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

Part II

Lecturer: Tõnis Saarts

Institute of Political Science and Public Administration

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First Soviet Year

- In August 1940 Baltic republics were formally incorporated to Soviet Union.
- Stalinistic red terror: systematic persecution and physical destruction of political, cultural and military elite of the nations.
  - Peak of the terror in 14.06.1941 - mass deportation:
    - Estonia 10 000, Latvia 15 000, Lithuania 35 000 were deported to Siberia
    - Taking account proportions of population: in French context it would have meant deportation of 500 000 Frenchmen, in USA’s case 3 millions.
- Industry and enterprises were nationalized.
- The consequences: Latvians and Estonians historical hatred against Germans turned against Russians.
German occupation

- In summer 1941 Germans conquered the region.
- At first Germans troops were greeted as liberators from Soviet oppression. Germans not interested in restoring independence of the Baltic States.
- Different attitudes towards local nations:
  - Lithuanians were treated like Poles (*untermenschen*),
  - Latvians and Estonians were considered to be a part of the Nordic race.
- German occupation in Lithuania harsher and partisan movement more active.
- Occupation in Latvia and Estonia milder (Germans murdered 7000 Estonians) and resistance was not so active (Latvian resistance more extensive).
- Holocaust. Before war: Latvia 70 000, Lithuania 160 000 – only 10% survived. Estonia 4000 – 100%
Baltic States in Word War II

- Baltic nations had to choose between two opportunities: fighting with Germans or with Russians.
- Retreating Russians in 1941 tried to recruit Baltic nations to the Red Army (especially in Estonia).
- German authorities organized also volunteer recruitment campaigns to German army, what were not very successful at first. In 1944 when Red army was already close to Latvian and Estonian borders a lot of Estonians and Latvians joined with German army. Why?
  - To prevent new Soviet occupation
  - Weakened Germany and Western powers would maybe restore the independence of the BS...
- In 1944 Red Army re-conquered Estonia and Latvia (except Courland). In January rest of 1945 Lithuania
Casualties in Word War II

- In Word War II Estonia and Latvia lost 1/5 of its population (Beside Poland nations what suffered most in Europe).
- Beside red and brown terror and casualties in war:
  - 120 000 Latvians (8%),
  - 70 000 Estonians (6%)
  - and 3% of Lithuanians exiled to the West before Red Army “liberated” the country
Afraid new deportations and red terror
Stalinistic period

- After reinstallation of Soviet rule terror continued
- **Second great mass deportation**
  - Agriculture was not yet collectivized.
  - At first communists tried to establish collective farms in voluntary basis, but failed.
  - Moscow decided to use fear and terror: in March 1949 the deportation: 20,000 Estonians, 42,000 Latvians, 40,000 Lithuanians = 100,000.
- **Total:** 50,000 Estonians, 120,000 Latvians, 200,000 – 300,000 Lithuanians were deported or murdered by communists. Lithuania suffered the most: 1940-1953 lost 1/3 of its population.
- 10% of Gulag’s prisoners had Baltic origins.
- Resistance/partisan movement (Forest Brothers). Very active 1944-1950. Especially in Lithuania
Soviet rule 1953 - 1980

- Death of Stalin 1953 marked the end of mass terror. Deported people were allowed to came back.
- "Khrushchev thaw" 1956-64 (actually to 1968)—ideological pressure relaxed, economy was more decentralized, national cadres became more powerful in Comm. Parties (especially in Lithuania!)
- In the 1960’s slow adoption with Soviet system, however feeling of national oppression was passed to younger generation. In 1960’s living standard was rising - legitimized Soviet power a little bit.
- After 1953 small-scale dissident movement, not open violent resistance. In Latvia and Estonia was lead by local intellectuals, Lithuania by church.
- 1970’s Brezhnev’s period—centralization, ideological pressure became stronger again.
Soviet rule - immigration

• Mechanism of immigration:
  – Authorities tried to carry on large scale industrialization in the Baltic States.
  – New industries were built not for meeting economic necessities of the Baltic States but Soviet economy.
  – Industries demanded for new workforce. Baltic States hadn’t it sufficiently - need to bring it from Russia.

• Latvia and Estonia had better industrial infrastructure - easier to carry on extensive industrialization. Especially in Latvia.

• Lithuania was not so industrialized, so demanded more investments and also had more their own free workforce in rural districts.

• Result: Lithuania effectively prevented extensive Russian immigration, Latvia and Estonia couldn’t.
Soviet rule – immigration II

• **In 1939**: Latvians in Latvia 75%, Lithuanians in Lithuania 70%, Estonians in Estonia 88%.

• **After the war** (and elimination of several historic minorities) Baltic nations comprised over 90% of population.

• **In 1989**: Latvians in Latvia – 52%, Estonians in Estonia 62%, Lithuanians in Lithuania 81%.

• Any other nation in Europe haven’t experienced so large-scale immigration during the 20th century!
Social movements

• Movements and interest groups – the main linkage between government and the people

• Social movements pursue some kind of change in politics, society or even culture. Movements - non-elite groups and basing on grassroots participation. Alternatives to the party politics.

• Difference from parties: narrower agenda and scope – dealing with specific problems; don’t want to gain the power – only influencing decisions

• Old social movements – workers, national movements. Materialist, class based, centralized

• New social movements – greens, feminists, racial movement, anti-war movement. Identity based, self-expression, post-materialist values.
Independence movement 1987-88

• In the beginning of the 1980’s Russification campaign:
  – Russian language compulsory from first grade, official and public sphere should function in Russian, etc.
  – The campaign failed – resistance of intellectuals and students. Showed that national culture is threatened.

• 1987 Gorbachev prestroika - democratization.

• Started in Latvia. 1986 demonstrations against the hydroelectric dam on Daugava. On June 1987 a small demonstration at Riga’s Statue of Liberty


• Later: Creative Unions – in Latvia and Estonia. Estonian Heritage Society. Political movements?
Popular fronts

- **1988 - Singing Revolution.** High mass mobilization.
- **1988 spring-autumn founding congresses of Popular Fronts.** Start in Estonia (April). Lithuania - Sajudis

- **Lithuania – Sajudis** had two fractions:
  - moderate group – Vilnius, liberal, Western-orientated, moderate with Moscow;

- Beside Sajudis strong Communist Party – lead by reform communists (Brazauskas).

- The essential conflict in Lithuanian politics: moderate, Russian friendly left wing versus nationalist, anti-Russian, church influenced right wing
National fronts and Congresses

- **Lithuania** – moderate-radical conflict inside Sajudis.
- **Latvia and Estonia** nationalist radicals formed their own semi-parliaments – Congresses. Supported restoration of inter-war republics → legitimate ground to declare all Soviet immigrants non-citizens.

**Latvia:**
- Popular Front more unified (1 million members).
- Latvian Congress quite weak.
- Strong pro-Soviet Inter-movement.

**Estonia:**
- Popular Front strong, but since 1990 Estonian Congress offered strong counterbalance.
- National Front – Soviet time specialists, reform comm.;
Independence movement 1989-91

- 1988-1989 independence seemed too unrealistic. Rather autonomy and economy was in agenda.
- 1990 first (semi)dem. elections to Supreme Soviets
- 1989-90 independence arose to agenda.
- Lithuania declared independence restored 11.03.1990. Moscow - trade embargos and blockade. Estonia did same 30.03.1990, Latvia 04.05.
- Januar 1991 Moscow decided to use force in Lithuania and later Latvia. It failed: International reaction and internal opposition in Russia (Yeltsin)
- 1991 February-March independence referendums
Main conflicts in Baltic politics

- **Movements** – Popular Fronts similar to parties with comprehensive programs, participated in elections.
- Main conflicts and cleavages in the Baltic politics have their roots in independence movement. Social cleavages and class conflicts are important, but are not sufficient to explain today’s Baltic politics.
  - **Estonia** – personal dimension. Personal conflicts and tensions between Congress and Popular Front and inside Popular Front
  - **Latvia** – ethnic cleavages. Conflict between Russian minority and Latvians. Latvian politicians who support more moderate ethnic policy versus Latvian nationalists. Transformation in the 2000’s – conflicts in economic elite
  - **Lithuania** – ideological – left wing vs right wing. Nationalist and church influenced right wing (basing on Sajudis radicals) versus more Russian friendly, former communist based left wing.
Conclusions: 20th century

• The crucial importance of the inter-war independence

• Interwar independence - different paths, different failures of democracy, not much similarities between individual countries

• Soviet legacy – similar, but at same time quite different country by country

• Substantial differences between independence movements 1988-91 – the roots of today’s politics
Conclusion: Periods in the Baltic history

• I. Ancient independence to the 13th century (Lithuania to the 15th century)
• II. Under foreign powers: 13th (15th) century – 1918.
  – Under the Western powers 13th – 18th century: Germans, Swedes, Danes, Poles (Latvia and Estonia); Poles (Lithuania).
  – Under Russia from the 18th century to 1918.
• III. Time of independence 1918 – 1940
• IV. Soviet occupation 1940-1991
• V. Independence restored since 1991
Exercises I

• Search for additional literature about the period 1917 – 1920 in the Baltic States! Compare the roads towards the independence 1917 - 1920 in three Baltic countries – what was different what was similar?

• Search for additional literature about the Baltic States during the inter-war period. Compare the politics, economy and the failures of democracy (dictatorships) in three Baltic countries! What was different what was similar?
Exercise II

• Compare the experiences of World War II in your home country with the Baltic countries!

• If you analyze today’s foreign policy of the Baltic States, in what way it has been affected by the experiences of the Word War II?

• Search for additional literature about the Baltic States at Soviet period (1945 – 1991). Compare the Soviet period in three Baltic countries - what was similar, what was different?

• Search for additional literature about the independence movements in the Baltic States (1987 – 1991)! Compare the independence movements in the Baltic States! What where the most remarkable differences or similarities between three countries?
Suggested reading

Books:

Useful links about history and country:
Lithuania:
http://lietuva.lt/en/history
http://www.lietuva.lt/
Latvia:
http://www.am.gov.lv/en/latvia/history/
Estonia:
http://www.estonica.org/eng/teema.html?kateg=43
http://www.estonica.org/