Russia's emerging "civil accord." An army of "ruins and debris" which had to abandon its most advanced military hardware in forward (and now foreign) areas faces a Herculean task in reconstituting itself.

Yet the era of military disintegration is plainly over. Thanks to the political dominance of the "centrists," the defense-industrial complex—which economic radicals sought to de-

A Question of Identity

METHODICALLY, and with just the right amount of blue paint, someone has removed the Cyrillic script from Riga's street signs. Other consequences of the long Soviet occupation remain all too visible. Latvia may have regained its independence, but Russian officers still drive down Elizabetes (formerly Kirov) Street. Riga's skyline is famous for its elegant spires, but the view also includes Stalin gothic and Intourist concrete. In perhaps the ultimate humiliation, half a century of Soviet rule has turned this once affluent Baltic city into a place where visitors are advised not to drink the water.

The confused and shifting politics of the immediate post-independence period meant that, with the important exception of a strikingly successful monetary reform, many of the structural changes essential to the rebuilding of the economy were not introduced. In particular, privatization was a shambles. Even today only about 20 per cent of industry is privately owned, although rather more is under private "control."

The June 1993 elections may have represented a turning point. Since then the country has been governed by a minority coalition led by the cautiously center-right Latvia's Way. Under the amiably professorial Prime Minister Valdis Birkavs, the government is firmly committed to the establishment of a market economy. Legal reform is under way, and the bureaucracy is being de-Sovietized. A privatization agency modeled on Germany's Treuhand is being put in place. Foreign investment is welcomed, although, reflecting a typical ambivalence, foreign ownership of land is still not permitted.

Recreating Latvia is more than a matter of economics, however. Latvia has been independent now for nearly three years, but a definition of what that country is to be remains elusive. Latvia's leaders are both inspired and haunted by the memory of the First Republic that won independence from Russia in 1918. After seven centuries of foreign domination, Latvia showed that it could stand on its own. By 1940 it had achieved a modest prosperity, crystallizing the sense of nationhood that had been reawakening since the late nineteenth century.

The years of Soviet rule that followed annexation in 1940 sought to reverse this process. Independent Latvia became a taboo, a failed "bourgeois dictatorship" remembered only by the old and the brave. Even the Bralu Kapi, Latvia's military cemetery, a brooding masterpiece presided over by a monumental Mother Latvia, was Sovietized by the addition of a few Red Army corpses. Strangely, Riga's soaring independence monument was allowed to remain untouched and unexplained, its inscription, "For Fatherland and Freedom," doubtless an increasing mystery to a people with neither.

Now, at last, Latvians are allowed to rediscover their past. Wherever possible, continuity with the pre-war republic is stressed. Its last president died in Soviet captivity, but his nephew is head of state today. The Constitution of 1922 is in effect. The Central Bank, Parliament, and ministries are back in their old buildings. After half a century of denial, no memory of the First Republic is too small to be preserved. Even its consumer products, from "Tik Tak" cigarettes to "Weekend" herring, are on display in one museum.

At times it seems as if any history will do so long as, somehow, Latvians made their mark. The War Museum has an exhibit not unsympathetically describing the Waffen SS's Latvian Legion. Nearby, however, the Soviet-era monument to Latvia's Red Riflemen—Lenin's Praetorian Guard—still stands.

The problem is that this rediscovery of the past appeals mainly to ethnic Latvians, and they form only a bare majority of this country's approximately 2.5 million inhabitants.

At the time of the Soviet takeover in 1940 ethnic Latvians accounted for 76 per cent of the population; by independence in 1991 their share had fallen to 52 per cent. Russians made up most of the balance. Most of them had been deliberately imported by a Moscow that saw mass immigration as a way of breaking the Latvian nation. Ethnic Latvians are now a minority in the country's seven largest cities. They account for just one-third of Riga, their own capital.

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days' readiness). Deficient as the army's recovery is bound to be by the ambitious standards of the country's new military doctrine, there is no doubt that Russia will be able to maintain sufficient nuclear forces to worry her former NATO adversaries and sufficient conventional forces to unsettles her former Warsaw Pact allies.

For the moment, these former allies are less concerned about capability than about intent. They were the first to note how those who long equated Russia's superpower status with ruin were gradually injecting her "great power" and even "world power" status into every significant foreign-policy pronouncement. In August 1993, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev caused a public stir by declaring that "East-Central Europe has never ceased to be an area of interest for Russia." Within weeks, concerns were compounded by the invocation of "zones of traditional influence": an expression that skillfully blurred the customary distinction between "near" and "far" abroad. Somewhat less skillfully, Kozyrev recently reassured Czech President Vaclav Havel that he would avoid the expression "sphere of interest" ("if these words evoke the past"), but then spun about and as-

"this is not Belgium." Overall, the provisions are mild considering the long assault through the Soviet period on the Latvian language. Russian language education is easily available. Russian television continues to broadcast, and Russian newspapers circulate freely.

History and relatively high rates of intermarriage would suggest that Russians and Latvians can live together in peace. Latvia has a tradition of extensive Russian settlement that stretches back to Tsarist times. The problem with Russian culture, I was told, is that the Russians have lost touch with it. "If they were to re-discover their own culture, they might have more respect for the culture of others."

Contrary to the assertions of Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev there is no deportation policy. Most Russian-speakers enjoy permanent resident status and continue to enjoy full economic and social rights. The Russian population is far from united against the new Latvia. Many of Latvia's most successful businessmen are of Russian origin, and Riga's Russians look more prosperous than their counterparts in Moscow.

What most of these Russians lack, however, is the security and sense of belonging that Latvian citizenship would bring. Currently, this is enjoyed only by nationals of the First Republic and their descendants, a total of 1.7 million people including over 300,000 ethnic Russians. Citizenship has not been extended to the far larger number of Russians who have arrived since 1940. Overnight many became foreigners in the only country they have ever known. So far as Russia is concerned the solution is simple: extend citizenship to all. Latvia, it is alleged, is beginning an ethnic cleansing of its oppressed Russians, something that has, however, escaped the notice of a seemingly endless stream of U.S., European, and UN delegations who have found only a few isolated incidents.

OF COURSE human rights are not the issue. In Moscow's eyes Latvia's Russians are not only a painful symbol of lost empire but also a means of its rebirth. Russia has, it is true, just signed an agreement to withdraw its remaining troops, but "protecting" the Diaspora will always provide an ideal excuse for their return. As Boris Yeltsin has explained, "If we are dealing with the legitimate rights of Russians, this is not the exclusive internal affair of some other country, but our own national state affair."

There is little that Latvia can do to protect itself. Disgracefully, NATO membership is not on offer, only the insulting "Partnership for Peace." Latvia is trying to join the European Union, a form, sighed one member of Parliament, of "soft protection," but membership is years away. Besides, the martial traditions of Jacques Delors are somehow less reassuring than those of General Eisenhower.

U.S. support has also been patchy. In March, Secretary of State Christopher appeared to take the Russian line, commenting that "it's a legitimate point for the Russians to make to encourage the Latvians to extend the right of citizenship . . . to Russians who happen to be living in Latvia." Those Russians of course "happen" to be living in Latvia as a result of Soviet conquest. In essence Latvians are being asked to enfranchise their former conquerors in such numbers that they threaten to eradicate what is left of Latvia's identity.

The West's moral position in supporting Russian rights in Latvia might have been a little stronger had it shown some interest in supporting Latvian rights in Latvia over five decades of Soviet oppression. Long centuries of survival under foreign rule have made Latvians a pragmatic people, however, and Latvia needs Western support. The citizenship law that emerges is likely to reflect this. The government's current proposal would, subject to quotas, extend citizenship to almost all long-term residents able to pass an examination in conversational Latvian. The nature of these quotas is likely to dominate political debate in Latvia in the coming months as Prime Minister Birkavs tries to survive hard-line nationalist criticism in Parliament and opportunist Russian pressure outside it.

The hope must be that growing economic recovery in Latvia will smooth a transition period that also sees emigration East as Russia finds its feet. The alternative is an increasingly vicious circle of nationalist polemic and Russian pressure, followed by disaster in what is likely to be the highly dangerous period surrounding Russia's 1996 presidential election.

But with some luck—and firm Western discouragement of Russian meddling—Latvia may muddle its way back to the West. As Birkavs explains, "We want to move out of Russia's shadow, to live in Europe. We were, we are, and we will be part of Europe." If the Cold War is really over, it does not seem like a lot to ask.

—ANDREW STUTTAFORD