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Eesti tuleviku heaks

History of the Baltic States: From Independence to Independence – the 20th century Part I

Lecturer: Tõnis Saarts

Institute of Political Science and Public Administration

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TALLINNA ÜLIKOOL

Objectives of the lecture

- The main objective: to map the the crucial event in the history of the Baltic States in the 20th century and to demonstrate how they have affected today's Baltic societies and politics.
- Other objectives:
 - To demonstrate the importance of inter-war independence
 - To map the main differences between the Baltic countries during the interwar independence period
 - To demonstrate the diversified impact of Soviet rule on individual Baltic countries
 - To explore the crucial differences between the independence movements in the Baltic States in the late 1980's

Outcomes of the lecture

- The basic knowledge about the history of the Baltic States in the 20th century
- The basic knowledge about the differences between the Baltic States in the context of the history of the 20th century

Political awakening

- 1890's first socialist parties are founded.
- Latvian national movement – strong left-wing parties (Riga), had strong socialist accent.
- Lithuanian national movement more influenced by church → socialists vs. (religious) nationalists.
- Estonian national movement more right-wing and conservative, socialists weaker than in Latvia.
- 1905 revolution:
 - As a political awakening for the region.
 - Formation of informal assemblies (Great Council of Vilnius) where local political leaders (from various parties) first time demanded autonomy for Lithuania
 - Ideas about autonomy started to circulate in the BS
 - Unrests were suppressed, but political activeness remained

Independence

- World war I – Germans occupied Lithuania in 1915 and part of Latvia. In February 1918 rest of region
- In February 1917 collapse of Tsarist rule – new democratic government in Russia. In October 1917 Bolsheviks seized the power.
- Political instability - a great historical opportunity!
- Lithuania – Germans allowed to organize Council of Lithuania, what on 18.02. 1918 proclaimed independence. Germans too weak to prevent it.
- Estonia – in February 1918 Russians retreated and Germans hadn't yet occupied the whole Estonia. 24.02. 1918 Estonian independence day.
- Latvia – in Nov. 1918 collapse of the German rule, 18.11.1918 Latvia proclaimed independence.

Independence wars

- Nov 1918 collapse of Germany. Bolsheviks tried to re-conquer (now independent) Baltic states.
- Estonia – Russians conquered half of the country but were repulsed in winter 1919. Tartu Peace February 1920 – Russia recognized independence.
- Latvia – more problematic, because pro-Bolshevistic socialist movement was stronger. More like civil war. Russians were driven out in summer 1920. Peace treaty in August 1920.
- Lithuania – Russians conquered half of the country. Were driven out. Lithuanians also re-conquered Vilnius, but Poles claimed to it and conquered it. This spoiled Polish-Lithuanian relations and ruined all attempts to create Baltic-Polish alliance during interwar period

Independent Baltic republics

- Land reforms in the beginning of the 1920's: land was expropriated from German (Latvia/Estonia) and Polish (Lithuania) nobility, distributed to peasants
- Economic re-orientation from Russia to the West
- Exported mainly agricultural products to Britain and Germany.
 - Industry more developed in Latvia and Estonia, but despite this they remained rather less developed agrarian countries compared to Western Europe.
 - However, living standard rose quite a lot, and especially in Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania was the poorest. Living standard of Estonia comparable with Italy and Hungary
- Political life active but extremely unstable: party system very fragmented, governments very short-living (Estonia 23 cabinets 1919-1934).

Failure of democracy

- Lack of experiences with democracy + unstable political life + Great Depression (1929-1933).
- Lithuania – Smetona and Alliance of Nationalist seized the power with military coup 1926. Smetona regime fascist-inclined, anti-semitic, glorified heydays of medieval Lithuania. President as a dictator, parties were banned, press under control.
- Estonia – Päts's coup in 1934, tried to prevent extreme right-wing pro-fascist movement to gain the power. Suspended parliament, banned all parties. Restricted press freedom. The mildest dictatorship in the Baltic.
- Latvia – Ulmanis coup in 1934. Directed against socialist. Pro-fashist, anti-semitist. Milder than Smetona's regime.

Importance of inter-war independence

- Extremely important for national self-consciousness.
- Memories from independence time, what actually helped these nations to survive Soviet period – at once we were independent, maybe will be again!
- Made Baltic nations unique in former Soviet Union – no other nations had such kind of experiences: to be an independent democratic state. Made Baltic states more similar to Central Europe.

Lost of independence

- Dictatorships stayed in power to the end of indep.
- In August 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression pact. The secret part of the document determined interest spheres in the Eastern Europe: Western Poland to Germany; Finland, Baltic States, Moldova to Soviets.
- In September 1939 Soviet Union demanded military bases on the territories of the Baltic States. Baltic governments hadn't much choice and accepted this.
- 1940 June – attention of the Western powers on the Franco-German war and Soviet Union installed new pro-soviet puppet governments to the Baltic States.
- There wasn't any military resistance why: too costly, Western countries didn't care at all, hostile troops already inside the country