

Russian minority and border issue in baltic states

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Historical background

Before the 18th century Baltic region had quite few contacts with Russian culture and Orthodox civilization. Region was already integrated to the West! And there was quite little common in the history of Lithuania in one side and Estonia+Latvia in another side! Only since the end of the 18th century we can speak about the Baltic region as a region what has a common destiny. Destiny which is not pleasure to Baltic states.

Since 18th century all Baltic States were as a part of Russian Empire: Estonia and Livonia (modern Estonia and Latvia) as a part of Swedish Empire was incorporated into the Russian Empire after the Sweden's defeat by Russia in the Great Northern War in 1721. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (created in 1569) was partitioned in 1795 by the Russian Empire, Prussia, and Habsburg Austria. The largest area of Lithuanian territory became part of Russian Empire. After the World War I in 1918 all Baltic countries got independence.

This period was extremely important for national self-consciousness. And again were occupied in 1940 by Soviet Union. After incorporation into Soviet Union Stalinistic red terror regime was started in Baltic region: systematic persecution and physical destruction of political, cultural, military elite of the nations. Mass deportations (to Siberia for example) began, also nationalisation and industrialisation were started. Strong ideological pressure by communists. So Latvians and Estonians historical hatred against Germans turned now against Russians.

But memories from independence time actually helped these nations to survive Soviet period – at once we were independent, maybe will be again! Regained their independence in 1990 after the fall of Soviet Union. Face some problems with Russia. As we can see all Baltic States was in similar position since 18th century. But if we look deeper, we can find that all these occupations made different impact on each country which caused different problems in each country. It was made by Russia deliberately. Latvia and Estonia had better industrial infrastructure before Soviet rule so it was more easy to carry on extensive industrialization here. Because of industrialisation there were lots of russian workforce brought to Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania was not so industrialized, so demanded more investments and also had more free workforce in its own rural districts, so Lithuania effectively prevented extensive Russian immigration, Latvia and Estonia couldn't.

Issues after gaining independence As I mentioned before each of Baltic country faces different problems with Russia after independence. In Latvia and Estonia the biggest still remains russian minority issue. Russian minority issue. After gaining independence (in 1990) there left a huge russian minority in Estonia and Latvia, about 30% of population were russians. It was a huge problem to these countries because they wanted to emphasize their national identity, unique language and culture. So the integration process of russian minorities was started just after the independence. Estonian citizenship was given only to the russians who lived in Estonia before World War II and their descendants. All Estonian residents, who had been Soviet citizens, had the right to register themselves as citizens of Russia or to choose any other citizenship.

The Estonian Government actively promotes the acquiring of Estonian citizenship through naturalisation, thus reducing the number of persons with undetermined citizenship. A person who wishes to acquire Estonian citizenship by naturalisation must have been a permanent resident of Estonia for at least five years, have a basic knowledge of the Estonian language, have knowledge of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia and the Citizenship Act. Residents without citizenship may not elect the Riigikogu (the national parliament) nor the European Parliament, but are eligible to vote in the municipal elections.

In 2012, 84.3% of Estonia's population held Estonian citizenship, 8.9% were citizens of other countries and 6.8% were of undetermined citizenship. The same in Latvia – latvian citizenship was given only to the russians who lived in Latvia before World War II and their descendants. There is quite common non-citizen status in Latvia. Latvian non-citizens can be regarded neither as citizens, nor aliens or stateless persons but as persons with "a specific legal status". They have the right to a non-citizen passport issued by the Latvian government as well as other specific rights.

They have their own magazines, it's like unique community in Latvia. So a lot of russians don't bother about latvian citizenship and seek latvian citizenship only if they want to attend in political arena, because as non-citizens they can't do so. Otherwise there is no point for russians to learn latvian language. Russians in Latvia claim: „Latvian language? Why do we need it? Americans didn't learn American Indian language, british didn't learn aborigine language.“ Situation in Lithuania is totally different. There are 80% of lithuanians in Lithuania.

Historically minorities in Lithuania usually knew and nowadays know Lithuanian language pretty well, apart some exceptions. Russia's attitude to this issue. Russia is always complaining about Russian minorities in Baltic countries. Russia state to European Union that human rights are trampled on because there is no appropriate respect to Russian minorities in Baltic countries. Complaints include all Baltic states although Russian minority is not essential issue in Lithuania. Only 5, 8% of total population are Russians in Lithuania. Compared to Estonia (there is 25% of Russian minority) and Latvia (), number is very low.

The border issue. Estonia. Estonia had hoped for the return of more than 2,000 square kilometers of territory, named Petseri County, annexed by Russia in 1945. The annexed land had been within the borders Estonia approved by Russia in the 1920 Tartu Peace Treaty. The border treaty with Estonia was swiftly ratified by the Estonian parliament in 2005. However, the Russian minister of foreign affairs withdrew his signature from the Treaty because he objected to the Estonian parliament's ratification law which made reference to texts mentioning the Soviet occupation of Estonia.

The border remains substantially the same as the one drawn by Stalin, with some minor adjustments. Latvia. In the case of Latvia, the border treaty was not even signed till today because Russia was angered by the Latvian parliament's desire to add a unilateral preamble condemning the Soviet occupation. Also Russia insisted that the situation of Russian-speakers in Latvia must be improved before any treaty could be signed. The Abrene District has been the main reason the two countries have not been able to

agree on a border treaty. The Latvian-Russian border is functional in de facto terms.

There are two possible ways in which the situation might develop in the future. The possibility that Latvia might entirely waive the unilateral declaration or that Russia might agree to ratify a treaty with the appended declaration. Lithuania. Russia's border problems with Lithuania were different from those with Estonia and Latvia. True, nationalist Lithuanian groups questioned the legality of Russia's take-over of the Kaliningrad region from Germany, and the first President Vytautas Landsbergis demanded not only the demilitarisation but also the "de-colonisation" of the region.

However, all Lithuanian governments recognised the existing borders with Russia. In 1997 the Lithuanian and Russian presidents finally signed a border treaty. The Russian Duma, however, refused to sign the border agreement, openly explaining that it would remove one of the last obstacles to Lithuanian NATO membership and NATO bases. The Duma also claimed that the transfer of Klaipeda (Memel) from the Russian share of German East Prussia to Soviet Lithuania in 1945 was illegal, complained about Lithuanian politicians raising territorial claims on Russia and discrimination of Russian-speakers in Lithuania, too.

However it was ratified by Lietuvos seimas (Lithuania's Parliament) in 1999 and by Russian Duma in 2003. Russia's policy with Baltic countries: With Estonia and Latvia, Russian foreign policy is focused on the protection of the rights of Russian minorities. With Lithuania, where this card is useless, Moscow has developed more subtle tactics. Russia's tactics take the form of oil sanctions, 'gas isolation' and dissuasion of Western firms from investing

in Baltic energy projects. Russian interest: Baltic states as a window to Europe. Baltic States as an obstacle for Russian trade and communication with Western Europe.