tournament. In the same year, Hatulev became the first Latvian and Soviet player ever drafted to the NHL by Philadelphia Flyers.¹⁷⁴

Already in the season of 1972/73, the exceptional progress of “Dinamo Riga” captured the attention of the Soviet sports authorities. Tikhonov was assigned to the second Soviet national squad. Throughout the period from 1973 to 1977, under his guidance, many notable players of “Dinamo Riga,” such as Balderis, Vasilyonok,

already in the first season winning against “CSKA Moscow” (8:5, 4:0), “Dynamo Moscow” (5:0, 3:2), and “Spartak” (5:3, 7:5, 2:1), only losing all games to the Soviet Champion, “Krylya Sovetov.” In Gunārs Ernštreits, *Хоккей: 1974-1975 [Hockey: 1974-1975]* (Рига: Лиесма, 1974) 4.

¹⁷² Due to the lack of domestic players, Tikhonov selected mostly young legionaries, who had still much to prove and were eager to progress together with the team. In Gunārs Ernštreits, *Хоккей 1973-1974 [Hockey 1973-1974]* (Рига: Лиесма, 1973) 3; Vyatcheslav Nazarov, Aleksander Klinshov, Mihail Beskashnov and many others stayed with the team until retirement and continued coaching careers in Latvia until today.

¹⁷³ In early 1970s, the Latvian Institute of Psychical Culture opened the Hockey faculty led by Edgars Rozenbergs. The scientific hub nurtured the future Latvian coaching staff and closely cooperated with Tikhonov; Simultaneously, under the guidance of Harijs Vītolīšs, the farm club, “RVR,” produced the generation of the “Dinamo Riga star players like Helmut Balderis, Valery Odincov, Edmunds and Haralds Vasiljevs and Juris Tarnovskis. In Ernštreits. *Latvijas PSR Hokeja Federācija: Hokejs 71. – 72* 74.

¹⁷⁴ Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 248.

Nazarov, Odincov, H. Vasiļjevs, Emelyanenko, Durdin, and Hatulev played in various international tournaments.¹⁷⁵ When in the mid-1970s, Soviet hockey began to experience systemic crisis, the Soviets, fearing an international debacle, abstained from sending their top squad to the 1976 Canada Cup. Instead they sent the experimental Soviet team led by the coach of “Dinamo Riga,” Tikhonov, who promised the Central Committee of the Communist Party to take at least third place. Besides, Balderis, who had already gained the international recognition as the Soviet-Latvian superstar, winning the Silver Medal in the 1976 World Ice Hockey Championship, Tikhonov brought with him to Canada another two members of “Dinamo Riga” – the goalie Mikhail Vasilyonok and the defenseman, Vladimir Krikunov. Although the experimental team did not win the cup, Tikhonov kept his word, finishing third despite the wide-spread skepticism expressed by the Soviet hockey specialists, including the coach, of the first team, Boris Kulagin.¹⁷⁶

The restoration of Soviet supremacy in international hockey would not begin until the departure of Tikhonov and the Latvian superstar, Balderis, to Moscow. Their last 1976/77 season in Latvia was captivated by the mesmerizing performance of “Dinamo Riga” finishing in 4th place. Balderis was voted the best Soviet player of the year, scoring a memorable hat-trick in the humiliating 8:6 defeat of “CSKA” in Moscow on the Day of the Anniversary of the Red Army.¹⁷⁷ In the same year, Balderis became the best forward of the 1977 World Ice Hockey Championship in Vienna. Yet, the Soviets won only Silver Medals, receiving another devastating blow by their “sworn friends” from Czechoslovakia, which led to the resignation of Boris Kulagin.¹⁷⁸ Already in May,

¹⁷⁵ In 1974/75 Riga Sports Palace hosted an international tournament, featuring the national teams of the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and Finland. “Dinamo Riga” was represented by Balderis, Hatulev, E. Vasiļjevs, Nazarov, and Vasilyonok. In Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 228; For the 1976/77 tour to Canada, Tikhonov brought 5 players from “Dinamo Riga,” Vasilyonok, Hatulev, Nazarov, Odintsov and Durdin.

¹⁷⁶ Petrov, *Тайны Советского Хоккея* Chapter 2. From Tikhonov’s memories: “I remember a special meeting of the Central Committee of the CP was held, which was attended by all the leading coaches. Many asked the same question: what place the experimental Soviet team can take in the tournament. Coaches responded differently - the fourth, fifth, or sixth. When it came to me, I said - if Tretiak played, we could take no lower than a third place. Then, they appointed me. I think the fact that, while being in Riga, I also coached the second national team, played a huge role in this decision.” [translation mine].

¹⁷⁷ The February 23 game is remembered as one of the greatest victories of Latvian hockey. “CSKA” was humiliated at the presence of the General Secretary of the Central Committee, Leonid Brezhnev and the Minister of Defense, Aleksander Ustinov. Tikhonov would later confess that “it was the first major victory for us, which significantly raised the reputation of “Dinamo Riga” in the Soviet Union and abroad.” [translation mine]. In Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 242; Ēriks Strauss, “Dinamo Lielās Uzvaras [The Great Victory of Dinamo].” *Hokejs Sporta Āvize*. (Sep. 2011): 68-69.

¹⁷⁸ “Sworn friends” – the expression was made by the famous Soviet commentator, Nikolai Ozerov, about the escalated rivalry between the USSR and Czechoslovakia. After the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia by the members of the Warsaw Pact, the Czechoslovaks became the most dreadful European adversary of Soviet hockey, successfully challenging its dominance in the global competition. For

Tikhonov was called up to the Soviet capital for consultations where he had meetings with the head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, about his future transfer to Moscow. At his headquarters in *Lubynka*, Andropov was able to convince Tikhonov to take over the national squad and its base-club, “CSKA Moscow,” to “put things in order” in the affairs of Soviet hockey.¹⁷⁹ On June 1, 1977, in a highly emotional letter to the fans of “Dinamo Riga” published in the local newspapers *Sports* and *Sovetskaya Molodezh*, Tikhonov acknowledged the departure to “CSKA Moscow” and the “necessity” of taking Balderis with him to form another top Soviet line (Zhluktov-Kapustin-Balderis) and promising to continue taking care of Latvian hockey.¹⁸⁰

The crucial debut of the coach of “Dinamo Riga” took place a year earlier in the 1978 World Ice Hockey Championship when all of Prague was preparing to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Czechoslovakian hockey with a third victory in a row. The Czechoslovaks pulled together their strongest national squad in the history of the country, recruiting all the winners of two previous championships, with the exception of František Pospíšil. Despite the Czechoslovaks hopes, the Soviet authority in global hockey was restored again. This time with the help of the Latvian hockey star, Helmut Balderis, whose stellar goal in a decisive 3:1 win against the Czechoslovaks was vital to the tournament victory, when the Soviets required to beat the hosts with a difference of at list two goals.¹⁸¹ The memorable 1978 victory in Prague signified the beginning of Tikhonov’s era of Soviet domination in global ice hockey.

Vladimir Yurzinov’s Era – Building for the Future

The final chapter of the Soviet era of “Dinamo Riga” was manifested by the remarkable rise of a new generation of Latvian hockey talent in the late 1980s. When the last Mohicans of Tikhonov’s era, Helmut Balderis (1985) and Mikhail Vasilyonok,

more reading on the Eastern Europe crisis see e.g., Chapter *Кризисы Восточной Европы в Зеркале Спорта* [*Crises of Eastern Europe in the Mirror of Sports*]. In Prozumenschikov, *Большой Спорт*.

¹⁷⁹ The decision of transferring Tikhonov and Balderis to Moscow was made in the highest echelons of the Soviet authorities. Initially, Tikhonov refused to leave “Dinamo Riga,” but was eventually “persuaded.” Tikhonov’s interview *In Yuri Golyshak and Aleksander Kruzhkov*, “Виктор Тихонов: Фетисов Просил Сжечь Мои Блокноты [Viktor Tikhonov: Fetisov Requested to Burn My Notes].” *Sports Express*. 13 Feb. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://news.sport-express.ru/2009-02-13/284436/>>. Mid Para;

¹⁸⁰ Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 16; further reading: Viktor Tikhonov, *Надежды, Разочарования, Мечты* [*Hopes, Disappointments, Dreams*] (Moscow: Physical Culture and Sports, 1985).

¹⁸¹ In the Russian historiography of hockey, the 1978 game against the Czechoslovaks is considered one of the most important to retaining the national prestige of Soviet hockey abroad. *In Farid Bektemirow*, “Победная Десятка: Часть 1 [Victorious Ten: Part 1].” *Ice Hockey Federation of Russia*. 2011. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.phl.ru/content/news/8681.html>>. Mid Para.

(1986) retired from the team, the majority of “Dinamo Riga” players became the recruits from Russia. At the time, the production of the new generation of Latvian players was not fast enough to fill the wide gaps left in the republican flagship after the retirement of the old-time stars.¹⁸² As a result, “Dinamo Riga,” led by the new coach, Vladimir Yurzinov, also known for his creative collaboration with Tikhonov in the first Soviet national team, had to rely on the recruitment of the players from the all-union affiliates of “Dinamo.” This strategy kept “Dinamo Riga” in the elite division but Latvian hockey was losing its national flavor. With the beginning of the new epoch of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*, “Dinamo Riga” became more susceptible to open criticism from the local fans, specialists, and press for the lack of national flavor, partially due to the absence of domestic players and overwhelming presence of non-Latvian players. Under these new political pressures of growing national awareness, in the 1985 Plenary, the Latvian SSR Hockey Federation (LHF) updated the recruitment policies for “Dinamo Riga,” urging the team’s management to work in closer cooperation with the republican youth hockey development.¹⁸³ After intensive collaboration with the top Latvian junior teams “RASMS” and “Latvijas Bērzs,” Vladimir Yurzinov managed to prepare a competitive squad, which would later become the base-team for the future endeavors of Latvian national hockey in international competition.

In the 1987/88 season, “Dinamo Riga” shook the foundations of Soviet hockey by eliminating from the semifinal series “Dinamo Moscow” and only losing in the final series to the unstoppable force of Soviet hockey, “CSKA Moscow.” Winning the first Silver Medals of the Soviet Championship was a paramount event to the self-esteem of Latvian hockey. Never before had the Riga Sports Place had as “benevolent atmosphere” as on 20 May 1988 when “Dinamo Riga” fans gathered to celebrate together with the

¹⁸² Helmut Balderis came back to Riga together with Vladimir Yurzinov in 1980 when he refused Tikhonov’s offer to stay in “CSKA Moscow.” After this incident, Tikhonov abstained from inviting Balderis to the Soviet national team, except the year of 1983 when Balderis became the best scorer of the Soviet Championship. From Balderis’ interview in Vitaly Slavin and Oleg Sokol, “Знаменитый Форвард Сборной СССР и Рижского Динамо Хелмут Балдерис: Я – Бизнесмен И Мне Наплевать на Клевету... [The Famous Forward of Team USSR and Dinamo Riga Helmut Balderis: I am a Businessman. And I Do not Care about the Slander...].” *Soviet Sports*. 25 May 2006. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/224333>>; By the mid-1980s, brothers Vasiljevs, J.Reps, M.Denisov, V.Odincov and V.Hatulev retired from “Dinamo Riga.”

¹⁸³ In 1980, the coach of “Dinamo Moscow”, Yurzinov, replaced Evalds Grabovskis (1977-1980). From 1980 to 1987, “Dinamo Riga” ended up between 5th to 8th places. In the 1984/85 farewell season of Balderis, “Dinamo Riga” finished 7th, being sharply criticized for the poor performance and lack of domestic flavor; In the 1985 Plenary Session of the LHF, the Committee changed the recruitment policies of “Dinamo Riga,” requiring the team to rely more on domestic talent. In Anatoli Raskolov, “Не Почивать на Лаврах [Not to Rest on Laurels].” Ed. Mariss Andersons. *Хоккей 1988-1989 [Hockey 1988-1989]*. (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press.1989) 3.

team their achievement.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the sweetness of the success was furnished by the fact that the new generation of domestic players, including the members of the Soviet Junior team, Ulvis Katlaps and Harijs Vītoliņš III, known in the popular culture as the members of the so-called generation of Latvian Riflemen (*Latviešu Strēlnieki*), was elevated to the first team to compete against the best of Soviet hockey at that time.¹⁸⁵ Yurzinov entrusted a 20-years old Artūrs Irbe to protect the net of “Dinamo Riga” instead of the injured, Vitaly Samoilov, who just returned from the 1988 Olympic Games in Calgary with the Gold Medal. Together with such future stars of Team Latvia as Harijs Vītoliņš III, Ulvis Katlaps, Normunds Sējējs, Oleg Znarok, Aleksander Belyavsky, Aleksander Kerch, Igor Pavlov, and Andrei Matytsyin, the young Latvian goalkeeper, Artūrs Irbe, led “Dinamo Riga” all the way to the memorable final game series against the mighty “CSKA Moscow,” crossing the sticks with such world class superstars as Vyatcheslav Fetisov, Sergei Makarov, Igor Larionov and Vladimir Krutov.

A year later, “Dinamo Riga” promoted Latvian hockey to the Canadian public in the 1989 Super Series against the top NHL teams. As Yurzinov noted, the local Canadian press would suddenly discover that Soviet hockey is not only about “CSKA Moscow”, the “camouflaged” national base team of the national squad, but also teams from other cities. The North-American tour witnessed the global emergence of a new Soviet-Latvian goalkeeper, Artūrs Irbe, whose solid game in the series was compared by the North Americans with the outstanding performance of Vladimir Myshkin in the 1979 Challenge Cup.¹⁸⁶ In the final phase of Soviet hockey, Artūrs Irbe would fill the long awaited goaltender spot left available after the departure of Vladislav Tretiak, bringing two Gold Medals from the 1989 and 1990 World Ice Hockey Championships, which would signify the ultimate sparks of the Soviet domination on global stage.

¹⁸⁴ Mariss Andersons, “...И, Наконец, Серебряный Выход! [*And Finally the Silver Yield!*]” *Хоккей 1989-1990*. Ed. Mariss Andersons (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989) 57.

¹⁸⁵ Pastalnieks, “*Gunārs Krastiņš – Pirmais Rīgas* Mid Para. Gunārs Krastiņš was a follower of Tikhonov’s methods. He trained the generation of the so-called “Latvian riflemen,” such as Harijs Vītoliņš (the grandson of the hockey dynasty of Vītoliņš and the assistant coach of “Dinamo Moscow” in the KHL), Ilmārs Tomanis, Ulvis Katlaps (captain of the junior Soviet team), Ainārs Hehts, and Normunds Sējējs (the current General Manager of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL).

¹⁸⁶ In Mariss Andersons, “По Америке в Ранге Серебряных [*American Tour in the Rang of Silver Medlists*].” *Хоккей 1989-1990*. Ed. Mariss Andersons. (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989), 80-85. Vladimir Yurzinov confessed that in a couple of days of the 1989 Superseries, Artūrs Irbe had become an incredibly popular man in North American hockey, being highly praised by the press, specialists, and the leaders of the NHL. In Kehris, “*Dinamo*” *Latvijas Organizācijai* 17.

C. The Global Prospects of Latvian Hockey in the post-Cold War Era: At the Crossroad of New National Trajectories and Post-Soviet Realities

The National Revival of Sports and International Dreams

With the process of decentralization of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s, the longing for having Latvian sports recognized on the international stage had started to dominate domestic activities in the realm of sports. Since the Latvian SSR was still formally part of the Soviet Union, the main task of the national “reawakening”¹⁸⁷ movement in sports was to find a viable legalistic formulation for the “renewal” of the Latvian National Olympic Committee, whose status would be recognizable both by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the central Soviet authorities.¹⁸⁸ The movement gradually started to receive much wider acceptance within Latvian society and local sports authorities. In October, 1988, the Latvian *provisional* Olympic Committee (LOC) was set to boost the promotion of Olympic awareness in Latvia while furthering the Republic’s demands for international recognition. More radical activism of revitalizing the international status of organized sports took place in the form of what the Latvian historians of sports have later referred to as “Olympic hooliganism.” In April, 1989, at the banks of the Gauja River, the sports activists “illegally” raised the Olympic flag of Latvia when the Republic was still part of the Soviet Union Olympic structures.¹⁸⁹

The idea of a national reawakening rapidly entered the minds of the Latvian hockey community. The hockey and figure skating association of the *Latvijas Tautas Fronte* (Popular Front of Latvia) was formed to discuss the issues of Latvian hockey within the newly-emerged socio-political processes in the republic. The members of “Dinamo Riga,” Artūrs Irbe and Ulvis Katlaps became the most outspoken representatives of the younger generation of Latvian hockey, who often openly criticized in the local sports media the policies of the all-union sports organizations for hindering the development of national hockey. In the same years, the Latvian media started cautious campaigns of promoting the interwar history of Latvian hockey, which was not celebrated

¹⁸⁷ National Awakening (*Atmoda*) – The years 1988-1991 is the period of the national awakening in Latvian sports. Further reading: Forands and Kehris, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture* 206-207.

¹⁸⁸ Dainis Caune, “Atmoda. Atjaunošana. Atzīšana (1988-1992) [Reawakening, Renewal, Recognition (1988-1992)].” Ed. Guntis Keisels and Dainis Caune. *The Olympic History of Latvia* 149-51.

¹⁸⁹ Caune, *Atmoda. Atjaunošana. Atzīšana* 155-165.

in the pre-*Perestroika* times due to the ideological motives.¹⁹⁰ Many notable members of the hockey community, including the head of the LHF, Vitaly Raskolov, also started to endorse the economic independence of the Republican federation and “Dinamo Riga,” which found itself ripped off from the earnings from the 1989 Super Series by the All-Union *Goskomspor*. Simultaneously, in the 1989/1990 season, few local players including the returning head coach, Ēvalds Grabovskis, openly supported the vision of having the national hockey team representing Latvia separately from the Soviet Union in their profiles for a new season.¹⁹¹

Perhaps, the first touchstone for advertising the independent character of Latvian hockey overseas took place in the December 1990 North American tour of “Dinamo Riga” playing a few games against the US college select team in Orlando, Florida. “Dinamo Riga” played in this exhibition tour wearing a new set of jerseys for the season of 1990/1991. The ancient Latvian symbol of *Auseklis* was incorporated on the standard uniform logotype of the sweaters to emphasize the national identity of the team, whose country declared its independence on May 4, 1990.¹⁹² However, the American broadcasters still habitually located the games within the Cold War paradigm of sports competition, describing it as the rivalry between the USSR and the USA and referring to “Dinamo Riga” as “Team USSR”.

The Turning Point of the National Insurgency

The radical moment of the national “insurgency” of Latvian sports in relation to the Soviet center came after the dramatic events of January 1991 when the Soviet *OMON* (“Special Purpose Mobile Unit”) attacked Latvia’s Ministry of the Interior following the

¹⁹⁰ Ulvis Katlaps was amongst the first young hockey players to join the People’s Front of hockey, openly discussing the issues of Latvian hockey in the local sports newspaper, *Sports*, and often debating with the team’s management on the recruitment policies of “Dinamo Riga.” In Ulvis Katlaps, “Под Знаком Народного Фронта [*Under the Badge of the Popular Front*].” *Хоккей 1988-1989*. Ed. Mariss Andersons (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989) 46-47; Mariss Andersons, “О Вице-Чемпионах Мира Среди Юниоров [*About the Vice Junior World Champions*].” *Хоккей 1988-1989*. Ed. Mariss Andersons (Riga: Central Committee of Communist Party Press, 1989) 159; *Melnās Ripas* 59-60.

¹⁹¹ The independent representation of Latvian sports in the international competition was still strongly opposed by the Central Olympic Committee of the USSR. Caune, *Atmoda. Atjaunošana. Atzīšana* 153; Meanwhile, the consensus was found in the realm of economy. Since the 1989 Plenary Session of the Soviet Hockey Federation, the LHF and “Dinamo Riga” embarked on the path of commercialization and were less reliant on the all-union organization of “Dinamo.” Andersons, *С Пленума Федерации Хоккея СССР* 64-66; Andersons, *По Америке в Ранге Серебряных* 81.

¹⁹² *Auseklis* is the ancient Latvian symbol, which in the late 1980s became the official symbol of the third national awakening in Latvia; It should be noted that during the 1989 Superseries, the Latvian members of “Dinamo Riga” met with the members of the WWII Latvian exiles in Los Angeles, In Andersons, *По Америке в Ранге Серебряных* 82-83.

conflict of the central authorities with the separatist Baltic Republics. The bloody January created a political split in the sports societies in Latvia. Many notable sportsmen abstained from the participation in the international competition under the umbrella of the Soviet Union in solidarity with the victims of the January attack and joined the people's *Barricades* in Riga. Already, in the same year Artūrs Irbe declined Tikhonov's offer to join the Soviet national squad in the 1991 World Ice Hockey Championship in Finland, thereby putting his future international career at stake.¹⁹³

However, despite the radical changes in the relationship with central authorities and the ever-growing separatist movement in Latvian society, the withdrawal of the flagship, "Dinamo Riga," from the Soviet Championship League was not on the agenda of the Latvian Hockey Federation (LHF). After intense debates, the LHF decided to continue playing in the Soviet Championship to retain the higher class competition "for the sake" of Latvian hockey. The political passions of sports separatism were "overshadowed" by the hockey passions, which got their way out on the ice in the memorable rivalry against the symbolic representative of the Soviet oppression – "CSKA Moscow."¹⁹⁴ In the final year of the Soviet Championship, "Dinamo Riga" repeated the result of the 1946 championship, which witnessed the rise of such future NHL stars as Sandis Ozoliņš and Sergei Zholtok.

Notwithstanding the passionate campaigns of promoting the national character of Latvian sports, not until the breakup of the Soviet Union in August 1991, when Latvia *de-facto* restored its independence, the longing for the international recognition of national sports would be ultimately fulfilled. The euphoric celebration of the Latvian sportive nationalism on the global stage reached its highest point during the triumphal return of the Latvian delegation at the opening ceremony in the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville. The athletes of the newly-independent Baltic State entered the stadium dressed up in the vintage clothing resembling the attire of the Latvian athletes in their last appearance as the representative of the independent Latvia at the closing ceremony in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin. This symbolic reappearance from the past favorably contrasted the

¹⁹³ From the interview with Artūrs Irbe: "On the barricades in Riga I was asked, *Arthur, the Soviet Union is collapsing. You are not going to play for their Soviet national team, are you?* – "Of course, I was done. Then, in January 1991, I made my choice." In "Чемпион мира в Составе Сборной СССР: Я Отказался от Динамо – Команды КГБ [*The World Champion in the USSR Team: I Refused Dinamo – the KGB Team*]." *Ves.lv*. 2 Feb. 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.ves.lv/article/161075>>. Mid Para.

¹⁹⁴ Ulmanis *Melnās Ripas* 73. The bobsleigh federation decided immediately to withdraw its membership from the Soviet team and went to the barricades in Riga; For further reading on the escalation of the conflict see e.g., Caune, *Atmoda. Atjaunošana. Atzīšana* 162-164.

Latvian delegation with the unified team of the Common Independent States (CIS), whose collective identity at the Olympic Games in Albertville lacked such vital features of national identity as an anthem, flag, and colors.¹⁹⁵

The Post-Soviet Realities of Latvian Hockey

However, the post-Soviet reality of the first years of national independence was far from making it favorable for the Latvian hockey to neglect its Soviet roots in the new era of the post-Cold-War global ice hockey competition. When in May 6, 1992, the Latvian Hockey Federation got formal acceptance in the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF), the national team was placed at the bottom of the IIHF ranking system. It took nearly six years for Latvia to claim the ranking ladder and join the elite “A” division of the world hockey powers. In these formative years of independence, the success of Team Latvia on the international stage was heavily relayed on the old guard hockey talent generated during Soviet times. Accordingly, the decisive goal in the dramatic rivalry with the Swiss team in the division “B” in 1996 scored by the legendary Russian captain of “Dinamo Riga, Oleg Znarok, is highly regarded as one of the “golden moments” in the history of Latvian hockey.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, when, in the fall of 1996, Team Latvia was preparing for its debut in the 1997 World Championship in Turku/Tampere, Finland, the question of retaining its place in the elite division became paramount to the global prospects of Latvian hockey. In the controversial appeal, the Latvian Hockey Federation requested the *Saeima* (Parliament) to grant citizenship for another 17 ex-Soviet players, most of whom were the former Soviet-Latvian stars of “Dinamo Riga,” so they can help the national team to retain its elite status in world ice hockey. While these players were not eligible for citizenship on the basis of the newly drafted citizenship law, denying the rights of citizenship for the Soviet incomers, the LHF urged the law-makers to award the Soviet settlers of “Dinamo Riga” with membership on the national team on the basis of their contribution to the development of hockey in Latvia. After intense debates in the *Saeima*

¹⁹⁵ For further reading on the Olympic recognition see e.g., Caune, *Atmoda. Atjaunošana. Atzīšana*; Forands and Kehris, *Latvijas Sporta Vēsture*; Baldunčiks and Vaiders. *Latvia in the Olympic Movement*.

¹⁹⁶ Ēriks Strauss, “Latvijas Hokeja Zelta Mirkļi [Golden Moments of Latvian Hockey].” *Hokejs*. (Oct. 2007): 35; Oleg Znarok is a cult figure of Latvian hockey. The native of Russia, he was recruited to “Dinamo Riga” in 1983 and since then remained loyal to Latvian hockey, playing for the national team until the retirement. He coached Team Latvia and is the current head coach of “Dinamo Moscow” in the KHL. In the recognition of the contribution to Latvian hockey, Oleg Znarok was honored with the Latvian citizenship in 1996, which he declined later for personal reasons in 2001.

with the nationally-inclined camp over the eligibility of such a plea, a few former members of “Dinamo Riga,” like Grigory Pantelev, Igor Pavlov, Andrei Matytsyn, and Vyacheslav Fandul were finally awarded Latvian citizenship.¹⁹⁷ In the following World Championship in Finland, the Latvian national team won its highest to our days 7th place, fortifying the trademark of Latvian hockey worldwide for the next millennia.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain and following increased mobility of Eastern-European professional athletes, the situation with local hockey development was far from suitable to simply break up all hockey ties with the former Soviet republics. After regaining independence, the organization of “Dinamo Riga” was left without its Soviet patrons. As well as in other post-Soviet countries, Latvian hockey experienced the drainage of hockey players, after the opening of the “talent pipeline” to the western countries.¹⁹⁸ Already in mid-1991, many notable Latvian hockey players had realized that staying in their home country during the period of great political and economic changes is quite risky to their careers and went to play for foreign clubs.¹⁹⁹ As a result, there were simply not enough professional hockey players to launch a competitive national league. Resisting the global pressures of commingling with the West, exemplified in the drainage of hockey talent to the well-established professional leagues in the West, a new hockey club, “Riga,” was founded. Ironically, the team from already independent Latvia joined the competition in the Hockey Championship of the disintegrating Soviet Union, which would be officially renamed a few months later into the Championship of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).²⁰⁰ However, without the financial support of the Riga City Council, on which high hopes had been placed, the project was doomed to a short life.²⁰¹ After participating in the last Soviet/CIS Hockey Championship in 1991/92, the hockey club “Riga” ceased to exist.

Shortlyafter, Russia came up with a new project of organizing the International Hockey League (IHL), which was supposed to transform the CIS Championship into a

¹⁹⁷ Ingrīda Jurševica and Māra Jurševica, *Latvijas Hokeja Pavasaris [Latvian Hockey Yearbook]* (Rīga: Latvijas Hokeja Federācija, 2006) 72-75; The minute notes from the *Saeimadebates* between ruling party, *Latvijas ceļš*, and the national camp, *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai*, on the destiny of Latvian hockey. In “Latvijas Republikas 6.Saeimas Rudens: Sesijas 28.Sēdes Turpinājums [6th Saeima of Latvian Republic in Fall: Session 28th Continued Hearing].” *Latvijas Republikas Saeima*. 14 Nov. 1996. Web. 10 Dec. 2012. <saesima.lv/steno/st_96/st1411.html>.

¹⁹⁸ See Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 32.

¹⁹⁹ Jurševica, *Latvijas Hokeja Pavasaris* 385; Ulmanis *Melnās Ripas* 78-79.

²⁰⁰ Another two native players of “Dinamo Riga” and the future NHL stars, Sandis Ozoliņš and Sergei Zholtok played for the CIS squad in the 1992 Junior World Championship in Moscow. Interestingly, the team was still wearing the “CCCP” jerseys while being called the CIS team, showing how much confusion was at the time in the post-Soviet hockey.

²⁰¹ Jurševica, *Latvijas Hokeja Pavasaris* 385; For more reading see, Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 78-84.

hockey league making the participation possible to all post-Soviet countries of the region. Latvia filled in another team, “Pārdaugava,” which took part in all four seasons from 1992 to 1996 before going bankrupt.²⁰² Nevertheless, the idea was short lived due to the economic instability of the post-Soviet countries undergoing the challenges of economic transition and overall weakness of Russia to sustain viability of the project and compete against the well-established sports business projects in North America and Western Europe. After the league’s disintegration, no Latvian team was filled in the hockey leagues organized and sponsored by Russia, not even when the membership of the Russian *Superliga* went international again in the year of 1999.

²⁰² Ulmanis, *Melnās Ripas* 131.

IV. THE MODERN REBIRTH OF DINAMO RIGA

A. The New Geopolitical Context: The Rediscovering of Russia after the EU's Eastern Enlargement

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the official relations between Latvia and the Russian Federation have been far from outstanding. In the first decade of the post-Communist transformations in the Baltics, the complicated legacies of WWII have shaped the atmosphere for multiple political crises filled with suspicion and mutual charges. The presence of the Russian military on Latvian soil, the questions of the recognition of Soviet occupation and compensations, glorification of Nazism and the fate of Russian-speaking minorities as well as the dilemma over the ratification of the borders agreement have all together negatively affected the possibility of establishing any long-term political framework for bilateral relations based on trust and pragmatism. The very contradictory development in Latvian-Russian relations had existed where the growing economic partnership in trade, transit, and especially energy supply and transportation was troubled by the “increasing tensions over issues of history and identity.”²⁰³ In these disturbed waters of cultural geopolitics, each round of political crisis related to the sensitive matters of Latvian security and identity would weaken Latvia-Russian relations.

This overall vulnerability of the Latvian government in the face of the Russian influence in hard political matters coupled together with soft cultural insecurities served as the legitimate security threat factor for maintaining national sovereignty. As Merje Kuus correctly observed, the pre-EU era of Baltic states was the time when the questions of security “as a matter of identity, culture, and values” where “*soft* and *subjective* issues like culture and identity [unite] with *hard*, *objective* categories like threat into a seemingly natural geographical framework.”²⁰⁴ Thus, throughout the first decade of independence, the Latvian officials were consumed with the tasks of “redirecting” the country from Russia’s sphere of influence and “integrating” it into the western structures, rebranding themselves as “fundamentally Western” and seeking to escape from the margins of the so-

²⁰³ Muižnieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations* 9.

²⁰⁴ For the discourses on security and identity in the post-Soviet Baltic states see e.g., Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed: Security and Identity in Europe's Eastern Enlargement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) x.

called Eastern Europe, exemplified in such countries as Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus.²⁰⁵ Ultimately, achieving integration with the EU and NATO was seen as a rational choice objective of retaining sovereignty and the unique national trajectory of the country, which was still considered endangered by the proximity of borders with Russia and its ability to influence domestic politics.

Although it would be still premature to conclude that those suspicions over fundamental security and identity as well as political conflicts over historical legacies would ultimately disappear from the political discourses of Latvia in relation to Russia, nonetheless, the double enlargement has given Latvia an empowering multilateral political framework and tools to re-formulate its foreign policies strategies and use the historical opportunity to begin a constructive dialogue with regional neighbors like Russia. In time, the importance of improving the bilateral relations with Russia was formally reinstated in Latvia's official rhetoric in *Latvia's Foreign Policy Guidelines 2006-2010* as following:

Russia is Latvia's neighbour. At the bilateral level, relations between Latvia and Russia must be based on pragmatic foundations and co-operation, particularly emphasising the need to resolve vitally important and practical mutual issues, and strengthen the role of the Baltic Sea region. With regard to dialogue between two countries, Latvia is also prepared to continue discussions on the fundamental political issues in which agreement has not been achieved to date.²⁰⁶

The idea of indispensability of Russia as a strategic economic partner of Latvia in the Baltic Sea region goes along the lines with the recent directives of the Russia-EU partnership. However, these descriptions and objectives were also distinctive in another instance: they explicitly showed the desire of Latvia to establish closer economic partnership with its eastern neighbor, Russia, so the country could in near future practically enhance its "competitive geographical advantage" as the gatekeeper of economic activities between the EU and its Eastern rim, where the cooperation in the realm of trade, transit, and energy could not be ignored.²⁰⁷ The important task of

²⁰⁵ Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed* 16.

²⁰⁶ "Latvia's Foreign Policy Guidelines 2006-2010." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia*. Summer. 2006. Web. 10 May. 2013. <<http://www.am.gov.lv/en/policy/guidelines/#45>>. 5. Relations with Third Countries.

²⁰⁷ The competitive geographical advantage of Latvia would be advanced further during the cadency of the president, Valdis Zatlers (2007-2011), who made significant efforts to improve the economic relations with

achieving this new foreign policy goal with respect to the Latvian-Russian relations in the period between the years of 2006 to 2010 was “to facilitate political dialogue and economic co-operation with Russia” via various “visits”, “meetings”, and “consultations” as well as the establishment of the “Intergovernmental Commission” and other “bilateral legal frameworks,” and making use of the potential for furthering economic cooperation of both countries.²⁰⁸

Thus, the role of the local political actors and the interpersonal level of communication became paramount to achieve the primary objective of the new foreign policies objectives with regard to Russia. In this paradigm, the historical and cultural ties in the humanitarian dimension would be used as a vehicle for resolving fundamental political issues and creating the platform for the partnership in the realms of economy, culture, and sports. Many political and business figures who had already been involved in the closer links with Russian business would play a significant role in bridging both countries on the official level. As the ex-Minister of Transport, Ainārs Šlesers, confessed, “the knowledge of Russian language is our oil, gold, and diamond, which must be properly invested.”²⁰⁹ Likewise, during the mid-2006 and 2008, one of the future co-founders of “Dinamo Riga,” the former Prime Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, was a leading actor in establishing a trust relationship with the Russian leadership. Kalvītis was one of the few members of the Latvian political elites, who were convinced that Latvia should have good economic relations with Russia, and managed to establish a trust relationship with the Russian leadership.²¹⁰

Some of the important regional institutional frameworks developed at the Russia-EU level as well as other global venues have been initially utilized to attain the direct

Russia and other Eastern European and Eurasian partners in the post-crisis years of 2009-2011. For further reading see e.g., Valdis Zatlers, “Latvia: an Opportunity Not to Be Missed.” *Latvia the Heart of the Baltics: The Best Eurasian Gateway*. Seria Latvia and Latvian Business 2010 (Riga: ICD Group Ltd, 2010) 6-7. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://2010.balticsheart.com/pdf/Zatlers.pdf>>.

²⁰⁸ *Latvia's Foreign Policy Guidelines 2006-2010* 5. Relations with Third Countries.

²⁰⁹ Ainārs Šlesers on the economic perspectives of Latvia in the Eurasian markets. In Olga Pavuk, “Латвия Готова Стать Транзитным Центром [Latvia is Ready to Become a Transit Hub].” *Baltic Course*. Spring 2007. Web 20 Apr. 2013. <http://www.balticcourse.com/archive/pdf_ru/40_2007.pdf>. 10.

²¹⁰ Toms Ostrovskis, “WikiLeaks: Krievijas Naftas Tranzīts Caur Latviju Apsīka Lemberga Dēļ [WikiLeaks: Oil Transit through Latvia Stopped Because of Lembergs].” *TVNet.lv*. 3 May. 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/375944wikileaks_krievijas_naftas_tranzits_caur_latviju_apsika_lemberga_a_del>. End Para; Aigars Kalvītis served as the Prime Minister of Latvia since 2004 to December 2007, during the so-called “fat years” of Latvia, experiencing an economic boom. Kalvītis argued that the membership in the NATO and EU was supposed to empower Latvia’s relations with Russia. In Artur Rozenband, “Россия – Латвия: Перезагрузка Отношений? [Russia – Latvia: Restart of the Relations?].” *Perspektivy*. 2 Dec. 2011. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <http://www.perspektivy.info/oykumena/krug/rossija_latvija_perezagruzka_otnoshenij_2011-12-07.htm>. Mid Para.

talks. For instance, at the Council of the Baltic Sea States in Reykjavik in June 2006, the Latvian Prime Minister, Aigars Kalvītis, met his colleague, Mikhail Fradkov, where he stressed “the *historic* importance” of the first official meeting on such a level since independence and expressed the desire to develop “a pragmatic dialogue aimed at practical cooperation” between two neighboring countries. Multiple initiatives for future bilateral agreements were put on the table related to the establishment of the “Intergovernmental Commission,” energy security, borders, transit routes, and fostering economic cooperation between both countries.²¹¹ This initiative resulted in the invitation of Kalvītis to participate in the 10th Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, where he delivered his speech praising the historical significance of the northern Russian capital to the promotion of Latvian culture and identity. Expressing his “special feelings,” Kalvītis pointed out that Saint Petersburg was the city where many famous Latvian intellectuals acquired education and were allowed to publish “the very first newspaper in the Latvian language.” Later, he also met the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade, German Gref, and Saint Petersburg Governor, Valentina Matviyenko, to discuss renewed opportunities for closer cooperation between Latvia and Russia.²¹²

Perhaps the meeting between the Prime Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, at the EU Heads of State Informal Meetings with Russia in Lahti, Finland in October 2006 set the tone for the larger scale “restart” of the Latvian-Russian relations aimed at resolving the issues of the political borders and furthering cooperation in the realm of economy, trade, science, and humanitarian dimensions.²¹³ The main controversy was over the region of Pytalovo (Abrene district), which was part of the first Latvian Republic according to the Latvian-Soviet Treaty signed on August, 11 1920. The Lahti conversations with Vladimir Putin gave the green light to the ratification process of the border agreements, which was waiting its authorization since the 1990s. Consequently, in the following year it resulted in the historical signing of the “Treaty on the Russian-Latvian State Border,” which was signed

²¹¹ State Chancellery, “Aigars Kalvītis in Iceland Meets Prime Minister of Russia Mikhail Fradkov.” *The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia*. 8 Jun. 2006. Web 10 Apr. 2013.
<<http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/aktuali/zinas/2006/06/08062006-01/>>.

²¹² State Chancellery, “Aigars Kalvītis Delivered a Speech at 10th St.Petersburg International Economic Forum.” *The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia*. 13 Jun. 2006. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.
<<http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/aktuali/zinas/2006/06/13062006/>>. Intro Para.

²¹³ Toms Ostrovskis, *WikiLeaks: Krievijas Naftas Tranzīts Caur Latviju Apsīka Lemberga Dēļ* Intro Para.

by Kalvītis and Fradkov in March 2007 in Moscow.²¹⁴ After years of tensions, the gesture of reconciliation shown by the political elites of Latvia was an astonishing change in the approach to Russia by one of the members of the Baltic states. As a notable Latvian political scientist, Nils Muižnieks, pointed out, the ratification of the border agreement was “a clear turning point” in Latvian-Russian relations.²¹⁵

The personalization of Latvian-Russian contacts in the spring 2007 did help to mitigate the disagreement over political history and reshape the focus of the ongoing meetings on favorable topics. Thus, in the months of the dramatic controversy surrounding the relocation of the *Bronze Soldier* of Tallinn, which led to substantial escalation of the tensions between Estonia and Russia, the Prime Minister of Latvia, Kalvītis was prizing the constructive attitude of Russian politicians in the historic signing of the border treaty in Moscow. After the informal meeting with Putin outside of the Kremlin’s walls in Novo-Ogarevo’s residence, when Kalvītis was briefly interviewed about whether the situation with the Russian-speaking residents in Latvia was discussed in the meeting, he said that with the President of Russia, they talked “mainly” about “economic topics,” “not political.” Simultaneously, Putin did mention, however, that the “border agreement does not resolve all the political tensions,” but was very satisfied with the “positive tendencies,” prizing the constructive role of the political Treaty to “push the Latvian-Russian relations in a positive direction for both sides.”²¹⁶

Indeed, despite the skepticism of many observers of the late 90s, who argued that the accession into the NATO and the EU would further complicate Latvian-Russian relations, the positive atmosphere surrounding the historical signing of the Border Treaty proved the opposite. The EU’s accession gave a new stimulus for the Latvian ruling elites

²¹⁴ State Chancellery, “Prime Minister Aigars Kalvītis and Mikhail Fradkov, Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Discussed Opportunities for Closer Cooperation of Both Countries.” *The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Latvia*. 27 Mar. 2007. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<<http://www.mk.gov.lv/en/aktuali/zinas/2007/March/27032007-1/>>. The Treaty was ratified later by the *Saeima* of Latvia in May 2007, and in September by the Russian State Duma and the Council of Federation.

²¹⁵ Muižnieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations* 25; Addressing the Estonian audience at the seminar devoted to Russian-Baltic relations in Tallinn, Muižnieks stated: “I do not understand what is your problem with the boundary treaty, [...] by keeping the preamble, you would not be able to regain any territory. *Be pragmatic*. I know you are accustomed to say that there is no difference whether there is an agreement with Russia or not. But after we signed the agreement, we felt the difference. Now we have finally been able to deal with other issues, without looking at the agreement.” In “Муйжниекс Эстонии: Заключите Договор с Россией и Почувствуйте Разницу [*Muižnieks to Estonia: Sign the Treaty and Feel the Difference*].” *TVNet.lv*. October 21, 2011. <http://rus.tvnet.lv/novosti/politika/180654muyzhnijeks_estonii_zakljuchitje_dogovor_s_rossijey_i_pochuvstvuytje_raznicu>. [translation mine].

²¹⁶ Anatoli Kamenev, “Договор не Решит Всех Проблем [*The Agreement Does not Solve All Problems*].” *Chas*. 29 Mar. 2007. Web. 10 Jan. 2013. <http://www.chas-daily.com/win/2007/03/29/1_042.html?r=&printer=1&>.

to improving the relations with Russia where the economic interest of Latvia have prevailed over highly sensitive historical matters. However, it should be also noted that the Latvian spirit of constructivism, conveyed by the moderate political forces of the post double enlargement Latvia, was also coincided with if not predetermined by the Russian soft power shift towards the pragmatic economic politics in relation to its near-abroad. Specifically, as well as other post-Soviet transit countries like Ukraine and Belarus, Latvia was affected by the newly established energy approach of Russia, which defined its “great energy sources” as “the basis of economic development and the instrument of carrying the internal and external policy.”²¹⁷ As part of the strategy, Russia looked for the elimination of its heavy dependency on the post-Soviet transit countries and finding more effective transit lines of gas and oil, by developing new regional energy and transport systems. In this scenario, the Latvian port of Ventspils, which was responsible for “up to 13% of all Russian oil exports,” during the 90s, lost its significance with the construction of an oil export port in Primorsk.²¹⁸ The discussions with the Western European countries on the building of the joint-stock companies of gas transportation like *Nord Stream* did not contribute to enhancing the role of Latvia as the energy transit country either.

Thus, besides other important political, economic and cultural aspects of the restart, the initial stages of the rediscovering of Russia during the reign of Kalvītis had also illuminated an ambitious plan of retaining and empowering the privileged regional status of Latvia as the energy and transit infrastructure hub of the Baltic Sea littoral via the ongoing improvement of the partnership with the major players of the Russian oil and gas export industries. In this paradigm, the ongoing cooperation between the major supplier of natural gas, Gazprom and the major Latvian gas distributor, Latvijas Gāze, was also meant to “guarantee” the balanced economic approach of Russia over the historical disagreements in relations with its important EU’s neighbor in the Baltic Sea region.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ *The Summary of the Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period of Up to 2020* 2-12.

²¹⁸ Muižnieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations* 14.

²¹⁹ The Russian Gazprom has a control share of 34% over Latvijas Gāze. The Russian Itera Oil & Gas Company, which had close connections to Gazprom, owns 16% of the Latvijas Gāze shares. Additionally, the Russian Gazprom exercises via Latvijas Gāze the control over the only LNG gas terminal in the Baltics, the Inčukalns underground gas storage, being a key hub in the distribution of gas in the region. Thus, the “two Russian gas companies – *Gazprom* and *Itera* – together own a 50% share in *Latvijas Gāze*, guaranteeing a very strong lobby in Russia for stable gas relations with Latvia.” On the close ties between Latvijas Gāze, SIA Itera Latvija and Gazprom as well as their big impact on Latvia’s policies in relation to Russia see: Muižnieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations* 47-50.

B. The International Revival of “Dinamo Riga” in the Context of the Restart of Latvian-Russian Relations

The Global Affairs of Latvian Hockey in the 21st Century Context

In the early 21st Century, Latvian hockey became an indispensable staple in the elite of global hockey. Despite having a relatively small number of registered players, the country enjoyed remarkable victories in the international competition against the top hockey nations, exemplified in the memorable 3:2 victory over the Russians, whose team consisted of the top NHL superstars, in the 2000 World Ice Hockey Championship in Saint Petersburg. Consequently, the “Victory of the Century” over the Russians on May 5th, the day after the 10th anniversary of the declaration of Latvian Independence, was followed up by the tremendous rise of sporting nationalism, solidifying the belief amongst Latvian hockey fans that one day ice hockey could “bring” the country to “the very top of the World.”²²⁰ Henceforth, the major IIHF events became an important site of the celebration of Latvian nationalism, whose “crazy” hockey fans were widely recognized across the globe for their passionate following of the national team.²²¹

However, with the gradual retirement of the Soviet generation of Latvian hockey stars, most of whom began their careers in “Dinamo Riga,” it became apparent that the ambitious dreams of taking the world were short-lived. The national aspirations of winning the first medals melted into air instantly after the disappointing results of the 2006 World Ice Hockey Championship in Riga. The national team, which was mainly based on the players, who began their professional careers in the independent Latvia, was literally booed for poor performance by its very own fans after the scandalous 0:11 loss to the Canadians in the newly built “Arena Riga.” In time, the commonly expressed view amongst the Latvians was established that, in the near future, the “Latvian national hockey team potential was limited by averagely 8th place [...] and the miracle will hardly come for the national team...”²²²

²²⁰ Ēriks Strauss, *Gadsimta Uzvara. Latvija-Krievija 3-2: Kas Notika 2000. Gada 5. Maijā? [The Victory of the Century. Latvia – Russia 3-2. What Happened on 5 May, 2000?]* (Rīga: Nacionālais Medicīnas Apgāds, 2001) 47; Ainars Brencis and Juris Ozols, “Competitive Identity for Nation of Latvia – Lessons to Learn from Team *Dinamo Riga*.” *European Integration Studies*. 4 (2010): 15. Web. 10 Mar. 2013. <http://www.ktu.lt/lt/mokslas/zurnalai/eis/04/Brencis_Ozols_2010_15_21p.pdf>. Mid Para.

²²¹ “For Latvians, IIHF is like the Super Bowl.” *Sportsnet.ca*. 14 Sep. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/latvians-lovable-iihf/>>.

²²² Brencis and Ozols, *Competitive Identity for Nation of Latvia* 18.

By the mid-2000s, Latvian hockey was still stuck in the post-Soviet experiences, having a lack of any feasible national strategy for the international development of the most popular sport. Despite the successful post-Soviet efforts of retaining Latvian hockey in the elite of the international competition, without significant financial support from the state and businesses, the local development of youth hockey had continued to experience the shortage of qualified players and a higher level of competition. The cohort of the finest Latvian players preferred going abroad for more lucrative options in their careers, thereby continuing the labor mobility patterns of the Eastern European athletes during the post-Cold-War development of international hockey.²²³ In the meantime, the new flagship of Latvian hockey, “Riga-2000,” had continued its struggles of having no contenders, dominating the semi-professional Championship of Latvia. Looking for a better competition, the team joined the Open Championship of Belarus, which was a second-rated league of European hockey, dominated by the Byelorussian teams. In 2006, the Latvian hockey authorities attempted to give a new Baltic spin for the Championship of Latvia, transforming it into an open *Samsung* Hockey Premier League, which included teams from Estonia and Lithuania. The tournament yet failed to generate serious competition and attract notable Latvian players from abroad. In its inaugural season, “Riga-2000,” which decided to withdraw from the Byelorussian *Extraliga*, easily won the tournament, further complicating the prospects of Latvian hockey.²²⁴

The Eastern Promises and Latvian Ambitions

However, by the beginning of 2007, the prospects of promising change in international hockey had arrived to Latvian soil from Russia, which at that time was rapidly advancing towards the introduction of the KHL. When the news about the creation of a new “zone of prestige” in European hockey reached the Baltic Sea littoral, the opportunity of joining the lucrative league was met with ever greater enthusiasm in the business circles of Latvia, who began to endorse the idea of entering a Latvian hockey team into the Russian-sponsored Eurasian platform, which could give a feasible boost to

²²³ On the labor mobility of the Eastern European athletes see: Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 32; Most talented Latvian players of the national team, who failed to settle in the NHL, continued their careers in the national championships of Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Czech Republic, Belarus and Russia.

²²⁴ Kyrill Belyakov, “Член Правления ХК Рига-2000 Виестурс Козиолс: За 6 Миллионов Евро Я Соберу Суперкоманду! [*The Member of the Board of HK Riga-2000 Viesturs Kozziols: Having 6 Million Euros I will Gather a Superteam!*].” *Soviet Sports*. 4 Mar. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/284394>>. Intro Para; From the interview with the former president of “Riga-2000,” Viesturs Kozziols, who believed that the organization of the Samsung league was a “step back” in the development of Latvian hockey.

the global development of Latvian hockey. Being well aware of each intension, both parties' interests in the realm of hockey could naturally flow along very well during the discussion over the accession. The Latvian stakeholders were pursuing their own ambiguous business agenda of becoming the EU's pioneers by joining the lucrative transnational sports project that was supposed later to attract the teams from the Swedish, Czech, Finnish, German and other European countries' championships.²²⁵ Moreover, knowing that the Russians are "desperate" to acquire a EU team, they believed that with the help of Russians, the Latvian hockey club in the KHL could become the Baltic superclub for the national squad that would generate under its umbrella the best of what the Latvian hockey school could offer at that time and give the long-term framework for youth hockey within the newly-emerging system of the KHL youth development.²²⁶ On the other hand, the Russians have perceived post-Soviet Latvia as an important member of the European Union. The Latvian capital was standing right at the Western margins of the Eurasian hockey landscape, thereby gatekeeping the clearly defined sphere of the KHL vital interest in the future European expansion. Moreover, after attaining the historical center of the Soviet ice hockey interactions – Riga, the organizers of the KHL could begin their ambitious journey of "conquering" the western market and, therefore, coming closer to achieving the truly "European contours" of the new league in the global rivalry with the NHL.²²⁷

²²⁵ Aivars Pastalnieks, *A/S "Dinamo Riga" Gadagrāmata 2008/2009 [Joint-Stock Company "Dinamo Riga" Yearbook 2008/2009]* (Rīga: SIA Veiters Korporācija, 2009) 14.

²²⁶ From the post-KHL accession interview with the President of the Latvian Hockey Federation, Kirov Lipman In "Киров Липман. Рижское Динамо: Хоккей, Бизнес или Политика? [*Kirov Lipman. Dinamo Riga: Hockey, Business or Politics?*]." *Delfi.lv*. 30 Apr. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://rus.delfi.lv/archive/kirov-lipman-rizhskoe-dinamo-hokkej-biznes-ili-politika.d?id=20845511>>. Mid Para; Additionally, the former Prime-Minister, Aigars Kalvītis, highly prized the Russians for their ability to create an ambitious global project where the Latvian hockey players could have a great opportunity to obtain a higher competition for all season long. In Māris Zembergs, et al., "Hokeja Superklubs [*Hockey Superclub*]." *Diena*. 2 Apr. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sabiedriba/hokeja-superklubs-39364>>. Intro Para; For more reading in English see e.g., Guntis Ulmanis, "Dinamo Rīga – the Baltic Power." *Latvia the Heart of the Baltics: The Best Eurasian Gateway. Seria Latvia and Latvian Business 2010* (Riga: ICD Group LTD, 2010) 52. *Open Access*. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://2010.balticshheart.com/pdf/Dinamo.pdf>>.

²²⁷ See e.g., Medvedev In *KHL to Conquer Europe- League President*; and Aleksander Medvedev, "Континентальная Лига. Основные Направления Деятельности [*Continental League. The Main Trajectories of Activities*]." *Federal Book: Russian Sport. Volume 1*. 8 Sep. 2010. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://federalbook.ru/files/SPORT/soderganie/Tom%202/Medvedev-Hokey.pdf>>. 425.

The Latvian “Hockey Diplomacy” of Rapprochement with the Russians

Within this newly-emerging perspective of the European ice hockey development, the revitalized Latvian-Russian political and business contacts during the geopolitical “restart” did facilitate the promotion of mutual interests of cooperation in the realm of ice hockey between both countries. The Latvian “hockey diplomacy” of rapprochement with the Russian organizers of the KHL was carried out by the groups of the political, business, and sports elites, who have been already deeply engaged in the Latvian-Russian cooperation in the realms of gas infrastructure, transit and supplies as well as the humanitarian dimensions like media and sports.²²⁸ In this paradigm, the special humanitarian status of Latvia as the historical member of Soviet hockey coupled with the good partnership in the energy sector and recently built informal friendships on the highest political level significantly eased the shape of the discussions over the acceptance of the Latvian stakeholders into the new league. In this historical rebirth of Latvian-Russian contacts in the realm of ice hockey, the media developer and real estate investor, Viesturs Koziols, the chairman of the Latvian brunch of Russian gas and oil distributor Itera, – SIA Itera Latvia, as well as Latvijas Gāze, Juris Savickis, the former Prime Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, the former President of Latvia, Guntis Ulmanis, the President of the Latvian Hockey Federation (LHF), Kirov Lipman, and the Vice-President of the LHF, Helmutis Balderis, were amongst the notable political, economic, cultural, and sports figures, being instrumental to the international revival of “Dinamo Riga.”²²⁹

In the very first steps of the Latvian “hockey diplomacy” of rapprochement with the Russians, the Soviet and Latvian legend, Helmutis Balderis, played an important role of the sports ambassador, helping to reactivate the common cultural bonds of both countries in the realm of ice hockey. The first president of “Dinamo Riga” in the inaugural season in the KHL, Viesturs Koziols, would later confess that the desire of entering into the agreement with the Russians occurred when by the early 2006 the Latvian Championship, which was transformed into the regional *Samsung* league, completely lost “intrigue” and went into “stagnation,” wherein his hockey club, “Riga-

²²⁸ The analogy is traced back to the preparation of the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the USSR where hockey served as “a common bond between the two countries” to strengthen the bilateral relations. Macintosh and Greenhorn, *Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Hockey Policy* 107-108.

²²⁹ It should be noted that the historical figures of the revival of “Dinamo Riga” have been connected to such parties as *Tautas Partija* (People’s Party), *Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvian Way) and *Latvijas Pirmā Partija* (Latvia’s First Party), which leaders were the principle agents of the Latvian foreign policy shift towards the pragmatic relations and closer cooperation with Russia after the post EU’s eastern enlargement.

2000,” had to compete against the Lithuanian and Estonian teams that could be hardly considered as good European contenders.²³⁰ With Fetisov’s promotion of the Euro-Asian Hockey League (EAHL), Koziols began to actively seeking the ways of partnering with the bosses of Russian hockey so he could promote his team, “Riga-2000,” into the new league. In this quest, Koziols approached his legendary acquaintance from the times of the ruling party, *Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvian Way), Helmut Balderis, who could use his well-established contacts with the Russian hockey functionaries, to “investigate” if there is a possibility for a Latvian team to join the “promising” Russian project.²³¹ Already in May 2007, when Moscow hosted the World Ice Hockey Championship, Helmut Balderis invited Viesturs Koziols to go alongside him to the Russian capital, so he could get acquainted easily with the right people in Russian hockey:

Balderis called me in May 2007, when Russia was hosting the World Ice Hockey Championship. He was invited to play with the Soviet veterans, and he took me with him. There, I was introduced to Vyacheslav Fetisov, to whom I spoke about the idea of joining the league. In turn, Fetisov introduced me to Aleksander Medvedev. Later, there was a call to Vladislav Tretiak for getting the permission for the Latvian club.²³² [translation mine]

The first informal Latvian delegation to Moscow was received with great enthusiasm by the KHL organizers. During the preliminary discussions, Vyatcheslav Fetisov encouraged the Latvians to begin evolving their project around the historical brand of the Soviet and Latvian hockey – “Dinamo Riga,” with the legend of Soviet and Latvian hockey, Helmut Balderis, as the potential president of the team.²³³ However, the

²³⁰ Belyakov, *Член Правления ХК Рига-2000 Виестурс Козиолс: За 6 Миллионов* Intro Para.

²³¹ Māris Zembergs, “Koziols: Dinamo Rīga Spēlēšanai KHL Pirmo Grūdienu Deva Balderis, Nevis Lipmans [Balderis Gave the First Push to the Participation of Dinamo Riga in the KHL].” *Diena*. 26 Oct. 2012. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/koziols-dinamo-riga-spelesanai-khl-pirmo-grudienу-deva-balderis-nevis-lipmans-13974806>>. Intro Para; From the interview with Balderis on the first contacts with the Russians: “the first president of *Dinamo Riga*, Viesturs Koziols, asked me to go to Moscow to talk with Tretiak and Fetisov. The conversation was like this: *You create the KHL, let us in, so Riga could make a statement in Russia*. Aleksander Medvedev promised to think about it. So, that is how “Dinamo” was re-created.” In Margita Sprancmane, “Хельмут Балдерис: Жалею Только о Забитых Голах [Helmut Balderis: I only Regret about the Missed Goals].” *Fanzone.klh.ru*. 16 Dec. 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://fanzone.khl.ru/news/15510/>>. End Para. [translation mine].

²³² Zembergs, *Koziols: Dinamo Rīga Spēlēšanai KHL*, Mid Para; Being in Moscow, Balderis reiterated the importance of joining the Russian project for the future growth of Latvian hockey. In Andris Pīzelis, “Krievi Grib Savā Līgā Rīgas Dinamo [Russians Want Dinamo Riga in their League].” *SportaCenters.com*. 16 May. 2007. Web. 10 Apr. 2013.

<http://sportacentrs.com/hokejs/20070516_krievi_grib_sava_liga_rigas_dinamo?is_mobile=1>.

²³³ Pīzelis, *Krievi Grib Savā Līgā “Rīgas Dinamo.”*

lack of financial resources was the biggest challenge to overcome for the potential partners from Latvia. When the principal economic patron of the KHL, the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Gazprom, Aleksander Medvedev, asked Koziols about the Latvians' financial capabilities, the latter "frankly" responded that they would "fail" to master the "necessary" budget by "their only" means.²³⁴ Thus, the serious talks about including the Latvian team, "Riga-2000" were postponed and would be only resumed in mid-February and March of 2008 when the rules of the financial entrance requirements for foreign teams had begun to take their final configuration after the introduction of the Rules of Procedure of the Open Russian Hockey League (ORHL).²³⁵

Consequently, the second round of "hockey diplomacy" in searching for the proper investor activated the big guns of the Latvian political and business elites. Already, in mid-February of 2008, at the meeting of the working group of the newly-emerging league and the managers of the *Superliga* clubs it was said that the team from Latvia, "Riga-2000," would "likely play" in the inaugural season. However, in Latvia, it was still "unclear" which hockey club was going to represent Latvians in the KHL.²³⁶ By the middle of March it became apparent that the owners of "Riga-2000" simply do not have enough cash, failing to find a principal sponsor, who would be willing to support the team and fulfill the KHL entrance criteria. According to the rules, foreign teams must have a minimum budget of at least \$10 million.²³⁷ When the deadline for registration was about to expire, the President of the LHF, Kirov Lipman, took initiative in his hands and asked the former Prime-Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, who could use his well-established links with the Russian political and business elites, to go with him to Moscow to help "bargain" over the "financial issue" and find there a potential investor to "co-finance" the Latvian-based team in the inaugural 2008/2009 season.²³⁸

²³⁴ Zembergs, *Koziols: Dinamo Rīga Spēlēšanai KHL* Mid Para.

²³⁵ "Континентальная Хоккейная Лига: Регламент Проведения Открытого Чемпионата России по Хоккею – Чемпионата Континентальной Хоккейной Лиги Сезона 2008 – 2009 [*Kontinental Hockey League: The Schedule of the Open Ice Hockey Championship of Russia – The Kontinental Hockey League 2008 - 2009 Season*]." *KHL.ru*. 21 Apr. 2008. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <http://www.khl.ru/documents/CHL_REGLAMENT_2008-2009_02-08-08.pdf>. Chapter 5, Requirements for the Foreign Clubs, 20-22.

²³⁶ Vladimir Ivanov, "Кто Станет Делегатом от Латвии? В Риге до Сих Пор не Знают, Какой Клуб Будет Представлять Страну в Континентальной Лиге [*Who Will Become the Delegate from Latvia? Riga Still does not Know Which Club will Represent the Country in the Continental League*]." *Soviet Sports*. 4 Mar. 2008. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/284393>>. Intro Para.

²³⁷ Belyakov, *Член Правления ХК Рига-2000 Вьетурс Козиолс: За 6 Миллионов* End Para.

²³⁸ According to Kirov Lipman, when Aigars Kalvītis was the Prime Minister, "he has already welcomed the initiative and was quite actively involved, so that we can adequately present ourselves at the KHL committee meetings in Moscow for the possibility of the inclusion of our country and our club in this league." From the interview *In Киров Липман. Рижское Динамо: Хоккей, Бизнес или Политика?* Intro Para. [translation mine].

While being in Moscow during the KHL committee gathering on March 11, 2008, the Latvian delegation engaged in the accession discussions with the principle organizers of the KHL, the Vice-Chairman of the Board of Gazprom, Aleksander Medvedev and the chairman of the *Rossport*, Vyatcheslav Fetisov. At the meeting, Lipman and Kalvītis reiterated the Latvian intent of joining the KHL and proceed to discuss the financial obstacles of the Latvian stakeholders, asking the organizers to reduce the minimal requirements of the club budget for the first year. Although Fetisov refused to make any budgetary “concessions” that could “harm” the newly-established standards of league’s membership, together with Medvedev, they “ensured” the Latvians that if they really need “sponsors,” the KHL would be more than willing to help them out in finding a proper investor.²³⁹ As Viesturs Koziols confessed, the former Prime Minister of Latvia, Aigars Kalvītis, was then “several times” in Moscow to continue meetings with the founders of the KHL in attracting the future general sponsor of “Dinamo Riga.”²⁴⁰ While, the Vice-Chairman of Gazprom, Aleksander Medvedev, did not disappoint his Latvian partners, redirecting the problem of the sponsorship to the Gazprom close partners in the energy sector, the Russian-based international gas supplier, Itera Oil& Gas Company.²⁴¹

The final stage of “hockey diplomacy” illuminated the strong ties of Latvians with Russians in the energy sector, which helped to resolve the financial obstacles of the agreement with the KHL. Interestingly, when by the spring of 2008, the hockey talks over the accession of “Dinamo Riga” with the KHL representatives from Gazprom were taking its final shape, the ruling coalition of Latvia was simultaneously entertaining itself with the prospects of building a new LNG terminal in cooperation with Gazprom and the Latvian subsidiary of the Russian gas supplier, SIA Itera Latvija, both of whom had significant shares in the major national monopolist of gas distribution, Latvijas Gāze. At the end of March 2008, being in his final steps of the investor quest, Aigars Kalvītis approached the Latvian businessman, Juris Savickis, who has been at the same time the Chairman of Latvijas Gāze and the subsidiary of the Russian gas distributor, Itera Oil& Gas Company, in Latvia, SIA Itera Latvija, which all together pushed the agenda of building new gas storages in cooperation with the Russian Gazprom. Both were also supposed to discuss the sponsorship of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL. While the real details

²³⁹ Vladimir Ivanov, “Нужны Спонсоры? Москва Поможет! [Looking for Sponsors? Moscow will Help!].” *Chas*. 13 Mar. 2008. Web 10 Apr. 2013. <http://www.chas-daily.com/win/2008/03/13/s_024.html?r=8>.

²⁴⁰ Viesturs Zariņš, “Team President Talks about Rebirth of Dinamo Riga.” *Latvians Online*. 13 Nov. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://latviansonline.com/news/article/5052/>>. Mid Para; Zembergs, *Koziols: Dinamo Rīga Spēlēšanai KHL*, Mid Para.

²⁴¹ Ivanov, *Нужны Спонсоры? Москва Поможет!*

of the discussions over the LNG have been never disclosed publicly, the final accords of the talks on hockey matters between Kalvītis and Savickis did materialize into a principal agreement of both parties. After the discussion of Savickis with the Chairman of Itera Oil& Gas Company, Igor Makarov, the company decided to invest 5 million Lats for the immediate expenses whereas SIA Itera Latvija became the largest shareholder of the new joint-stock company, “Dinamo Riga, holding 39, 02% percent of the share.”²⁴²

On the historical date of April 7, 2008, the legendary team, “Dinamo Riga,” was officially re-established. The capital stock of “Dinamo Riga of 2.5 million Euros included the shares of the former Prime Minister, Aigars Kalvītis, the head of the hockey club “Riga 2000,” Viesturs Koziols, the President of the LHF, Kirov Lipman, the Chairman of the company SIA Itera Latvija, Juris Savickis, the former Latvian President and the Board Member of the LHF, Guntis Ulmanis, the Member of the Supervisory Board of the transportation company, Nordeka, Aldis Pauniņš, and the President of the construction company, Skonto, Guntis Ravis.”²⁴³ Shortly, the Latvian team received an official invitation from the Russian Hockey Federation to join the KHL in the inaugural 2008/2009 season and participate in the official teams’ draw on April 9, 2008.

²⁴² From the statements of Savickis on sponsorship of Dinamo Riga.” *In* Sanita Jemberga, “Iteras Ēnā [*In Itera’s Shadow*].” *Diena*. 9 Sep. 2009. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sodien-laikraksta/iteras-ena-690317>>. Mid Para; According to Ivanov, Gazprom also lent “Dinamo Riga” cash to pay 750,000 US Dollars registration fee to guarantee team’s place in the KHL. *In* Ivanov, *Нужны Спонсоры? Москва Поможет!*; Since 2013, the share of SIA Itera Latvija increased to 60.96%.

²⁴³ Since 2011, Aigars Kalvītis is the Chairman of the Board of “Dinamo Riga.”

V. DINAMO RIGA IN THE KONTINENTAL HOCKEY LEAGUE

A. The Case of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL: The Global Prospects and National Struggles in the Development of Sporting Nationalism in Latvian Hockey

The participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL may become one of the most significant events in the development and promotion of Latvian sporting nationalism in the global sportive events since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the post-Cold War system of international hockey competition. The revival of Latvian-Russian contacts in the realm of ice hockey has already illuminated the powerful forces of sports globalization in the post-Soviet space, with its ability to transcend the political boundaries of nations after the EU’s eastern enlargement and reunite the historical members of Soviet hockey on the post-Soviet Eurasian hockey landscape. Simultaneously, however, the global commingling with Russian hockey has also triggered an increasing resistance in the more nationally-inclined camp of Latvia, concerned about the real motives of the introduction of the KHL on Latvian soil. This national insurgency to the cooperation with the Russians is primarily shaped by the contemporary cultural politics, which perceives the Russian soft power approaches to its former satellites in the Baltics as a continuation of the Soviet expansionist politics on Latvian soil, endangering the nation’s communal spirit and values.²⁴⁴

In line with what a Scottish theorist, Alan Bairner, correctly observed, the fundamental political and cultural concerns over the very identity of national community could not be completely overlooked from the analysis of the intersection of globalization, nationalism and sports. However they may sound more “artificial than natural,” they do touch “people’s hearts and minds in ways that cosmopolitanism does not and may never be able to, regardless of the development of global economics, power structures, and cultural forms.”²⁴⁵ In fact, despite the acceptance into the EU, in terms of its cultural politics and geopolitical discourses, modern Latvia may still seem one of the postcolonial

²⁴⁴ See .e.g., the recently emerged discourse on Russian “soft-power” activities in “near abroad.” Unlike the neorealist debate emphasizing the return of power politics in Russia’s foreign policy, this discussion on the common security and identity threats is focused on the recent sophisticated measures developed by Russia to “subjugate” its neighbors through the “soft power” humanitarian missions. Gatis Pelns, *The ‘Humanitarian Dimension’ of Russian Foreign Policy towards Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Baltic States* (Riga: Centre for East European Policy Studies, 2009), Web 10 Mar. 2013. <http://www.d999110.u-telcom.net/pdf/publications/Research_2009_ENG_2010.pdf>.

²⁴⁵ Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization* 16, 19.

cases of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," whose formation of the national self-awareness is still negatively influenced by the experiences of the "official nationalism" policies of the "dynastic realms" like the Russian Empire to "homogenize" its "heterogeneous population"²⁴⁶ and then the Soviet policies of Russification. In this cultural politics context, the fundamental strength in the construction of a Latvian community is largely derived from the fatality of its own people's tragic past, which is deeply embedded in the centuries-long history of colonial experience. Moreover, in this post-colonial thinking, the negative perceptions of Soviet occupation, associated with the loss of independence and harmful consequences of Russification to the development of the unique Latvian culture have continued to dominate people's minds and official historical narratives. They are reinforced in the national discourses as powerful reminders of the necessity of securing the political independence of Latvia and its national community for once and forever from the hegemonic flows of Russian influence.²⁴⁷ Thus, in this very instance, the participation of a Latvian-based team in the league sponsored by the Russians may appear for the more nationally-inclined Latvian people as one of the primary examples of Russian cultural imperialism, threatening the very nature of the Latvian national community and its civilizational trajectories.

Indeed, despite the globalized nature of the KHL and its possible perks for the development of Latvian hockey, the traditional values of the new sports project are deeply rooted in the Soviet past. These historical symbols are encoded in the KHL, including the name of "Dinamo."²⁴⁸ Moreover, the principal organizers, including the "father" of the KHL, Vladimir Putin, have proclaimed that the new hockey league could play a "positive" role in the "restoration" of the "common humanitarian space" on the post-Soviet space.²⁴⁹ Perhaps, all these fundamental national concerns over the geopolitical role of "Dinamo Riga" on Latvian soil and its repercussions for the security and identity of the Latvian community were at once summed up pretty well by the legendary Soviet and Latvian hockey goaltender, Artūrs Irbe, who named the re-invented "Dinamo Riga"

²⁴⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 86. See the Chapter "Official Nationalism and Imperialism."

²⁴⁷ Further readings on the official historiography of Latvian experiences in the Soviet Union and their repercussion to the relations with Russia see e.g., Valters and Nollendorfs, Erwin, Oberländer, *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupations 1940-1991: Selected Research of the Commission of the Historians of Latvia* (Riga: Institute of the History of Latvia, 2005); Andrey Plakans, *Experiencing Totalitarianism: The Invasion and Occupation of Latvia by the USSR and Nazi Germany 1939-1991: A Documentary History* (Bloomington, Indiana: Author House, 2007).

²⁴⁸ Pelnens, *The 'Humanitarian Dimension' of Russian Foreign policy 176-178*. For further reading on the history of the Soviet sports organizations see e.g., James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*.

²⁴⁹ *In В.В.Путин Провел Рабочую Встречу* End Para.

as “a Russian public relations project” in Latvia. Of course, this statement forced the hockey club management to immediately respond with a public letter denouncing the “beginning of a broad ideologized campaign aiming to undermine the prestige of Latvian hockey and *Dinamo Riga*,” stressing that “on the ice there is no politics and no ideology, on the ice there is the game. Hockey is the only ideology of *Dinamo Riga*.”²⁵⁰ Thus, the participation of a Latvian-based team in the Russian-sponsored hockey league has offered an opportunity to probe the extent to which the project of “Dinamo Riga” could be appropriated as the new global phenomenon in Latvian sports in terms of its ability to transcend the post-Soviet cultural politics and serve as a new sports vehicle in the celebration of Latvian identity.

B. The Identity Politics of HC “Dinamo Riga” within the Context of the National Insurgency to the International Collaboration with the KHL

The Emerging Partnership with the KHL and National Distresses

Already in the eve of the official accession into the KHL, the international revival of “Dinamo Riga” has generated a significant level of suspicion in the national camp of Latvia about its true colors and geopolitical implications to the core values of Latvia. The insurgency in the national camp to the participation in the KHL had already become apparent in the initial stages of Latvian “hockey diplomacy” when the notable Latvian politicians, businessmen and hockey functionaries were harshly criticized for the unpatriotic eagerness to go east and make a deal with the Russians. This anger was caused by the fact that the KHL involves teams from the post-Soviet republics, which was a clear sign of the reincarnation of the Soviet Championship. Moreover, the close links of the integration of the Latvian-based team into the KHL and the energy ambitions of the

²⁵⁰ In Nils Muiznieks, *Latvian-Russian Relations* 62; The legend of Soviet and Latvian hockey, Artūrs Irbe, was recruited in the inaugural season as the goaltender coach of “Dinamo Riga,” but stepped down from the role because of the disagreement over the branding strategies of “Dinamo Riga.” Irbe is known for his openly expressed views about the Soviet experiences of Latvia since the late 1980s. For instance, in his interview to *Neatkarīgas Rīta Avīze* after “the Victory of the Century” against the Russians in Saint Petersburg, he proclaimed that the victory was his “payback” to the Russians, which was waiting its moment for 55 years since the end of WWII. It was the kind of a tribute paid to his grandfather fighting in the Latvian legion against the Soviets. In Strauss, *Gadsimta Uzvara. Latvija-Krievija 3-2: Kas Notika 2000* 47; In his latest interview to *Soviet Sports*, however, Irbe acknowledged that the statement was too emotional and there was no need to recollect the war times. In Pavel Lysenkov, “Артур Ирбе о Матче Россия - Латвия: Маленькая Собака Хочет Укусить Большую. Но Войну не Надо Вспоминать [Artur Irbe on the Russia-Latvia Game: The Small Dog Wants to Bite the Bigger One. But the War is not Necessarily to Recollect].” *Soviet Sports*. 3 May. 2013. Web. 10 May. 2013. [translation mine]. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/news/text-item/606251>>. Mid Para.

Latvian sponsors of the project had also ignited the debate over Latvian overdependence on Russia in the energy sector, threatening its independence.

For instance, when in April 2008 the representative of the ruling coalition, Aigars Kalvītis, met with the head of SIA Itera Latvija, and Latvijas Gāze, Juris Savickis, who also happened to be the former KGB agent, to discuss the problems of “Dinamo Riga” in finding the proper investor, this move had immediately sparked public concerns in the more nationally-inclined camp of Latvian over the increasing dependence of Latvia on Russia in the energy sector.²⁵¹ The very close links between politics, energy, and sports in the talks over the acceptance of “Dinamo Riga” into the KHL and possible concessions over LNG projects with Gazprom and Itera were also perceived in the context of the security threats to the country’s independence. Although Kalvītis assured the public that, during the meetings with Savickis, they had mainly talked about hockey, not the building of LNG terminals in Latvia. Savickis was eager to be more open in acknowledging that the issues of LNG were also included in discussions with the representative of the ruling coalition. However, this political controversy surrounding the historical rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” again raised public concerns in the national spectrum over the true nature of the project. Consequently, the KHL expansion on Latvian soil, and its close links to the major sponsor of the league, Russian Gazprom, was seen as another illustration of the soft-power measures of the Kremlin to bring Latvia back to its sphere of influence.²⁵²

In fact, this national distress over the strong “Moscow hand” (*Maskavas roka*) behind the international project of “Dinamo Riga” could have spoiled the whole celebration of the historic return.²⁵³ The alleged Russian identity of the team could complicate the acceptance of the new project in the Latvian hockey community from its very inception. Moreover, the revelations over the close links of the Latvian political and business elites with the powerful people in the Russia energy sector could have evoked the political sentiments of denunciation of the emerging partnership in the very hearts of

²⁵¹ See e.g., the commentary of the experts on energy security in the Baltics, A. Sprūds *In Ivo Leitāns, “Eksperts: Sašķidrīnātās Gāzes Terminālis Palielinātu Atkarību no Krievijas [Experts: LNG Terminal to Increase Dependence on Russia].”* *Diena*. 31 Mar. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sabiedriba/politika/eksperts-saskidrinatas-gazes-terminalis-palielinatu-atkaribu-no-krievijas-39255>>; Ironically, there is a Russian folklore say that there have been no “former” KGB agents.

²⁵² Ivo Leitāns, “Eksperts: Savicka Šķidrās Gāzes Biznesa Ideja Palielinātu Atkarību no Krievijas [Expert: Savickis’ Idea of Liquid Gas Business to Increase Dependence on Russia].” *Diena*. 1 Apr. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/arhivs/eksperts-savicka-skidras-gazes-biznesa-ideja-palielinatu-atkaribu-no-krievijas-13429214>>. Mid Para; More on the issues of energy security see e.g. Baiba Rulle, “Meistars un Čekists. Kas Viņus Vieno? [Boss and KGB Agent: What does Unite Them?].” *Diena*. 28 Apr. 2008. Web. 10 Apr. 2013. <<http://m.diena.lv/sabiedriba/meistars-un-cekists-kas-vinus-vieno-601194>>.

²⁵³ The concept of the “Moscow hand” (*Maskavas roka*) is rather a folklore slang used in uncovering the political implication of a variety of activities related to the involvement of Russia in Latvian affairs.

the ordinary Latvian fans, whose stronger national awareness could overshadow their hockey passions and great anticipations of the historical return. Thus, realizing that without winning the hearts of the Latvian hockey community, the organizers of the international revival of “Dinamo Riga” undertook on an uneasy task of how to confine their ambitious global cooperation with the Russians within the identifiable Latvian contours of national hockey development and the local culture of hockey nationalism.

The National Recruitment Principle

Being aware of the wide-spread popularity of the national team amongst the Latvian fans, the Latvian hockey officials and co-founders of “Dinamo Riga” began to distort the national concerns over the “Moscow hand.” The international revival of the legendary Latvian team and the partnership with the KHL was endorsed within the context of the strategic interests of national hockey development. Especially in the initial stages, the project of “Dinamo Riga” has been represented as an extension of the national hockey team. For this purpose, the national recruitment principle of the team has been defined in such a way so that the team’s global status does not hinder the fundamental interests of Latvian hockey. Oppositely, it was featured as the domestic foundry of players, which nurtures the best Latvian talent for the national squad.²⁵⁴ In time, these national concerns over the strategic directions in the participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL were officially supported by the President of the Latvian Hockey Federation, Kirov Lipman, just a few days before the start of the 2008 World Ice Hockey Championship in Quebec, Canada:

The main idea [of the revival] was that the team would have those hockey players, who could then be included in the national team of the country. And within a year we could achieve a fairly good professional level, creating such conditions that would allow the coach of the national team scout Latvian players throughout the whole season. After all, many of our players are playing in the second-rated clubs, they come to the national training camp, sometimes being not ready for such a serious competition as the World Championship. And we have to rush the

²⁵⁴ Ulmanis, *Dinamo Rīga – the Baltic Power* 52. According to the then-Chairman of the Board of A/C “Dinamo Riga,” Guntis Ulmanis, the team also “was intended as a club that would give Latvian hockey-players the chance to assert themselves and the club stays true to this principle. The team’s core consists of the players of the Latvian National Team plus five-six high-class foreign players.”

preparations and their conditioning - both physically and psychologically, and even technically. That was our main problem.²⁵⁵ [translation mine]

The national principle in recruiting under the umbrella of “Dinamo Riga” the best Latvian talent dispersed around different European and North-American minor leagues had found its practical application immediately after the incorporation of the team into the KHL. Although relying on a relatively small budget of \$11 million, compared with the top KHL teams, such as “AK Bars Kazan” - \$55 million or “SKA Saint Petersburg” and “Avangard Omsk” both \$50 million, the aggressive summer campaign of bringing the Latvian talent back home was unprecedented on its own terms.²⁵⁶ It has significantly changed the labor mobility patterns of Latvian hockey players developed during the post-Cold War era of international hockey development. Already at the end of April 2008, the team management approached the members of the national team preparing for the World Ice Hockey Championship in Quebec, Canada, being able to recruit nearly 50% of the players that would join the team in the trip overseas. Shortly, it was announced that Viktors Bļinovs (HK Gomel, Belarus), Oleg Sorokin (Fribourg-Gotteron, Switzerland), Rodrigo Laviņš (Södertälje SK, Sweden), Agris Saviels (Odense Bulldogs, Denmark), Atvars Tribuncovs (MODO, Sweden), Miķelis Rēdlihs (Metallurg Zhlobin, Belarus), Alexei Shirokov (Metallurg Zhlobin, Belarus), Edgars Masaļskis (Metallurg Zhlobin, Belarus), Sergei Naumov (HK Gomel, Belarus), and the only two members of the Latvian national squad representing the domestic league, Armands Bērziņš and Juris Štāls (HK Rīga 2000) signed the contracts with the new team. The newly-assigned general manager of “Dinamo Riga”, Normunds Sējējs, reported that while the national team would play in Canada they would continue working with the agents of other hockey players to close on the contract agreements.²⁵⁷ By mid-summer of 2008, the biggest Latvian diaspora in the Belarusian *Extraliga* was all but swept out by the team. With the latest signings of Lauris

²⁵⁵ Киров Липман. *Рижское Динамо: Хоккей, Бизнес или Политика?* Intro Para. [translation mine]. It should be noted, however, that the LHF president, Kirov Lipman, stepped down from the board of directors of “Dinamo Riga” at the end of May 2008 to avoid the possible “conflict of interests” while managing the affairs of Latvian hockey and being on the board of the team. In Jānis Pārums, “Lipmans Izstājies no a/s Rīgas Dinamo [Lipman Dropped out of A/C Dinamo Riga].” *SportaCenters.com*. 27 May. 2008. Web. 10 May. 2013. <http://sportacentrs.com/hokejs/27052008-lipmans_izstajies_no_a_s_rigas_dinamo>.

²⁵⁶ Although being supported by the SIA Itera Latvija, in the inaugural season of 2008/2009, “Dinamo Riga” had one of the smallest budgets in the league compared with other top KHL teams. In “Season Budgets of KHL Clubs Revealed.” *Dinamoriga.eu*. 23 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 May. 2013. <<http://www.dinamoriga.eu/en/news/view/season-budgets-of-khl-clubs-revealed>>.

²⁵⁷ Andris Pīzelis, “Zināmi Pirmie Rīgas Dinamo Spēlētāji [Became Known First Players of Dinamo Riga].” *SportaCenters.com*. 25 Apr. 2008, Web. 10 May. 2013. <http://sportacentrs.com/hokejs/25042008-zinami_pirmie_rigas_dinamo_speletaji>. Intro Para.

Dārziņš (HK Gomel, Belarus), Mārtiņš Cipulis (Metallurg Zhlobin, Belarus), Krišjānis Rēdlihs (Hamburg Freezers, Germany) and Aleksander Nizhivij (Torpedo Nizhny Novgorod, Russia), the first President of “Dinamo Riga,” Viesturs Koziols, pleasantly concluded that with the strategic acquisition of 14 members of the national squad, they completed the first phase of the “national composition” of the team.²⁵⁸

The Reconciliation with the Soviet Name of “Dinamo Riga”

Another crucial aspect of confining the rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” into the standards of the nation-wide project was related to its conflicting Soviet designations. The re-alignment of “Dinamo Riga,” whose history is deeply embedded in the Soviet past of Latvian sports, with the modern features of Latvian hockey nationalism was not an easy task to accomplish in terms of its ideological implications as well as the negative perceptions of Soviet times within a large segment of Latvian society. It should be noted that despite the popularity of “Dinamo Riga” during Soviet times, the team’s name had historical associations with the enforcement organizations of a Soviet state apparatus like the NKVD and KGB. They were responsible for the repressions and deportations in 1940’s and 1950s and condemned for the crimes against the Latvian people.²⁵⁹ After regaining independence in 1991, official Latvia launched a full-scale crusade against these Soviet symbols and their remnants in the political, cultural and economic life of the country.²⁶⁰ Consequently, “Dinamo Riga” was de-Sovietized. The name was removed instantly from use, and the Soviet team was renamed “Riga” and shortly after “Pārdaugava” when the club participated in the Russian international league in the mid-1990s. Notwithstanding the rich traditions of Soviet-Latvian hockey, within the circumstances of the ultimate denunciation of the Soviet past, the preservation or

²⁵⁸ In “Biļetes uz Rīgas Dinamo Spēlēm Arēnā Rīga Maksās no 7 - 12 Latus [Ticket for the Games of Dinamo Riga Cost 7-12 Lats].” *Diena*. 6 Jun. 2008. Web. 10 May. 2013.

<<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/biletas-uz-rigas-dinamo-spelem-arena-riga-maksas-no-7-12-latus-609043?cp=1#comments>>. Mid Para; After signing the players, the club’s management began to cautiously distancing from the idea that “Dinamo Riga” is the official base team for Latvian hockey, which increased tensions between the LHF and the “Dinamo Riga” management over the course of the years.

²⁵⁹ In autumn 1940, the sport organization “Dinamo,” gained notoriety in Latvia due to its links to the head of NKVD, Alfons Noviks, who was responsible for the repressions and mass deportations in Latvia between the years of 1940 to 1953. The deeds of Alfons Noviks were recollected after Latvia regained independence, and he was found guilty and imprisoned in 1995.

²⁶⁰ For more readings on the aspects of denunciation of Soviet past in the formative years of rebuilding the political communities in the Baltic states see e.g., Budryte, Dovile. *Taming Nationalism? Political Community Building in the Post-Soviet Baltic States* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005); Anatol, Lieven. *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

promotion of the names and symbols of Latvian sports associated with the Soviet era was not easy to accomplish due to a strong national resistance and possible legal complications.

The decision to eradicate the brand “Dinamo Riga” was later criticized by notable members of the Latvian hockey community. For instance, the Vice-President of the LHF, Helmut Balderis, saw it as “short-sighted” conformism, believing that Latvian hockey would have only won if from the very beginning of independence it had evolved around this historical brand of “Dinamo Riga,” whose “history” was made by “many generations of Latvian players.”²⁶¹ On the other hand, another notable member of the community, Artūrs Irbe, is still convinced that the name “Dinamo” is “not suitable” due to its “questionable past,” arguing that assigning the historical name of “Daugava” could be more appropriate for the expression of Latvian identity of the team on the international stage.²⁶² Indeed, unlike “Dinamo,” which was primarily associated with the all-union organizations of the Soviet Union, “Daugava” was a national creation of the Republican sports organizations. The sports society “Daugava,” was established in 1944. It was an attempt of the Latvian SSR sports authorities to give an opportunity for local sportsmen to join a sports organization with a national flavor.²⁶³

The first president of “Dinamo Riga,” Viesturs Koziols, had confessed that the co-founders of the team had “spent a lot of time” discussing what name could be assigned to the new team, and eventually “*Dinamo Riga* won out because Dinamo’s successes represented the best era in Latvian hockey, [...] and it would be silly to forget or ignore that.”²⁶⁴ Moreover, the club’s management is eager to portray the team as the successor of the great sports traditions, distancing the team’s identity from the historical associations with the enforcement institutions of the Soviet state. In his interview, Viesturs Koziols stated:

²⁶¹ From the interview with Helmut Balderis in the 2011 KHL Stars Game in Riga. In Margita Sprancmane, “Хельмут Балдерис: Тихонову Говорили, что я Трус [*Helmut Balderis: Tikhonov was Told that I am a Coward*].” *Fanzone.klh.ru*. 16 Dec. 2011. Web <<http://fanzone.khl.ru/news/15509/>>. End Para.

²⁶² “Irbe Vēlētos Latvijas Hokeja Klubu KHL, bet ar Citu Nosaukumu [*Irbe would like a Latvian Team Playing in theKHL*].” TV.Net.lv 9 Feb. 2011. Web. 10 May. 2013. <http://www.tvnet.lv/sports/hokejs/365313irbe_veletos_latvijas_hokeja_klubu_khl_bet_ar_citu_nosaukumu>. Intro Para.

²⁶³ This national sport union was organized after the re-instatement of Soviet rule in the Baltics. Simultaneously, distinct national organizations were introduced in the neighboring Republics of Lithuania and Estonia. In BASB Daugava, *Daugavai XX Gadi [20 Years to Daugava]* (Rīga: BASB Daugava Centrālā Padome, 1964) 4.

²⁶⁴ Zariņš, *Team President Talks about Rebirth of Dinamo Riga* Mid Para. [translation mine].

[We are] the successor to the effect that we play the same type of hockey and try to show our teeth, like the original team. Playing a unique style that is significantly different from other teams has been also a stamp for the modern *Dinamo Riga*, which has already been noted in the media. We play differently compared with many Russian clubs. In this sense, yes, we are the successors of the hockey tradition. In legal terms, as the team was under the Soviet Ministry of the Interior, – no way. Those days, thank God, are over, and we have no relation to the Interior Ministry, nor any other ministries.²⁶⁵ [translation mine]

In fact, the selection of the team's name was the kind of moment of truth in the restoration of the symbolic continuity of modern Latvian hockey with its glorious traditions from Soviet times. Interestingly, when the agreement over the accession of "Dinamo Riga" into the KHL was almost finalized, the official team name of the Latvian participant was still undecided. Even though, the principal organizers of the KHL had already encouraged the Latvian stakeholders to evolve the team's name around the historical name of *Dinamo*, the future co-founders of HC "Dinamo Riga" were still hesitant. Instead, they decided that it would be better to include the old and potentially new generations of fans in the name selection. Thus, the Latvian hockey fans were given the choice of three most commonly known team names in Latvian hockey, which derived their origins from Soviet times, such as "Dinamo Riga," "Daugava Riga" and "Latvijas Bērzs" (*Latvian Birch*). Whereas the two of those names, "Dinamo" and "Daugava," served as historical names of the Latvian hockey flagship during Soviet times, the "Latvijas Bērzs" name was related to the local farm-club of "Dinamo Riga" originating during Tikhonov's era. Despite the potential choices of national flavor, the majority of Latvian hockey fans decided to go with the historical name of "Dinamo Riga," which won the vote with the overwhelming result.²⁶⁶ Consequently, this loyalty check of Latvian hockey fans has signified the first important victory of "Dinamo Riga" in acclaiming the status of the "people's team."²⁶⁷ Shortly thereafter, the KHL president,

²⁶⁵ "Виестурс Козиолс: Все о Динамо [*Viesturs Koziols: Everything about Dinamo*]." *Delfi.lv*. 30 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 May 2013. <<http://rus.delfi.lv/news/daily/versions/article.php?id=22068837>>. Mid Para.

²⁶⁶ Brencis and Ozols, *Competitive Identity for Nation of Latvia* 19.

²⁶⁷ Ulmanis. *Dinamo Rīga – the Baltic Power* 53. The concept of "people's team" was later enhanced by the team's management after the first two successful years of team's participation in the KHL.

Aleksander Medvedev, officially confirmed that the Latvians decided to go back to their “historical traditions,” playing in the KHL under the name of “Dinamo Riga.”²⁶⁸

The Team of Latvian Patriots

Despite the wide popularity of “Dinamo Riga” in Soviet times, its classic uniform, however, lacked any distinct features that can be easily associated with the official symbols of Latvian nationalism. Conversely, the classic blue-and-white colors of the jerseys and the stylized capital letter of “D” on the insignia of the team explicitly indicated the team’s direct affiliation to the All-Union organization of “Dinamo.” Moreover, the appearance of the elements from the official flag of the Latvian SSR on the emblem of the team served to signify the political affiliation of the Republican hockey flagship to the Soviet system. In fact, the only feature that was ideologically “neutral” to the modern national symbols of Latvia was the famous background panorama of the Riga towers, which was often used on the uniform of the 1970s and early 1980s. Ironically however, even the old towers of Riga could be, in the most radical fashion, associated with the centuries-long German domination but not with the national symbols of Latvia. Certainly, the most hostile remnants of the Soviet identity of “Dinamo Riga” could not be used in the formation of the team’s brand because of their antagonistic nature to the very principles of Latvian independence regained after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Accordingly, the Soviet image of “Dinamo Riga” was significantly re-formulated in a way that it reflects at best the modern political setting and new trends in sporting culture of Latvian hockey fans developed in the recent years of international hockey competition. In this instance, the IIHF World Hockey Championships and Olympic Games tournaments provide the international venue where the vital features of Latvian nationalism are expressed and celebrated by the world-renowned Latvian fans dressed up in the national colors. Moreover, it would be accurate to declare that the game of ice hockey facilitates “flag waving nationalism” in the Latvian sportive community as perhaps nowhere else in the world.²⁶⁹ Following this trend, the co-founders of “Dinamo Riga” began to evolve the team’s identity around the official symbols of Latvian sporting

²⁶⁸ Juris Miņins, “Rīgas Dinamo Atdzimst? [Dinamo Riga is Reborn?].” *SportaCentrs.com*. 22 Mar. 2008. Web. 1 May. 2013. <http://sportacentrs.com/hokejs/21032008-rigas_dinamo_-_atdzimst?is_mobile=1>. Intro Para; As of now, the official web-site of “Dinamo Riga” states that the revived team takes its origins beginning the year of 1946.

²⁶⁹ On the aspects of “flag waving” nationalism of sports see the Chapter on the role of sports in celebration of national identity in Bairner and Molnar, *The Politics of the Olympics: A Survey* 214.

nationalism. The old image of “Dinamo Riga” was fused to the fabric of the national colors of Team Latvia. The original letter “D” was included in the new logo of “Dinamo Riga” and decorated with two lions and three stars, representing the symbols of Riga and Latvia respectively. However, the classic blue-and-white colors of the jerseys were replaced with the national colors of the flag (maroon and white) as in the case of Team Latvia. As the first President of “Dinamo Riga”, Viesturs Koziols, confessed, there “was no single thought” or “temptation” to go back to the original blue-and-white jerseys. Moreover, it was the joint decision of the club and the artist, Dagnis Skurbe, whose design won the national competition amongst another 15 contestants.²⁷⁰

Interestingly, if one compared today’s uniform of “Dinamo Riga” with the attire of the national team, both uniforms may look, especially for the more untutored eyes, completely identical. They both incorporate the vital features of national independence and sovereignty. In fact, this symbolic interchangeability of the uniforms confines “Dinamo Riga” to the contours of a nationwide project, which nurtures true Latvian patriots in the international venues of ice hockey competition. For instance, the political formulation of this social importance of the team in terms of its empowering role in embracing Latvian patriotism on the global stage has been publicized by the first president of “Dinamo Riga,” Viesturs Koziols. In his interview to the western compatriots from the North-American communities of WWII Latvian exiles, the President diffused the national distress about the negative consequences of the partnership with the KHL to the Latvians. Stressing the national identity of the project, he argued that by choosing the “maroon colors” and “Latvia’s stars” they “wanted to show” that the “Dinamo” people are the true “patriots” of Latvia, and that with their participation in the Kontinental Hockey League they “respect” and “defend Latvia’s honour.”²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ *Вiestурс Козиолс: Все о Динамо* Mid Para. [translation mine].

²⁷¹ Zariņš, *Team President Talks about Rebirth of Dinamo Riga* Mid Para. It should be noted that the interview of Viesturs Koziols was given to the online site of the *World Federation of Latvians* organized by the former WWII exiles. For instance, responding to the comments made by the former Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Artis Pabriks, that the KHL expansion on Latvian soil is a politically motivated project of Russians, he stated that: “I would suggest to Mr. Pabriks that he not mix something delicious like cottage cheese with something that doesn’t taste well in the same bowl – to not mix politics with sports. Our goals are all about sports and it is difficult to imagine how the Russians could influence the Swedish, Finnish, German or Austrian governments through the KHL. That’s crazy. As far as I’m concerned, the more teams we’ll have from European countries, the better it will be for Latvia’s interests.”

C. “Dinamo Riga” as a New Vehicle of Latvian Sporting Nationalism: The Celebration of Latvian Sports Culture in the KHL

Since its very inception, the KHL has become an important sports network for the global promotion of Latvia’s sports image and celebration of civic passions. Already after the first two years in the KHL, the Chairman of the Board of Directors, and the former President of Latvia, Guntis Ulmanis, gladly reported that “by competing against the top hockey teams of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan” the hockey club, “Dinamo Riga,” not only gave impetus to the global development of Latvian hockey but also acclaimed the status of “the most popular sport team in Latvia,” whose “victories” and “defeats” are followed by “almost every resident of this country.”²⁷² Although the correlation of the global achievements of Latvian hockey in the IIHF tournaments with the team’s participation in the KHL still remains a matter of debate, this self-confident statement on acclaiming a national status in the realm of Latvian sports seems more genuine. In short a time, the project of “Dinamo Riga” has become an important social force in hoisting Latvian identity on global and local levels. Moreover, if as a symbol of *imagined community*, “sport can be considered one of the most significant expressions and manifestations of identity today,” then “Dinamo Riga,” has confidently filled this nationwide purpose, becoming a powerful sports vehicle in the reproduction of civic togetherness and celebration of Latvia’s image in the international sports venues.²⁷³

Gaining the Momentum for Acclaiming a National Status

This status of a nation’s symbol in international sports would not be possible to achieve without the devotion of Latvian hockey fans. The quick pre-season tournament at the “Inbox.lv” Ice Hall in *Piņķi* near Riga became the first tough lesson in attesting the popularity of the new project. On August 2, 2008, the legendary team made a victorious 3:2 debut against another KHL contender, “Amur Khabarovsk.”²⁷⁴ This first game of “Dinamo Riga” on Latvian soil since the collapse of the Soviet Union was expected to generate a huge turnout. Ironically however, a quarter of an hour before the game started, it became apparent that the arena stands would not be completely filled. Given the uproar

²⁷² Ulmanis, *Dinamo Rīga – the Baltic Power* 53.

²⁷³ On Sports and Civic Passions see: Maguire, et al., *Sport Worlds* 135.

²⁷⁴ “Rīgas *Dinamo* Pārspēj Habarovskas *Amur* [*Dinamo Riga Outplays Amur Khabarovsk*].” *Apollo.lv*. 2 Aug. 2008, Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.apollo.lv/zinas/rigas-dinamo-parspej-habarovskas-amur/386557>>.

in the media around the team, the attendance was disappointing. However, closer to the start of the KHL season, the team's popularity started to increase. The introduction of the fan club of "Dinamo Riga" on August 30, 2008 was an important event in the modern history of the club. At the call of the team management, the hardcore vanguard of "Dinamo Riga" fans, all dressed in the new national colors of the team, arrived at the "Inbox.lv" Arena in *Piņķi* to organize the official support of the team.²⁷⁵ The founding event was attended by around a hundred fans of various ages, who had the opportunity to meet with the team's management and new players and talk in a very informal atmosphere at the ice rink cafe about the future strategies of the fan club. The meeting was concluded with the passionate signing of the new anthem of "Dinamo Riga" and promising forecasts. Based on the pre-season results against dominant Russian and Scandinavian teams, the management assured the spirited crowd that Latvian hockey would establish a strong position in the KHL.²⁷⁶

Shortly, just a week before the commencement of the first official KHL games on Latvian soil, the Latvian fans began a campaign to increase the team's support. The mob of "Dinamo Riga" fans occupied the famous greeting sign "*Rīga*" on the Daugavpils highway at the entrance of the city to give a visible support to "Dinamo Riga." The fans fused their "*Dinamo*" letters to the greeting sign, transforming the inscription of "*Rīga*" to the greetings of "*Rīga Dinamo*" to inspire the Riga residents to support their city team in the KHL, which began its season with the long road trip to the Far East of Russia. The fans shouted: "[w]e hope and are confident that this impressive greeting performance in support of *Dinamo Riga* will inspire future [Latvian] victories in the KHL championship."²⁷⁷ Moreover, their sporting performance was also directed to the activation of the national support of "Dinamo Riga," whose players represent the honor of Latvian hockey abroad:

We would like that the *Dinamo* players feel the support from those of us, who stayed home. Guys, we are with you, as we have always stayed faithful to our

²⁷⁵ Pastalnieks, A/S "*Dinamo Riga*" *Gadagrāmata 2008/2009* 36. In the official historiography of the rebirth, the date of the foundation of the fan club of "Dinamo Riga" is considered paramount to the first year achievements of "Dinamo Riga."

²⁷⁶ "Sestdien Dībinās Rīgas Dinamo FanuKubu [*On Saturday will be Founded Fan Club of Dinamo Riga*]." *Diena*. 29 Aug. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/sestdien-dibinas-rigas-dinamo-fanu-klubu-624198>>; "Koziols Apmierināts ar Rīgas Dinamo Konkurētspēju [*Koziols is Happy with Dinamo Riga Competitiveness*]." *Diena*. 30 Aug. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/koziols-apmierinats-ar-rigas-dinamo-konkuretspeju-624348>>. End Para.

²⁷⁷ "Rīga Dinamo?! [*Rīga Dinamo?!*]." *Diena*. 5 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sabiedriba/riga-dinamo-625500>>.

Latvian national team! Not for nothing, the Latvian fans are acknowledged as the most enthusiastic hockey supporters, and our voices will reach worldwide attention!²⁷⁸ [translation mine]

Yet, the first KHL games at home proved to be a crucial test of the fans' loyalty to the team, whose management was also pursuing an ambitious agenda of making "Dinamo Riga" a profitable international project. It should be noted that due to the rent expenses of the "Arena Riga," the team management set the average ticket prices at 10 Lats (roughly \$18), which was around 3-5 times higher than the prices in Russia.²⁷⁹ Taking into consideration the fragile economies of many Latvians, the ticket prices could have easily prevented a good portion of the fans from going to the arena. Nonetheless, four hours before the start of the first game against "HC MVD Moscow Oblast," the marketing director of "Dinamo Riga," Mārtiņš Kalniņš, gladly confirmed that 10,000 tickets out of the 10,300 seats of the home "Arena Riga" were all but swept out of the Internet sales or reserved by the business organizations. After the ticket rush, the management gave a confident forecast that the planned 25 games at the home arena would be mostly sold out especially when team plays against such top Russian teams as "Avangard Omsk" with the superstar players like the Czech forward Jaromir Jagr.²⁸⁰

The successful performance of "Dinamo Riga" in the opening regular season caused extraordinary excitement in the Latvian hockey community. Nobody could expect this frisky start of the team that was literally built from scratch. The confident performance of "Dinamo Riga" against such top Russian teams as "SKA Saint Petersburg," "CSKA Moscow," and "Dinamo Moscow" gave a tremendous self-confidence boost to the team's management and significantly increased fans' interest. Moreover, the final spurt of "Dinamo Riga" with a KHL winning-streak record of six

²⁷⁸ "Fani Uzrakstu Rīga Pārvēš Sveicienā Rīgas Dinamo Hokejistiem [*The Inscription Riga Transformed to the Greeting of the Dinamo Riga*]." *Diena*. 5 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/fani-uzrakstu-riga-parvers-sveiciens-rigas-dinamo-hokejistiem-625366>>. End Para.

²⁷⁹ For the prices comparisons see: Karen Markaryan, "Бедных Просим не Беспокоиться! В Риге Установили Самые Высокие в Континентальной Лиге Цены на Билеты [*Poor Please not Need to Worry! Riga Sets the Highest Ticket Prices in the Continental League*]." *Soviet Sports*. 18 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/305091>>. End Para; Moreover, in the mid-season the prices were increased about 30% due to the VAT increase. In "Biļetes uz Rīgas Dinamo Mājas Spēlēm Maksās Dārgāk [*Ticket for Dinamo Riga's Game are more Expensive*]." *Diena*. 8 Jan. 2009. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/biletas-uz-rigas-dinamo-majas-spelem-maksas-dargak-645306>>.

²⁸⁰ Aleksandrs Vorobjovs, "Papildināta - Uz Dinamo Rīga Spēli Pārdotas 90% Biļešu, Brīdina par Sastrēgumiem [*Update: Dinamo Riga's Game Tickets Sold to 90%, Warning for Traffic Congestion*]." *Diena*. 11 Sep. 2008. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sabiedriba/riga/papildinata-uz-dinamo-riga-speli-pardotas-90-proc-bilesu-bridina-par-sastregumiem-626336>>. End Para.

victories shut down the last skeptics. Finishing the regular season in the “Kharlamov Division” second only to the Russian hockey powerhouse, “Locomotiv Yaroslavl,” “Dinamo Riga” was going to the spring playoffs. Throughout the inaugural season, the top-notch hockey games in the “Arena Riga” often collected audiences of around 8000 to 9000 spectators, and were sold out when the big gunners of Russian hockey arrived in the Latvian capital. Moreover, the revived team went immediately to the leaders of Latvian sports broadcasting, acclaiming the largest audiences across the country.²⁸¹ Summing up the emerging national popularity of “Dinamo Riga,” Koziols reported: “[o]ur games are broadcast on television and we haven’t had an audience less than 180,000. The best that basketball does is 80,000. Our biggest television audiences were 330,000 when we played CSKA and SKA St. Petersburg. That says a lot.”²⁸²

The Greatest Moment of Civic Unity and Celebration of National Identity

At once, there was a feeling that the whole nation lived by excitement from the recent hockey achievements of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL. Previously, this avid devotion to national hockey would normally take place in spring when the national squad participated in the IIHF World Ice Hockey Championships. However, “Dinamo Riga” has firmly surpassed these seasonal limitations in the hockey calendar of the Latvian hockey community.²⁸³ Moreover, when in the years of 2008-2010 Latvia was experiencing the harsh consequences of the devastating financial crisis, it seemed that the tremendous achievements of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL had remained the only source of pride for many distressed Latvians about their suffering country.²⁸⁴ This extraordinary display of

²⁸¹ “Динамо Рига в КХЛ: Пять сезонов в Сравнении [*Dinamo Riga in the KHL: Five Seasons in Comparison*]. *Delfi.lv*. 23 Mar. 2013. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://rus.delfi.lv/news/sport/dinamoriga/dinamo-riga-v-khl-pyat-sezonov-v-sravnenii.d?id=43171210&page=2>>. End Para.

²⁸² Zariņš, *Team President Talks about Rebirth of Dinamo Riga* Mid Para.

²⁸³ Interestingly, when the number of Latvian fans going abroad for the 2009 IIHF WC had slightly dropped, the Latvian travel agencies explained the diminishing numbers of travelers by two events: the economic crisis and the edition of “Dinamo Riga in the KHL, arguing that the WC is no longer the only option for the fans due to the abundance of quality of hockey during the KHL season. In “Hokeja Fanu Interese par Braucieniem uz PČ Atgriežas 10 Gadu SenāLīmenī [*Hockey Fans Interest to Travel to WC Returns to the 10-Year-ago Level*].” *Diena*. 3 Apr. 2009. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/hokeja-fanu-interese-par-braucieniem-uz-pc-atgriezas-10-gadu-sena-limeni-660768>>. Mid Para.

²⁸⁴ In the years 2008/2009, Latvia got hit by a devastating economic crisis, which led to the violent riots on the streets of Riga on January 13, 2009 and the resignation of the Ivars Godmanis government. The unemployment rates picked its highest rates beginning 2009, increasing from 10% to 22% by the end of 2010. More info on unemployment rates during the crisis in Latvia see e.g., In “Latvia – Standardised Unemployment.” *Statistical Office of the European Commission (Eurostat)*. Web. 10 Aug. 2013. <http://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/quickview.do?SERIES_KEY=132.STS.M.lv.S.UNEH.RTT000.4.000>. On the Riga riots see e.g., Elen Barry, “Latvia Is Shaken by Riots over its Weak Economy.” *The New York Times*, 14 Jan. 2009. Web 11 May. 2013. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/15/world/europe/15latvia.html>>.

Latvian civic passion found its way out in the unforgettable KHL playoffs series of “Dinamo Riga” against the powerhouse of Russian hockey “Dinamo Moscow.”

In a very symbolic way, “Dinamo Riga” crossed its sticks with the historical rival, “Dinamo Moscow” in the first round of the inaugural 2008/2009 KHL playoffs. These two teams had already met two decades ago when the Latvian team, led by the young goalkeeper, Artūrs Irbe, in a dramatic fashion eliminated “Dinamo Moscow” from the semifinals of the Soviet Championship. Significantly, to raise the morale of the Latvian hockey fans, the national sports channel, “LTV7,” broadcasted the retro footage of the victorious 1988 series in a popular sports program, reimagining the great traditions of Soviet-Latvian hockey by linking it to the modern sportive culture of Latvian hockey. The meaning of the historical sports retrospective was clear enough in its symbolic terms. As well as the Soviet times’ team coached by the legendary Vladimir Yurzinov, being the underdogs, the modern “Dinamo Riga,” was a true revelation of the season. The goal of the modern “Dinamo Riga” was to repeat the spectacular history of Soviet times in its inaugural season in the KHL. Yet, the first game in Riga could become the last game of the whole playoff series since the loss of the first two games in Moscow.

In fact, this episode of the Latvian history of sports signified one of the greatest moments of the expression of Latvian civic togetherness and sporting nationalism in the global events of international hockey. Following the observation of Eric Hobsbawm on the ways in which sports is “so uniquely effective as a medium for inculcating national feelings,” on the night of the decisive playoff game against “Dinamo Moscow,” the “imagined community” of Latvia seemed “more real” as a hockey team “Dinamo Riga,” whose players defended the honor of the country against the Russian team.²⁸⁵ When “Dinamo Riga faced its do-or-die destiny, the Latvian hockey community instantly responded to the call of the team’s management to put on a great show and support the team with pride. At the entrance of the “Arena Riga,” the stewards were handing out T-shirts, specially made for this game playoff to rally the unity of the fans.²⁸⁶ On the back of the T-shirts there was a proudly flaunted slogan: “for Our People, for the Victory, for *Dinamo!*” During the warm up, the “Dinamo Riga” players responded to the fans, taking off on the ice wearing unique sweaters on which was written: “Thank you for your

²⁸⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* 143.

²⁸⁶ “Rīgas Dinamo Aicina Laicīgi Ierasties uz Spēli, Daļu Biļešu Kasēs Vēl Pārdos [*The Last Call of Dinamo Riga to Late Arrivals, Some Tickets could be still Purchased*].” *Diena*. 4 Mar. 2009. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. < <http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/rigas-dinamo-aicina-laicigi-ierasties-uz-speli-dalu-bilesu-kases-vel-pardos-655167>>. Intro Para.

support!” Moreover, when the fully packed “Arena Riga” stood up and began passionately to sing the national anthem, “God Bless Latvia!” (*Dievs, Svētī Latviju!*), the patriotism of the fans of “Dinamo Riga” had instantly become the archetype of sporting nationalism in the KHL community. On the very next day of the dramatic 3:4 loss of “Dinamo Riga” to their foes from Moscow, the Russian national newspaper, *Soviet Sports*, wrote with the utmost admiration: when witnessing the synchronic signing of the national anthem by the Latvian hockey fans, “the heart stops beating in all of those who are present at the arena, regardless of their club sympathy. How beautiful this act [of patriotism] was.”²⁸⁷ At the end of the inaugural season in the KHL, “Dinamo Riga” released an official statement to thank all the Latvian fans for the support and pointed out the historical significance of the national support of “Dinamo Riga” in the playoff series. “Without a doubt, this game will go down in the history of the KHL, “Dinamo Riga” and the history of all Latvian sports.”²⁸⁸

Beyond the Boundaries of Sports Project: Dinamo Riga as a National Symbol

In short time, the project of “Dinamo Riga” has become a national symbol in the promotion of Latvia’s image on the global stage of international hockey. When in the playoffs series of 2009-2010, the Latvian team shook the very foundations of the KHL sports hierarchy, eliminating the Russian powerhouse, “SKA Saint Petersburg,” backed by the major sponsor of the league, Gazprom, this shocking event had sent the message across the Russians hockey community.²⁸⁹ Obviously, the case of “Dinamo Riga” has shown to the Russian bosses of the KHL that the significant amount of money spent in sports is not always what matters.²⁹⁰ Moreover, some nationally-inclined Russian hockey

²⁸⁷ Kirill Belyakov, “Рекорд на Дорожку. Рижане Завершили Сезон Новым Рекордом Посещаемости в КХЛ – Последний Матч Битвы Двух Динамо Собрал 11200 Зрителей [*Record on the Track. Rigans Complete Seasons with New Attendance Record in the League – The Last Match of the Battle of Two Dynamos Gathered 11,200 spectators*].” *Soviet Sports*. 5 Mar. 2009. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/323182>>. Mid Para. [translation mine].

²⁸⁸ Pastalnieks, *A/S “Dinamo Riga” Gadagrāmata 2008/2009* 133. [translation mine]; Moreover, during season’s closing ceremony at the “Arena Riga,” the Chairman of the Board of Directors of “Dinamo Riga,” Guntis Ulmanis, emotionally remarked that it was “the most beautiful hockey season playing in Latvian history.” In Aivars Pastalnieks and Kristiāns Purviņš, *A/S Dinamo Riga Gadagramata 2009/2010 [A/C Dinamo Riga Yearbook 2009/2010]* (Riga: SIA Dardedze Holografija, 2010) 14. [translation mine].

²⁸⁹ Kirill Belyakov, “Рижская Сенсация. Восьмая Команда Запада Выбила из Плей-офф Главного Фаворита Чемпионата и Победителя своей Конференции [*Sensation in Riga. Eighth Team of the West Division Knocked out thr Main Favorite of the Championship and the Winner of its Conference*].” *Soviet Sports*. 15 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.sovsport.ru/gazeta/article-item/375822>>. Mid Para.

²⁹⁰ The KHL President, A. Medvedev, pointed out about the results of the second KHL season: “[t]he Championship showed that having high salary players does not guarantee victory. The “Dinamo Riga”, and Balashiha’s team success without exaggeration made a real revolution for the Russian hockey management.

specialists compared the fiasco of the Gazprom-sponsored team with the crushing defeat of the Russian NHL superstars to the Latvian national team in the 2000 World Ice Hockey Championship in Saint Petersburg. In a similar fashion of the last year season, the playoff series games gathered a fully-packed “Arena Riga,” consolidating a great performance of sporting patriotism. This unconditional devotion of the Latvian fans to “Dinamo Riga” was not possible to buy for any money. Not for nothing that one of the KHL prizes, for best work with supporters, went to the “Dinamo Riga” fan club.²⁹¹ All season long, the variety of Russian hockey specialists, coaches, commentators and ordinary sports site users prized the role modeling of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL in terms of its competitiveness, top-notch organization of sporting events and great patriotic culture of the Latvian fans: “[i]f you want to experience the taste of the playoffs - a colorful, lively, exciting and intriguing – you should go to Riga.”²⁹² In the light of the international recognition of the success story of the participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL the former president of Latvia, Guntis Ulmanis, confidently declared that it is “already safe to say that *Dinamo Riga* is no longer just a sports project, but it has already become one of the national symbols.”²⁹³

This European flavor in mastering spectacular sports events in Riga has received considerable attention in the KHL, whose marketing department has always aimed at the bigger rivalry with the NHL. Interestingly, the President of the KHL, and the Vice-President of Gazprom, Aleksander Medvedev visited Riga for the final game of the playoffs series between “Dinamo Riga” and “SKA Saint Petersburg” and watched the games in the VIP sector together with the Prime-Minister of Latvia, Valdis Dombrovskis, and the Chairman of Council of “Dinamo Riga,” Juris Savickis. After the playoffs series ended, the KHL President highly prized the top notch organization of the playoff events

Victories are made not by budgets, but the players and coaches.” Mid Para. In “KHL Prezidents Uzskata, ka Līgas Otrā Sezona Bijusi Labāka par Pirmo [*The KHL President Believes that the Second Season was Better than the First*].” *Diena*. 25 May. 2010. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.diena.lv/sports/hokejs/khl-prezidents-uzskata-ka-ligas-otra-sezona-bijusi-labaka-par-pirmo-734988>>. Mid Para. [translation mine].

²⁹¹ Pastalnieks and Purviņš, *A/S Dinamo Riga Gadagramata 2009/2010* 17.

²⁹² From the spring 2010 survey on what sports events attract the attention of sports bloggers in Russia. In Vladimir Biryukov, “Жаль, что на Олимпиаде нет Нефтегазовой Трубы... [*It is a Pity that there is no Oil and Gas Pipes in the Olympics...*].” *Svoboda.org*. 15 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Jun. 2013.

<<http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/1984126.html>>; Further reading see e.g., Kirill Belyakov, “Плей-офф в Риге: 12 Тысяч Человек в Белых Майках, Суперхоккей и Пиво из Брандспойтов [*Playoffs in Riga: 12 Thousand People in the White Jerseys, Superhockey and Beer from a Fire Engine*].” *Blogging Liveinternet.ru*. 14 Mar. 2010. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/kirusha19/rubric/1387760/>>. Intro Para; Pastalnieks and Purviņš, *A/S Dinamo Riga Gadagramata 2009/2010* 17.

²⁹³ Pastalnieks and Purviņš, *A/S Dinamo Riga Gadagramata 2009/2010* 6. [translation mine].

in Riga, arguing that the Latvian expertise in organizing sports events and their marketing knowledge should be learned and adopted in different Russian cities.²⁹⁴

In a special historical recognition of Latvia as one of the major European hockey centers in the popularization of the KHL, Riga was chosen along Saint Petersburg to represent the KHL in the exhibition games against the NHL teams, “Carolina Hurricanes” and “Phoenix Coyotes” in October 2010. The last time when Riga hosted teams from the NHL was in the final phase of the fading away Cold War ice hockey competition, exemplified in the 1990 Soviet-Canadian exhibition series. Then, the Soviet times “Dinamo Riga” competed against the symbol of Canadian hockey, “Montreal Canadiens.” Generating the global recognition of Latvian hockey for its passionate fanning culture, the game between “Dinamo Riga” and “Phoenix Coyotes” went into the history of international sports as one of the key symbolic events, signifying the re-instatement of the international rivalry between North American and European hockey.²⁹⁵

The season of 2011/2012 was distinguished for the empowering role of “Dinamo Riga” to bolster the Latvian sports image on international level. First time in Latvian history, “Dinamo Riga” was invited to represent the country in one of the most prestigious European tournaments, the “Spengler Cup” in Davos, Switzerland.²⁹⁶ Soon, the promotion of Latvian hockey took its ultimate stage when Riga was hosting the 2012 KHL “All Stars.” The last time Latvia took on an international event of such scale was in 2006 when Riga hosted the World Ice Hockey Championship. In the KHL release, it was reported that “Riga’s hockey fans are world-renowned for their passionate and vocal support - and the Latvian capital proved it was the perfect host for the fourth KHL *All-Star* game with a sell-out crowd and a terrific atmosphere.”²⁹⁷ The festivity in the capital

²⁹⁴ On personal experiences of A. Medvedev in Riga during the playoffs series between “Dinamo Riga” and “SKA Saint Petersburg” see e.g., Kirill Belyakov, *Плей-офф в Пузе Миды Пара*; Before the start of the third season, the KHL, President A. Medvedev pointed out that the positive example for all KHL teams is “of course, “Dinamo Riga,” which uses the maximum marketing potential of its brand.” In “Александр Медведев: Сезон-2010/11 Должен Стать Первым, Который КХЛ Завершит в Плюсе [*Alexander Medvedev: The Sezon-2010/11 should be the First in which the KHL Ends with Revenue*].” *Sports.ru*. 7 Sep. 2010. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.sports.ru/hockey/72884563.html>>. End Para.

²⁹⁵ The exhibition games KHLvs. NHL were portrayed by the KHL as the return of the history event. “After a 20-year Break.” *KHLNHL.ru*. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.khlnhl.ru/en/official/>>; The captain of “Phoenix Coyotes,” Shane Doan, later confessed that “It was an unbelievable atmosphere,” referring to the Latvian fans as “arguably” ... “the best fans in the world with the way they support their teams.” In Shawn P. Roarke, “Coyotes Survive Riga Challenge for 3-1 Victory.” *NHL.com*. 16 Aug. 2011. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.nhl.com/ice/recap.htm?id=2010011007>>. Mid Para.

²⁹⁶ Jānis Stepītis, *AS DINAMO Rīga Gadagrāmata 2011/2012 [AC Dinamo Riga Yearbook 2011/2012]* (Rīga: SIA Dardedze Hologrāfija, 2012) 132.

²⁹⁷ “Record-Breaking All-Stars.” *KHL.ru*. 21 Jan. 2012. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://en.khl.ru/news/2012/1/21/24425.html>>.

of Latvia lasted for a full month, culminating with a memorable show in a fully-packed “Arena Riga” between two all-star teams, led by the Latvian and Russian hockey superstars, Sandis Ozoliņš (*Western conference*), and Sergei Fedorov (*Eastern conference*).²⁹⁸ It should be noted that at the beginning of December 2011, the legends of Russian hockey paid the visit to Riga to play against the Latvians in an exhibition match dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Latvian hockey. On a special note, the KHL “All-Star” game was heralded by the “Old Stars” game between the Latvian and Russian legends, captained by the legendary Helmut Balderis and Vyacheslav Fetisov.

²⁹⁸ “Озолиньш против Федорова [*Ozoliņš vs. Fedorov*].” *KHL.ru*. 12 Oct. 2011. Web. 10 Jun. 2013. <<http://www.khl.ru/news/2011/10/12/34641.html>>.

VI. CONCLUSION

The end result of the Cold War sports rivalry on western terms made many scholars assume the position that one of the most obvious consequences of globalization in relation to sports is that the sports practices of the national communities have become increasingly homogenized in accordance with western standards. Although the hegemonic influence of the historically more “established groups” of the West in the international sportization cannot be underestimated, the homogenization approach largely discounts the national responses of the “outsider” cultures to the global flows in world sports. The case of the Russian national response to a global hockey homogeneity shows that Maguire’s (1994; 2012) open-ended approach of studying the effects of the global sports processes on the national communities through the lens of “diminishing contrasts” and “increasing varieties” has a legitimate frame.²⁹⁹

Indeed, on the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought up a significant reduction of contrasts in the landscape of international hockey if compared with the Cold War animosities of international hockey. Moreover, throughout the 1990s to mid-2000s, the NHL became the economic core of global hockey development subduing the rest of the hockey world to its hegemonic patterns. Despite the positive aspects of the opened borders allowing the increasing mobility of professional sportsmen, the post-Soviet countries like Russia experienced the drainage of hockey talent and decline of the international reputation as a great hockey power. As a result, in Russia, the successor of the glorious traditions of Soviet hockey, this uneven exhibition of modern expansion of sports activated counteractive measures to restore the national prestige in world sports.

The Russian insurgence to these globalization processes in international hockey is exemplified by the creation of a new zone of sports interaction, the KHL. Although the creation of the direct competitor to the “established groups” like the NHL was guided by the official sportive ideology to restore the historical positions of national hockey, the continental status of the KHL is largely based on the acceptance of the new globalization dynamics in the modern diffusion of international hockey. Moreover, the new sports network “emulated” the patterns of sports organization of its North-American adversaries. Consequently, the introduction of the KHL has increased “varieties” in international

²⁹⁹ Maguire, *Sport, Identity Politics* 398-427; Maguire, *European Body Cultures and the Making of the Modern World: Zones of Prestige*.

hockey, becoming a new charismatic zone of sports interaction for European hockey. The Pan-European contours of the KHL have recently attracted not only the countries of the post-Soviet space as Latvia, Czech Republic, Slovakia, or Croatia, but also the Nordic countries as Finland and Norway.

The historical revival of the Latvian-Russian contacts in the realm of ice hockey is linked to the wider civilizational processes, which took place in the Baltic Sea littoral after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. During Soviet times, Latvian and Russian hockey were closely intertwined, forming a solid cultural bond for the future sports cooperation. Since the national awakening movement in the late 1980s, the official sporting nationalism of Latvia peaked its way through the struggle with the Soviet sports authorities for the international recognition of national sports, especially in the western community. However, the post-Soviet realities in Latvian hockey had not transpired on the same level with the new national trajectories of the country, aiming at departing from Russia's influence and integrating into the western structures.

Although Latvia regained international status in the IIHF, as well as other former Soviet republics, Latvian hockey experienced the same effects of the reduction of difference in the post-Cold War development of international hockey, facing the drainage of hockey talent to the western countries and the weakening of the domestic hockey development. Ironically, when during the post-Communist transformations, official Latvia was seeking to “escape” from the margins of “Eastern Europe” and rebranding itself as “fundamentally Western” (Merje Kuus 2007),³⁰⁰ Latvian hockey found itself in a position of resisting the pressures of global commingling with the West. Throughout the 1990s, the Latvian Hockey Federation retained contacts with the former Soviet republics, and, while often being at odds with the more nationally-inclined camp of Latvia, heavily relied its international success on the talent generated during Soviet times' performances of the republican hockey flagship, “Dinamo Riga,” which all together allowed keeping the domestic hockey alive.

The modern rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” highlighted the profound political shift in the official attitudes of Latvia towards Russia with the ability to transcend the post-Soviet geopolitical and cultural constraints in approaching its eastern neighbor. The rebirth of “Dinamo Riga” is part of the complex Latvian-Russian relations that have experienced a geopolitical restart after the accession of Latvia into the European Union and NATO. This

³⁰⁰ Kuus, *Geopolitics Reframed* 16.

restart was exemplified in the significant improvement of the political, economic and sports ties. The crucial aspect of the international revival of “Dinamo Riga” is that the creation of the new zone of prestige in international hockey sponsored by the Russians was found with great enthusiasm in the Latvian political, business and sport elites, some of whose representatives were also the key figures in the Latvian foreign policies of rediscovering Russia after the EU’s eastern enlargement. The global rise of Russia as a world sports power in organizing mega sports events has also consolidated the belief amongst the political establishment of the Latvian hockey community that by joining the lucrative project, the Latvian hockey development would receive a long-term framework while its Pan-European contours would only reinforce the position of “Dinamo Riga” as a Baltic power on the global scale.

These new effects of globalization on sports politics in the post-Soviet space were evident in the Latvian “hockey diplomacy” of rapprochement with the Russians to enter into the agreement with the new league. Besides the reinforcement of the common cultural bonds in hockey, the discussions over the agreement with the KHL revealed a strong level of cooperation between both countries stemming of the well-established political contacts and good partnership in the energy sector.³⁰¹ Although it would be still premature to conclude that the concerns over the fundamental security and identity of the national community in Latvia have vanished completely from the national discourses, these new global dynamics in sports cooperation between Latvia and Russia highlighted the abundant capabilities of ice hockey to gradually transcend the political and historical differences of both countries.

This global cooperation with the Russians in the realm of hockey has had a certain impact on the national community of Latvia. While the revival of Latvian-Russian contacts has illustrated the powerful forces of globalization of sports to expand beyond the political borders of the former Soviet republics and reunite members of Soviet hockey on post-Soviet space, this global commingling with the Russians has also activated an increasing resistance in the national camp of Latvian society. This national revolt was primarily shaped by the concerns over Russian hegemony in Latvian hockey, which has endangered the communal spirit and values of the nation and could be seen as part of the wider soft-power activities of Russia to re-instate its presence on Latvian soil.

³⁰¹ On the “hockey diplomacy” see another example of the Canadian rapprochement with the Soviet Union to initiate the 1972 Canada-USSR Summit series. In Macintosh and Greenhorn, *Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Hockey Policy* 107-108.

Consequently, the case of the participation of “Dinamo Riga” in the KHL exemplified the “symbolic potency” of ice hockey to undermine and re-shape the acceptable norms of the existing ideologies and narratives of state-sponsored nationalism in the performances of national identity in global sports events.³⁰²

Within the context of the national insurgency to the global cooperation with the Russians, the stories of “Dinamo Riga,” whose origins are deeply embedded in the symbols of the Soviet past, were retold, rebranded and incorporated into the new meaning system of Latvian hockey nationalism, which was developed during the post-Cold War era of the international sports competition. In a short time, “Dinamo Riga” has acclaimed the national status in Latvian sports in terms of its popularity and nationwide support amongst the Latvian hockey fans. While the impact of “Dinamo Riga” on the re-imagining of the national community of Latvia requires further sociological investigation, it is more certain that the Russian-sponsored hockey league became an acceptable global venue for the performance of Latvian sporting nationalism. Nonetheless, the crucial aspect of the global sportization processes, which recently took place on the post-Soviet space, is that re-emerging from the Soviet past “Dinamo Riga” has become a powerful national symbol in the celebration of Latvia’s civil passions and the promotion of the country’s image on the global stage.

³⁰² Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism and Globalization* 18-19; Hoberman, *Sport and Ideology in Post-Communist Age* 18.

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