

## JOURNAL OF SECURITY AND SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

ISSN 2029-7017 print/ISSN 2029-7025 online

2016 March Volume 5 Number 3

[http://dx.doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2016.5.3\(5\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2016.5.3(5))

### SAFETY AND SECURITY IN THE EU: PERCEPTION OF LATVIAN RESIDENTS

Aleksejs Ruža<sup>1</sup>, Iveta Ruža<sup>2</sup>, Vitālijs Raščevskis<sup>3</sup>, Aleksejs Vorobjovs<sup>4</sup>, Vadims Murasovs<sup>5</sup>

*Daugavpils University, LV-5401, Vienibas str.1, Daugavpils, Latvia*

*E-mails: <sup>1</sup>aleksejs.ruza@du.lv; <sup>2</sup>iveta.ruzha@gmail.com; <sup>3</sup>wiras@inbox.lv; <sup>4</sup>aleksejs.vorobjovs@du.lv;  
<sup>5</sup>vadims.murasovs@gmail.com*

*Received 25 October 2015; accepted 10 December 2015*

**Abstract.** The implementation of external and internal politics of the state cannot be considered without taking into account socially psychological challenges, which constantly are taking place in the social reality of all its residents. A transformation of cognitive, attitude-related, motivational components of psychological space of every person living in the country, in accordance with the cardinal changes of geographical and political determinants, has not been studied well enough. This fact does not allow, from the scientific point of view, reforming the educational, political and emigrational strategies of the state. The individual concepts often derive from the social representations prevailed in the society. Very often it is the only way to receive the information on the required subject. Social representations based on information from mass media, knowledge received from the other people's experience, including rumours, gossips, beliefs, etc., provide a good ground for the individual concept of the phenomena. Joining the European Union in May 2004 caused an important transformation of social reality and 'life-space' of residents of the Baltic States through their reflection of life in the new European Community. It caused a cardinal reconstruction of social representations of a new environment of its residents. The increased mobility of population of the Baltic States, the war in Ukraine, acts of terrorism in some European countries, recently have taken place in this part of the world. All these events have made a big impact on social representations about EU countries. The study on social representations of personal security of EU states among Latvian residents is a part of research-project on Social Representations about EU countries among Latvian residents. The objective of the given research is to shape the content and follow the transformation of social representations of European Union countries in modern Latvian society. One hundred Latvian residents 18-65 years old (*Mean* = 33.82; *SD* = 10.70) have participated in the study held in 2015 in addition to 2329 Latvian residents who participated in the study in 2005. The results received in both studies are compared and discussed.

**Keywords:** social representations, mental maps, personal safety and security, EU-states

**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Ruza, A., Ruza, I., Rascevskis, V., Vorobjovs, A., Murasovs, V., 2016. Safety and security in the EU: Perception of Latvian residents. *Journal of Security and Sustainability Issues* 5(3): 365–375.  
DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2016.5.3\(5\)](http://dx.doi.org/10.9770/jssi.2016.5.3(5))

## 1. Introduction

According to Maslow (1943), the individual's safety needs take precedence and dominate behavior as soon as the physical needs are relatively satisfied. It means that when the physical safety is not satisfied – due to war, natural disaster, family violence, childhood abuse, etc. – individuals may experience an avalanche of unpleasant emotional states due to post-traumatic stress disorder or transgenerational trauma. Therefore living in a definite region of the world the representation of personal security in this area becomes a question of a great importance. Representation of spatial objects, such as geographical regions, for example, the world in general, Europe or its particular country, a city, or its district mobilizes the concept of mental maps. This concept emerged in the 1960s from the encounter between spatial psychology and geography. On one hand, psychologists generally focused on the notion of cognitive space proposing the hypothesis that space is full of meanings

and values. On the other hand, geographers tend to focus on analysis of the link between representations of space, spatial behaviour and practice (Lynch, 1960; Saarinen, 1987; Gould & White 1997). From this perspective, the representation of the world depends on a knowledge database that is the result of information flows received from various sources of different scales: personal experience, advice of parents or friends, national discourse taught in textbooks, internet and global media (Didelon-Loiseau & Grasland, 2014).

As soon as each person belongs to the society, where he lives and communicates with others, the socially generated experience becomes a common property for its members by means of the processes of social representations. The social representations are usually defined as a set of knowledge and beliefs about objects and concepts, which help us to cope with a world around us (Dortier, 2002). The term of social representations was originally introduced by Moscovici in his study on the reception and circulation of psychoanalysis in France (Moscovici, 1961). Valsiner (2002) notes that Moscovici's theory of social representations starts from the diversity of individuals, attitudes and phenomena, in all their strangeness and unpredictability. Its aim is to discover how individuals and groups can construct a stable, predictable world out of such diversity (Moscovici, 1984). This diversity becomes organized by social representations that carry with them constructed meanings of the past, and make these available for new applications. Social representing is a process of selective construction of a meaningful view of the world, followed by its continuous verification. Social representations are values, ideas, and collectively practiced forms of cognition shared within society, which facilitate the understanding and communication of the world (Moscovici, 1984). They are cognitive systems with their own language and logic. They do not represent 'beliefs about', 'images', or 'attitudes', instead, they are 'theories', and 'knowledge systems' ready to organize reality (Moscovici, 1981). The aim of every (social) representation is 'to make something unfamiliar or unfamiliar itself, familiar' (Moscovici, 1984, p.24).

Moscovici (1998) defines two kinds of social representations that can be distinguished in relation to their genesis: social representations, which are predominantly *belief-based* and those, which are predominantly *knowledge-based*. Beliefs are usually rooted in culture, traditions and language and they are characterised by firmness and rigidity of conviction. The believer neither searches for proof, nor for evidence relating to object. They may be unconsciously transmitted through collective memory, implicit communication and traditions. (Moscovici & Markova, 2000). But all beliefs are different in durability, strength and the degree of engagement. Some beliefs are more easily changed than others. Other kinds of social representations are predominantly *knowledge-based*. Common knowledge involves different kinds of knowing. It can involve transformed scientific knowledge or knowledge based on the experience of interpersonal relations, conversations, daily routines and so on. To know, just like to believe, means to hold something true. To know is to examine, as far as possible independently of others, the nature of the phenomena in question. Of course, the notion 'independently' has a relative meaning because we can hardly totally ignore knowledge circulating in public discourse. Knowledge in social representations is always social; however, the relation between the knower and the object of knowledge is not fixed but is open (Markova, 2003). The difference between knowledge and beliefs does not concern the content of propositions expressing one or the other (Moscovici, 1998). Propositions expressing knowledge and beliefs can have the same content. However, whether such propositions are ascribed the status of beliefs or knowledge rests in the style of thinking and the method of searching for 'truth'. If individual or groups search for evidence of the truth concerning that object, the resulting social representations are knowledge based. If, on the other hand, representations are formed and maintained through the consensus with others, representations are belief-based. Farr (1995) proposes that in reality, social representations always involve both knowledge and beliefs' and it is unlikely that we could find a system of thought that would be based purely on one or the other, whether it is science or religion. The question as to whether social representations are based predominantly on knowledge or on beliefs could have important applications for social practices. For example, belief-based social representations may inspire social categorization and exclusion of groups and individuals. That is why self-help, just groups like governmental campaigns, attempt to change belief-based representations and thus reduce or eliminate exclusion and discrimination. Philogene (2001) notes, that after Moscovici laid down the framework of social representation theory in 1961, the first generation of scholars to work with him on the theory expanded on its various components. Three scholars in particular contributed to the theory by developing specific theoretical foundations for the empirical application of the theory. Abric (1976) elaborated a theory

of central core that gives a structure to the representation and endows it with meaning. The second extension of Moscovici's original social representation framework was provided by Doise (1985), who focused on the anchoring process by which the representation is rendered familiar. The third extension of original approach to social representation was carried out by Jodelet (1989) who argued that a representation always originates from a previous one, having altered mental and social configurations in the process. He emphasizes that the dynamic nature of social representations, which is to be capable of continuous change, is rooted in its genesis, that is, in its linkage to pre-existing representations. The structural approach based on the concepts of core and periphery continues to develop (Abric, 2002; Flament, 2002). This showed, that social representation can be described as an organized set of basic elements of two kinds, with a hierarchy. Nowadays it is concerned with different functions of the core and periphery, between different social representations. The school of social representations in Aix-en-Provence has developed the original structural approach to the study of social representations. According to that approach, social representations are organised into a structured body of information, beliefs, opinions, and attitudes, which consists of the *central core* and *peripheral elements*. These elements are organized and structured so as to constitute a particular type of social cognitive system (Abric, 1976, 2002; Flament, 1994a, 1994b, 2000; Guimelli, 1993, 1994, 1998). There are two processes *anchoring* and *objectification*, which play central roles in the construction of any social representation, that is, the ways social representations are generated, maintained and changed (Flick, 1995). With the two processes of anchoring and objectification, the theory of social representations offers a model for the genesis and transformation of knowledge and its function in communication and interaction. Thus, social representations are the result of interactive processes. In these interactions, social representations are generated, changed and exchanged, and spread through social groups. The symbolic nature of social representations embraces the social, cultural and historic aspects of social representations. It refers to the social significance of objects and events that is dependent upon the common meanings in verbal and non-verbal gestures by members of a community. These common meanings are, in turn, dependent upon a community's social norms and values and their common history (Puckhardt, 1993). Thus, social representations are complex wholes of signification that provide the direction for constructive interpretations of life events by individuals. These interpretations entail processes of dialogical kind, where different suggestions are in opposition with one another (Valsner, 2002). Markova (2003) considers that dialogical nature of social representations is an important concept of the theory. When individuals or groups share the same social representations, actions are understood in the same way. Jodelet (1993) describes the relations between representations and social communications as: forms of social thinking used to communicate, understand and master the social and intellectual environment.

A social representation would simply be an individual's representation of a social object. For instance, Breakwell (2001) considers the individual's relationship to any social representation, which can be described along a number of dimensions. In fact, the process whereby the social representation is generated and sustained is a continuing exchange between personal representation and social influence mediated through communities. However, the nature and scope for individual, impact upon social representation concerned and upon the structure of the social representation itself. Burr (2002) suggests that our perceptions of the world are mediated by social representations, but through our social interactions with others we also contribute to their continuing change and reformulation. We are therefore active agents in the production and reproduction of our social environments. We play a substantial role in the process of genesis of social representations. We are not passive products of society, and through our cognitive processes of anchoring and objectification our psychology puts its own spin on the representations that emerge from our social interactions. Rogers (2003) notes that the social representation available to individuals enables them to make sense of their experiences and their life-world, and they use them to choose different courses of action in different situations. But crucially, a person's social representations are not seen as locked in their individual mind. Rather they are culturally available and mediated resources, arising, for example, from the messages of the mass media, and in their interactions with experts (such as scientists, teachers or doctors).

Sommers (1998) considers that a theory of social representations conceptualizes the cognitive structure and social dynamic of popular knowledge. Social representations are more or less popular cognitive representations of relevant social phenomena. These phenomena include scientific theories (e.g. psychoanalysis, physics),

social roles (woman, child) or such phenomena as 'illness' or 'culture' or whatever else. The most interesting latest studies focusing on social representations get in touch with a wide variety of different topics and social aspects of human society (Leone, Siag & Sarrica, 2014; Howarth, 2014; Salesses & Romain, 2014, Ben Alaya, 2013; Vala, 2013, etc.), The complicated image of European Union is implemented with social representations about Europe and its states through transaction of geographical and economic space of Europe into the space of emotions of individuals and their selective behaviour towards EU. Several studies examined this complicated multifaceted problem in scientific literature. Rutland (1996) examined how different social anchors indicating a belonging to specific social groups (i.e. social class, travel experience and parental attitudes), in addition to age, affect British children's social representations of Europe.

Grasland, Dideon, & Beauguitte, (2012) developed the global project *EuroBroadMap*, which was implemented by twelve international interdisciplinary research teams and combined the different visions of Europe in the world. Chaban & Holland (2014) focus on external perceptions of Europe in the world combining the different approaches in attempt to reevaluate the Radical changes on the European continent. The aim of presented research is to shape the structure of social representations about EU states prevailed in the modern Latvian society. Besides, there are four tasks of this particular study: (a) to explore if the social representations about personal safety and security in EU states are important component of the representations about the country; (b) to analyse the most important correlations of social representations about safety and security in EU states; (c) to compare the general rating of the perception of personal safety and security in EU states among Latvian residents in 2005 and 2015; and finally (d) to compare the impact of predicting factors of social representations about personal safety and security in EU states between measurements held in 2005 and 2015.

## 2. Method

A total number of participants including pilot study and two basic studies held in 2005 and 2015 within the frame of global research on social representations about EU countries among Latvian residents exceeded 2500 people. Calculation of the number of participants and their individual peculiarities is based on proportional spread and number of people: a) living in different regions (statistical regions); b) ratio of male/female population; c) ratio of Latvian/Russian speaking residents; d) ratio of rural/urban inhabitants. In order to enable a comparison between two measurements on social representations about EU states taken in 2005 and 2015 the methodology and the obtained results for the comparison with the current study were taken from the study held in 2005 (Ruža, 2006).

### 2.1. Pilot study

In 2005, two months before the main phase of the research had been started, in order to shape the most important indicators characterizing any EU country, a group of respondents of different age 18-65 ( $N=100$ ,  $Mean=36.5$ ;  $SD = 8.62$ ) were offered a blank with a modified REP-test. Respectively they were asked to find similarities (constructs) and differences (contrasts) between 25 European countries grouped by three countries in one line. Grouping in three was performed in random order. The analysis of data has distinguished 10 most frequently used constructs (see Table 1). These common constructs formed the basic content of social representations about EU countries. Here we need to point to research limitations, since a lot of factors, which affect sustainable and secure development and contribute to attractiveness of a country can be indicated (Shatrevich, Strautmane, 2015; Oganisjana et al. 2015; Rezk et al. 2015; Grubicka, Matuska 2015; Tvaronavičienė et al. 2015; Starineca, Voronchuk 2015; Dalati 2015; Vinokurova 2015; Giessen, 2015; Dezellus et al. 2015; Raudeliūnienė et al. 2015; Caurkubule, Rubanovskis 2014; Dobeles et al. 2015; Kriviņš 2015; Tvaronavičienė, Černevičiūtė 2015; Mačiulis, Tvaronavičienė 2013; Račkauskas, Liesionis 2013; Ignatavičius et al. 2015; Travkina, Tvaronavičienė 2015; Tvaronavičienė, Černevičiūtė 2015).

**Table 1.** REP-test results: the most frequently used constructs of EU countries (N=100).

Similarities (constructs) / differences (contrasts) found between EU countries	Number of cases (N <sub>max.</sub> =100)
Economy power	46
Beauty of the nature	33
Suitability for living	31
Attractiveness of local people	30
Beauty of the cities and towns	27
Political power in EU	26
Industrial power	19
Developmental potential	17
Personal safety and security	11
Military power	9

These results show, that economy was the dominant theme (31.78% of cases including ‘*industrial potential*’ and ‘*fast developing*’). The outer attributes such as ‘*nice nature*’, ‘*attractiveness of local people*’, and ‘*beauty of the cities and towns*’ follow (27.5%) the theme of personal attitudes related to EU countries takes 21.5%, including ‘*suitability for living*’ and ‘*safeness and security*’. In our opinion, the theme of relationship across European borders was not represented in full measure. That is why we decided to add two more possible constructs referring to relationships within European Union: ‘*countries, that have cultural influence (actively spreading its culture)*’ and ‘*countries helping my country*’ and transferred them into 12 statements. In result of the pilot study there were distinguished 12 statements characterizing the key concepts of Latvian residents shaping social representations about any EU country.

## 2.2. Study (1) held in 2005

In presented study 2329 Latvian residents were offered to rate 25 EU countries with 12 statements formulated in the pilot study along a 5-point scale. Besides, the participants were given a blank in which they were asked to provide information about their age, gender, living place, education, occupation, mother tongue, etc. as well as to point out the main sources of information which provide the most of information about EU states, where participants could choose several variants of choice at the same time. They have also got some additional tasks in order to rate their level of knowledge about each EU country including border drawing task in a counter map of Europe and association task. The results of the study were presented in the framework of one PhD dissertation project (see Ruža, 2006) and partly published in some Latvian local interdisciplinary (see Vorobjovs, Ruža, Raševskis, & Murašovs, 2006a; 2006b) and military journals (see Vorobjovs, Ruža, Raševskis, & Murašovs, 2010; Ruža, Ruža & Vorobjovs, 2011).

## 2.3. Study (2) held in 2015

The same study was performed ten years later with 100 participants (55 females and 45 males) aged between 18 and 65 (*Mean* = 33.82; *SD* = 10.70) in order to discover a dynamics of social representations about EU states among Latvian residents. The only difference from the previous study was a number of EU countries, which was extended to 28 including new comers Bulgaria, Croatia and Rumania.

## 3. Method

The assessment of twelve qualitative statements expressing the basic characteristics of all 25 EU states showed that the most of mean values of these statements in opinion of the Latvian participants correlates with each other (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix between mean values of 12 statements characterizing the content of social representations about EU countries (data received in 2005).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Economy power	1	.960**	.347	.880**	.428*	.517**	.943**	.557**	.600**	.857**	.567**	.805**
Developmental potential		1	.333	.879**	.430*	.514**	.930**	.675**	.654**	.920**	.628**	.804**
Beauty of the nature			1	.324	.798**	.734**	.407*	.200	.822**	.281	.739**	.396*
Military power				1	.439*	.618**	.968**	.624**	.624**	.953**	.703**	.761**
Suitability for living					1	.762**	.519**	.571**	.849**	.452*	.817**	.691**
Attractiveness of residents						1	.649**	.411*	.756**	.566**	.821**	.548**
Political power in EU							1	.637**	.688**	.939**	.729**	.824**
Relationships with Latvia								1	.652**	.785**	.691**	.841**
Beauty of the cities and towns									1	.672**	.935**	.760**
Industrial power										1	.736**	.820**
Cultural influence											1	.717**
Personal safety and security												1

(\*p>0.01; \*\* p>0.05)

Perception of *personal safety and security* in EU countries among Latvian residents had strong significant correlations with all indicators characterizing the content of social representations about EU countries. This fact together with the other fact, that construct itself appeared during pilot study and was mentioned 11 times as an important indicator characterizing EU country could be served as indirect evidence of the importance of such representation. The same tendency was represented in the study held ten years later (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Correlation matrix between mean values of 12 statements characterizing the content of social representations about EU countries (data received in 2015).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Economy power	1	.843**	-.063	.824**	.603*	.440*	.889**	.451*	.486**	.850**	.796**	.828**
Developmental potential		1	-.091	.840**	.522**	.420*	.787**	.366	.481**	.893**	.720**	.831**
Beauty of the nature			1	-.074	.500**	.669**	.062	-.451*	.706**	-.129	.100	.078
Military power				1	.553**	.339	.821**	.307	.443*	.859**	.696**	.838**
Suitability for living					1	.769**	.715**	-.251	.802**	.490**	.707**	.655**
Attractiveness of residents						1	.591**	-.203	.867**	.359	.614**	.545**
Political power in EU							1	.261	.619**	.831**	.907**	.810**
Relationships with Latvia								1	-.166	.446*	.182	.230
Beauty of the cities and towns									1	.404*	.658**	.599**
Industrial power										1	.682**	.802**
Cultural influence											1	.710**
Personal safety and security												1

(\*p>0.01; \*\* p>0.05)

However, in the study conducted in 2015, two indicators: *beauty of the nature* and *relationship with Latvia* showed no significant correlations with *personal safety and security* item. The indicator: *beauty of the nature* has the weakest correlations in both studies with other items, which is logically explained: the beauty of the nature of any country is determined mostly by its geography and is little related with social and economic factors, which are mostly determined by people living in that country. But the country's relationship with other country may significantly impact the attitude towards its residents and affect the perception of personal safety and security in that country. In 2005, the most of Latvian residents believed that if a country in general demonstrates a good relationship to Latvia, it is an additional reason to perceive this country as safe and secure place. Ten years later, Latvian residents changed this representation.

In order to observe the general dynamics of social representations about personal safety and security in EU countries the mean values received in both studies were compared. The figure 1 shows that perception of personal safety and security in EU countries in social representations of Latvian residents has been rapidly decreased for the last decade.

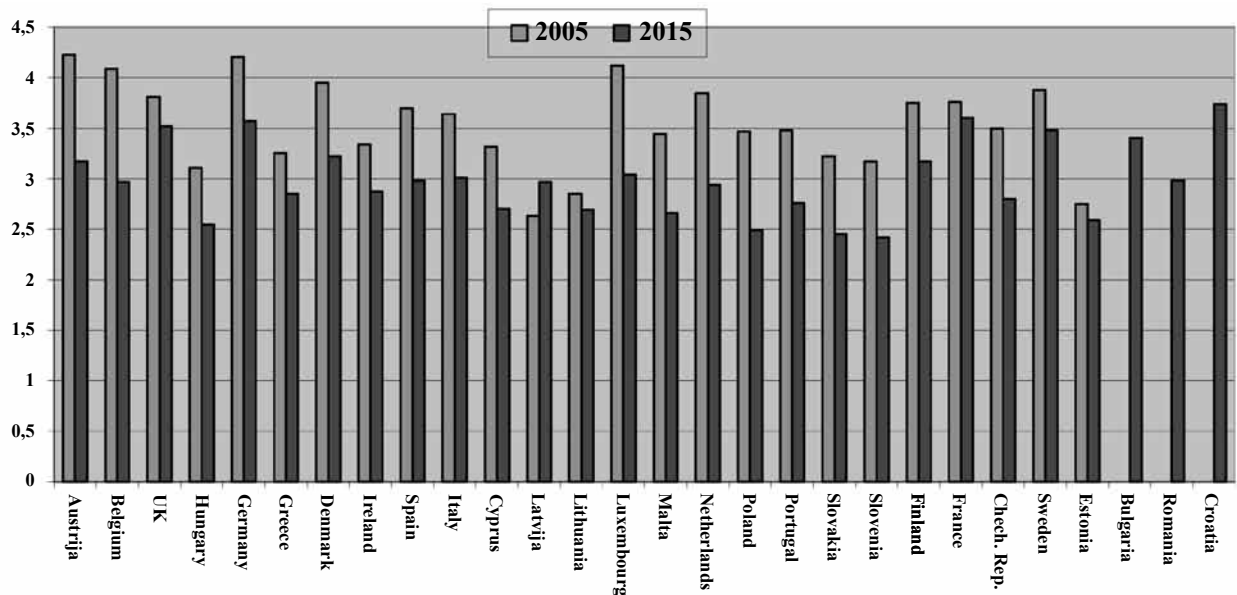


Fig.1. Mean values for assessments of personal safety and security in EU countries in 2005 and 2015.

The comparative analysis using Paired-Sample T-Test reveals significant differences between two measurements on personal safety and security perception (see table 4). Three new members of EU Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia showed only 2015 rating.

Table 4. The comparative analysis of personal safety and security perception between two studies 2005 and 2015 (Paired-Sample T-Test).

Study	Mean	SD	t
Study (1) 2005	3.54	0.442	8.885***
Study (2) 2015	2.94	0.348	

(\*\* $p > 0.01$ )

All European countries, except Latvia, in the modern representations of Latvian residents are not perceived any longer as safe and secured as in 2005. The interesting result obtained from comparison, is that Latvia, in perception of its residents, is the only country in EU, which became more safe and secured to its residents for the last decade. The real reason of that fact needs to be learned from additional study. But speculatively one can suppose that it happened not only because the perception of personal safety and security in Latvia objectively increased among its residents, but because of rapid decrease of perception of personal safety and security in other EU countries, which in 2005 were perceived as much more safe and secured. Analyzing the impact of predicting factors affecting social representations about security in EU states, a linear regression modelling was performed. The models were constructed independently for both studies entering the same variables in order to determine and understand the differences in social representations about safety and security among Latvian residents in 2005 and 2015. In all models the dependent variable was “*personal safety and security*”; the independent variables were indicators presented in tables 2 and 3, which were strongly correlated with dependent variable; the method of all linear regression models was “enter”. The most interesting models, which brightly show the difference between results obtained from 2005 and 2015 studies in relation with predictors’ impact on perception of “*personal safety and security*” in EU states are presented respectively in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Linear regression analysis of social representations about personal safety and security predicting factors in 2005.

Model	B	SE	B	t
Economy power	.294	.077	.537	3.799**
Suitability for living	.218	.075	.239	2.900**
Military power	-.073	.096	-.113	-.758
Relationships with Latvia	.521	.103	.476	5.050**

$R^2 = 0.787$  (\*\* $p > 0.01$ )

The results show, that in 2005, the most important predictors of the social representations about personal safety and security in EU countries among Latvian residents were following indicators: *Relationships with Latvia*, *Economy power* and *Suitability for living*. It means, that the most safe and secure EU countries in perception of Latvian residents were those, having good relationship with Latvia and a strong economy, which potentially would provide a good place for living. Ten years ago, a military power of a country had no significant impact on social representation about personal safety and security in perception of Latvian residents.

**Table 6.** Linear regression analysis of social representations about personal safety and security predicting factors in 2015.

<i>Model</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>t</i>
Economy power	.280	.189	.354	1.485
Suitability for living	.179	.170	.188	1.058
Military power	.452	.172	.449	2.620**
Relationships with Latvia	-.011	.085	-.020	-.125

$R^2=0.911$  (\*\* $p>0.01$ )

Ten years later, the situation has changed dramatically. *Relationships with Latvia*, *Economy power*, and even *Suitability for living* have no significant impact on social representations about personal safety and security in EU countries any longer. The only indicator, which has an enormous effect on these representations, becomes a *military power* of a state.

## Conclusions

It is evident, that social representations in general are constantly changing and are very sensitive to processes, which are taking place around the world we live in. Social representations about personal safety and security in EU states have a distinct dynamic nature led by communication and shaped by mass media, which supply with information about events happening in this part of the world. The results of the study show that European Union and its countries in modern social representations of Latvian residents are not as safe and secure as they were considered to be in 2005. The perception of basic determinants of personal safety security in EU countries also has changed. Ten years ago, the most important compounds of personal safety and security in EU country were considered to be a power of economy, relationship with Latvia and suitability for living. In 2015 all these indicators have little effect on perception of personal safety and security in EU countries. The only indicator, which really matters, became a military power of the state, which had no significant effect on social representations about personal safety and security in EU countries a decade ago. Why did it happen? The answer becomes more or less evident if we take into account the most important events, which have taken place in European countries for the last decade. The terrible acts of terrorism in the United Kingdom, Spain, France and Norway, in spite of their economy power, relationship with Latvia and assessment of the potential suitability for living for Latvian residents have shaken the world. The war in Ukraine used to be the most dominant theme and widely discussed topic in interpersonal communication and mass media during 2015. The presence of NATO forces, American tanks, joint military exercises, geopolitical discussions on possibility of Russia’s military invasion into the Baltic region and NATO response in Ukraine were widely presented in mass media and have caused a big public resonance. It has been widely discussed in interpersonal communication at all levels in Latvia and caused an important transformation of social representations about personal safety and security of EU countries. In result, the military component of personal safety and security of the country has brought to the fore, but all the other aspects of it suddenly became insignificant. It is possible to conclude, that new social, economic and political challenges, which European Union countries will face in the nearest future, definitely would shape the content of the social representations about personal safety and security of the residents in this part of the world.

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**Aleksejs RUZA**, Dr.psych., associate professor of psychology is a head of psychology programs at Daugavpils University (Latvia). He is an expert of psychology of Latvian Academy of Science and National Research University, Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). His research interests are related to psychology of interpersonal relationship and social cognition.

**Iveta RUZA**, Dr.psych, is a practical psychologist and researcher, head of Daugavpils family support and rehabilitation center. She is a psychology expert of National Research University, Higher School of Economics (Moscow, Russia). Her research interests are related to social and cognitive psychology, psychology of interpersonal relationship, family psychology.

**Vitalijs RASCEVSKIS**, Dr.psych., senior lecturer of psychology at Daugavpils University (Latvia). He is an expert of Latvian Academy of Science in the field of psychology and researcher. His research interests are related to cognitive psychology, social cognition, and psychology of interpersonal relationship.

**Aleksejs VOROBOVS**, Dr.habil.paed., Dr.habil.psych., professor of psychology at Daugavpils University (Latvia). He is an author of several books and monographs, an expert of Latvian Academy of Science in the field of psychology and experienced researcher. His research interests are related to the history of psychology, personality psychology, and psychology of individual differences.

**Vadims MURASOVS**, PhD candidate at Daugavpils University (Latvia); Master in International and European Relations, Baltic Studies, and Psychology; former science counsellor at the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia. His research interests are related to intergroup processes, attitudes, social identities, nationalism, migration and international relations.