Baltic national movements, 1986-1992. Origins, trajectories, agendas

JÖRG HACKMANN

The public appearance of national movements in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is closely connected to Gorbachev's attempt to reform the Soviet Union through the politics of perestroika and glasnost. The evident similarities of these mass movements in their agendas and trajectories result from the parallel political history of the Baltic nations with the Soviet annexation in 1940 and the renewal of their independence in August 1991. Apart from this general framework the single movements show path dependencies, which are based on different social and cultural developments and shaped by the diverging scale of Russian-speaking immigrants during the Soviet period. In fact, after August 1991, the term 'Baltic' may serve only as a regional term for analytical purpose, as it does not mark an essentialist coherence within these movements.

This paper focusses on the origins and trajectories of the Baltic national movements between 1986 and 1992, when they ceased to exist as social movements after their success in restoring political independence. The origins of the 'popular fronts' (*Rahvarinne* in Estonia, *Tautas fronte* in Latvia) or 'movement' (*Sajūdis* in Lithuania) are connected first with the support of perestroika, second with public historical debates about the Molotov-Ribbentrop-Pact and Stalinist repressions, and third with the restoration of national symbols of the pre-war republics. Music performances and festivals, and in particular the 'Baltic chain' on 23 August 1989 mobilized large parts of the population of the three then Soviet republics and shaped the image of the peaceful 'singing revolution'.

Since spring 1990 divisions appeared within the independence movements between the rather reform-oriented popular movements and more radical nationalist groups striving for immediate full independence and the restoration of the pre-war nation states. These cleavages deepened after the restoration of national independence in August 1991, first of all on issues of legal restoration, language laws and de-Sovietization and largely shaped political debates in the three Baltic states in the following decades.

Keywords: Baltic nations, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Singing revolution, national movements

Introduction

In the chain of peaceful revolutions in the Soviet hemisphere from 1989 onwards, the 'singing revolution' in the Baltic region formed a much longer lasting drama than the overcoming of the socialist regimes in the Central European states, and its successful ending was still highly uncertain until August 1991, when the failure of the coup against Gorbachev paved the way for the international recognition of the restored states of Estonian, Latvia and Lithuania. Contrary to the provocative thesis by Steven Kotkin in his *Uncivil Society* that the collapse of the Socialist regimes was caused only by their internal weakness, contemporary foreign observers and scholars were impressed by the power of peaceful protest in the Baltic region. [1] Actually, no analysis of the events leading to the independence of the three Baltic states can skip discussing the role of national movements and nationalisms, and this also implies to look at their historical traditions and trajectories.

Against the official Soviet condemnation that these national mass movements adhered to the chauvinism of the pre-socialist 'bourgeois' or even 'fascist' nation states, an alternative understanding can be noticed that referred to nineteenth-century traditions of liberationist national movements in Europe, which became manifest in the 'spring of nations' and the emancipation of small nations. [2] Such a connection is not only a scholarly one ex post, but was also used as a political argument in Socialist Poland in conceiving the civic protest against the socialist regime. In his 'Letters from Prison' Adam Michnik, a leading intellectual of the Polish national movement of *Solidarność*, borrowed directly from the national Polish traditions of the nineteenth-century striving for self-determination as a major argument for establishing a democratic civil society in socialist Poland. [3] A crucial element of the historical Polish

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discourse was the notion of solidarity of the nations against their tyrants, an idea which the also shaped international relations in East Central Europe in the 1990s.

International scholarly debates on nationalism fill whole libraries, but one point historical research has highlighted in the last decade is the connection between emancipation and exclusion in nineteenth-century nationalisms. The striving for political participation implied social and not least 'ethic' integration on the fields of language, culture and historical imagination. Such an integration was achieved, however, in particular by excluding those who were regarded as not belonging to the nation. Those developments may be described as a trajectory of moving from leftist to rightist political positions.[4] In such a perspective, the distinction between an inclusive, territorial nationalism on the one hand and an ethnic, exclusive on the other hand is not an essentialist, but an analytical one. Nationalism, thus, has to be regarded rather as a Janus-faced phenomenon. Such a dichotomy may serve to understand the impact and the trajectories of national movements in the Baltic region from the late Soviet period until the first years of renewed independence after 1991.

This article focusses on the origins and trajectories of the Baltic national movements between 1986 and 1992, when they ceased to exist as social movements after their success in restoring political independence and their political role was taken over by political parties.[5] Before, some basic aspects of Baltic nations and nationalisms will be discussed. Furthermore, the text sheds light on the cultural forms of the national movements and discusses their political strategies. The conclusion will then briefly address the place of the Baltic national movements within the broader context of nationalism at the end of the twentieth century. The period covered here has been closely observed by many western journalists and scholars, many of them with an exile background being

linguistically competent to follow the developments and debates. Furthermore, many of the activists involved have published memories and reflections on that period.[6]

On the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, on 23 August 1989, a human chain formed over 600 km from Tallinn via Riga to Vilnius, the respective capitals of the three then Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Organized by a joint council of the three Popular Fronts in the Baltic republics, it involved between 1 and 2 million people[7] out of a population of circa 8 million. The statement issued by the organizers claimed a 'peaceful restoration of our statehood' and a strive for 'social security, civil rights, and economic progress to all peoples in the Baltic republics regardless of their nationality'.[8] This event marked the symbolic peak of the common striving of the Baltic national movements for political self-determination. On the occasion of the chain, a rock song was recorded addressing the common fate of the 'Baltic sister nations' and calling upon them in their three languages to awake.[9] It illustrates the image of the 'singing revolution', a term coined by one of the Estonian activists, Heinz Valk, at its very beginning in June 1988. Collective singing made language a 'core symbol in Baltic nationalism', as Smidchens argues, and highlights the double nature of inclusive and exclusive national mobilisation, which was also inherent in Valk's notion.[10]

Apart from the narrative of the peaceful singing revolution, the 'Baltic chain' also illustrates a second core narrative of the national movements: the reference to history and the claim to mark the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in 1940 as acts of injustice, which should be made undone. In that respect, 'revolution from the past' has been another labelling of these movement.[11] The pasts remembered and reconstructed in the Baltic region, however, were first of all national ones, based on historical references within the single nations to their respective

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national movements before 1918. Against this background, the notion of unity among the three national movements worked out best in reaction to Russian (Tsarist and Soviet) repression. Actually, there had also been attempts among the Baltic states to co-operate during the inter-war period, but the focus then was rather on a broader Baltic region including Finland and the Scandinavian states.[12] One may argue, therefore, that the phenomenon of supranational Baltic unity during the singing revolution was mainly a result of the Soviet period. This may also explain why after the restored independence in August 1991, the concord among the three movements quickly ceased to exist, although common political institutions had been created. In fact, the political and cultural trajectories of the single movements also reveal significant path dependencies. These remarks shall highlight the fact that treating the Baltic nations as one entity has been – to a large degree – a perspective from outside the region, with only limited resonance within the Baltic societies and the political elites themselves. As I have argued elsewhere, the contemporary understanding of 'Baltic' in 'Baltic states', 'Baltic nations' referring to Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania is largely based on the developments since the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the subsequent German and Soviet domination over the north-eastern part of the Baltic sea region.[13]

Another aspect that needs clarification before looking at the development of the singing revolution refers to the ethnic and linguistic structure of the population in the region. A major concern until nowadays is the large number of usually called 'Russian-speaking' inhabitants in Estonia (35% of circa 1,5 million in 1989) and Latvia (circa 42% of 2,7 million in 1989). [14] This situation is largely, but not exclusively, due to Soviet-time labour migration into the industrial centres. However, arguments that the Baltic states have widely been nationally homogeneous before the Soviet occupation are only correct

with regard to Latvia and Estonia when looking at the situation in 1944, i.e. after the forced evacuation of the Baltic Germans as a consequence of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the murder of the Jewish population during after the German occupation from 1941 to 1944. The ethnic and political situation in Lithuania is different for several reasons: First, the Russian-speaking people comprised only circa 12% of 3,7 million residents in 1989. Second, the Polish population (7% in 1989), which concentrates in the region around Vilnius, has been of much higher concern for Lithuanian internal politics. Third, the Lithuanian territory saw a significant expansion since 1940 with the inclusion of two territories: the Vilnius region, which had been occupied by Poland in 1920, and the Klaipėda region, which was contested between Lithuania and the German Reich in the inter-war period. Against this background, notions of originally in ethnic terms homogenous Baltic states must be seen critically. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, the cultural expressions of the broad social movements during the striving for independence were dominated by the languages of the three titular nations.

The social movements in the Baltic region emerged during the Gorbachev era with civic protests against ecological devastation. They focused on phosphorite open mining in north-eastern Estonia (called by Estonian activists the 'phosphorite war') in 1987 and a hydro-electric power plant on the Daugava river near Daugavpils in Latvia since 1986. The protests in the case of Latvia were launched by two writers, among them Dainis Īvāns, who later became a leader of the Latvian Popular Front, with an article in the literary journal *Literatūra un Māksla* in October 1986. Success came rather unexpectedly, when the plans – both in Estonia and Latvia – were stopped, although they had already been approved in Moscow in 1987.[15] This success was, as Andrejs Plakans suggests, largely due to the fact that the protests came unexpected for

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the Soviet administration, which had no experience how to deal with the new dimension of civic protests in the times of *glasnost*.[16] In Lithuania, initiatives for environmental protection had emerged already in the early 1980s. They broadened into mass movements in 1988, after the foundation of the national movement *Sąjūdis* and focused on the third bloc of the Ignalina nuclear power plant as well as on pollution at the Baltic shore.

In addition, these protests against environmental devastation were not only a criticism of technological projects, but were also connected to the romantic idea of protecting the homeland as well as the ethnic nation, because those large Soviet industrial projects implied the immigration of (Russian-speaking) workers from all over the Soviet Union. This connection introduced national images and symbols into the form of protests, as for instance by the Latvian Environment Protection Club (*Vides aizsardzības klubs*). The focus on the national homeland also became a core issue of the movements for monuments protection. In Estonia, the focus was on a large number of castles, churches, manor houses and cemeteries, although many of these monuments would not fit into a narrow ethno-nationalist reading of the Estonian nation. The Estonian Heritage Society (*Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts*), founded in December 1987, right from its beginnings departed from understanding itself as a secret dissident organization, but strove for official approval in order to act openly in the public space, although its activities to publicly display the Estonian pre-war flag in April 1988 were still illegal. In Latvia, protests were ignited by plans to build a subway beneath the Old Town of Riga; furthermore the reconstruction of the Black Heads' House on the Town Hall square as central issue on the national agenda gained new momentum.[17] In Lithuania, the preservation of Vilnius' Old Town and the restoration of Catholic churches as for instance the Cathedral on Gediminas square had a similar focus.[18]

More closely connected to national traditions were the commemorations of blank spots of the Soviet period. In Latvia, mass mobilization started with 'calendar demonstrations' on anniversaries of dates connected to national history. A first one, organized by a 'Helsinki-86' group from Liepāja, was dedicated to the deportations of 13-14 June 1941, when more than 15,000 people were transported from the Latvian SSR to various places within the Soviet Union. Held in Riga on 14 June 1987, it was joined by some 5,000 people. Further demonstrations followed on 23 August, referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and 18 November, commemorating the independence of 1918. The 14 June commemoration in 1988 was then attended by already 100,000 people.[19] In Tallinn, a first demonstration took place on 23 August 1987 in the Hirve Park leading to the foundation of a group for the publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.[20] Further demonstrations in early 1988 commemorated the 1920 Tartu peace treaty between Estonia and Soviet Russia and the declaration of independence of 1918. In Lithuania, many mass demonstrations took place since summer 1988, the demonstration on 23 August 1988 in Vingis Park in Vilnius was joined by 150,000 to 200,000 people.[21]

What can be noticed in this early stage is the combination of single political issues connected to the protection of environment and cultural heritage into a quickly broadening social movement with an increasing display of national symbols. The protests initiated by individual persons and small groups did not only spread through means of signing protests, but not least through their cultural dimension. Its relevance clearly was a result of the Soviet suppression of a public political sphere. The ban of pre-war national symbols thus gave them an imminent political meaning. As Plakans has argued, the display of national symbols emerged subsequently as participants challenged the new space of freedom that was promised by the slogan of *glasnost*.[22] Such activities were also

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stimulated, as Karsten Brüggemann suggests, by the collective disappearance of fear of Soviet authorities.[23] But there was also a deep-going unsettling within the Soviet administrations how to deal with the new public activities. On the one hand, Soviet authorities were already too weak to impose the ban of national symbols of the pre-1940 Baltic states or to introduce large scale repressions of the social movements. On the other hand, these mass movements understood themselves, as will be discussed below, as acting in accordance with the new politics of Gorbachev, so they could initially be regarded as contributing to the process of *perestroika*.

The organization of rock concerts and song gatherings as places of non-political or half-political society-building had an important impact on mobilising large parts of the societies beyond environmental protests and collective commemoration of historic and traumatic dates. Song festivals in particular had a tradition going back to nineteenth-century Protestant and national singing traditions in Estonia and Latvia, and they were continued as official national events in the independent states after World War I. In the inter-war period, such festivals were also introduced in Lithuania. However, one should not overlook the impact of Soviet trajectories. On the one hand, the display of ethnic folk culture received official support already from the Stalinist period in the famous slogan of 'national in form, socialist in contents' and became manifest in Soviet song festivals already since 1946, which actually continued the traditions of official mass festivals from the inter-war period. The ban of pre-war national flags and anthems created voids that were filled with substitutes preserving the memory of the banned symbols. With the ban of the pre-war Estonian national anthem 'Mu isamaa, mu õnn ja rõõm' ('My fatherland, my happiness and joy'), which was an adaptation of the Finnish anthem for the Estonian Song Festival in 1869, its place was taken over by a song with similar background and contents: 'Mu isamaa

on minu arm' (My fatherland is my beloved') by the poet Lydia Koidula which was also composed and performed in 1869. The song was newly arranged by Gustav Ernesaks in 1944 and then performed at the first Soviet time Estonian song festival in 1947. After it was banned temporarily in the Stalinist period, it was sung again publicly since 1960. At the Estonian Song Festival of 1985 Ernesaks' song clearly occupied the place of the traditional national anthem, as Brüggemann and Kasekamp argue.[24]

In Estonia, since 1987 rock music performances, in particular with Alo Mattiisen's 'five patriotic songs', contributed to national mass mobilization. Mattiisen combined texts from the nineteenth-century Estonian national movement as for instance 'Sind surmani' ('You, until death') with own rock arrangements and created new songs as 'Ei ole üksi ükski maa' ('Not a single land is alone') or 'Eestlane olen ja Eestlaseks jään' ('I am Estonian and I'll stay Estonian'). Their performance at the Tartu Music Days in April 1988 went along with the first public displaying of the Estonian national flag in Soviet Estonia. In June 1988, during the Tallinn Old Town Days, mostly young people spontaneously gathered at the song festival place during the white nights for almost a week, which coincided with the anniversary of the first wave of Soviet deportations in June 1941. According to Heinz Valk, 'participation in this festival compensated for decades of humiliation and self-denial.'[25] As Brüggemann and Kasekamp pointed out, it was the experience of forming one body through singing that triggered their political courage and inspired the image of the 'singing revolution'.[26] In September 1988, the festival Song of Estonia ('Eestimaa laul') then gathered an estimated number of 300,000 singers, which would have been 25% of the whole Estonian population. This festival also included political speeches and another popular slogan created by Heinz Valk 'Ükskord me võidame niikuinii' ('One day we will win anyway') and

manifested a 'mental secession from the USSR'.[27] Also at this festival, Trivimi Velliste, the leader of the Estonian Heritage Society, for the first time publicly demanded Estonian independence, and thus showed the connection between cultural and political activities. In fact, members of that association understood themselves as leaders of a new, second national awakening after the first one, which had emerged after the first Estonian song festival in 1869.

A view on Latvia and Lithuania reveals similar phenomena. In Latvia, the rock band 'Pērkons', which had already produced protest songs in earlier years, was banned by the authorities after young people demolished a train coach in 1985. The band then received popularity (even beyond Latvia) through Juris Podnieks' documentary *Vai viegli būt jaunam?* ('Is it easy to be young?') from 1986. In Lithuania performances by the rock band 'Antis', which also became subject of a documentary *Kažkas atsitiko* ('Something just happened') by Artūras Pozdniakovas in 1986 had a similar mobilising effect.[28] Finally, in the summer of 1990 national song festivals took place in all three Baltic republics. As Šmidchens describes, the closing of the Estonian festival continued with spontaneous songs of national contents ('Jää vabaks, Eesti meri' – 'Stay free, Estonian sea' – among others) and speeches focusing on freedom. The performances at the festivals in Riga and Vilnius saw similar national programs with unofficial anthems ('Pūt, vējiņi' – 'Oh wind' – and 'Gasimas pils' – 'Fortress of light' in Latvia, a song by Andrejs Jurjāns from 1884) and continued singing after the official end of the program in Riga.[29] The Lithuanian song 'Lietuva Brangi' ('Dear Lithuania'), by Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis served as an unofficial anthem in the 1930s and re-appeared during public events in the 1960s.[30] The intention of creating a common cultural narrative through collective singing also shaped Juris Podnieks' documentary *Krustceļš* ('Homeland') in 1990, who worked with the

stark contrast between peaceful singing in choirs and gatherings on the one hand, and the military power of the Soviet army on the other.

Between April and October 1988, the various cultural and preservationist initiatives and demonstrations resulted in the formation of 'Popular Fronts' (*Rahvarinne* in Estonia, *Tautas fronte* in Latvia) or simply 'Movement' (*Sąjūdis*) in Lithuania, respectively, as informal mass organizations. As initial motivation these movements stressed the support of *perestroika*, which initially was part of the movements' names in Estonia and Lithuania, but at the same time the limits of *glasnost* were tested by demands to publish the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (in Estonia and Latvia) and thus disclose the injustice of the Soviet annexation in 1940. All three Popular Fronts served as umbrella organizations, where dissident intellectuals met with reform-oriented communists who tried to distance the republic party branches from the CPSU. In the early phase, almost 50% of the council members of *Tautas fronte* and *Sąjūdis* and more than 20% of the delegates to the first congress of *Rahvarinne* in Estonia were members of the Communist Party. The leaders of the Popular Fronts reveal the broad range of support within the Baltic societies: In Estonia, Edgar Savisaar, a leading member of the Estonian CP (and an influential politician inter alia as the mayor of Tallinn until 2015) became chairman. In Latvia, Īvāns, who initiated the protests against the Daugava hydro-electric dam, was elected, and in Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis, a musicologist, who had entered politics with the foundation of *Sąjūdis*.

The dynamics within these movements were strong, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The Popular Fronts quickly outnumbered the members of the regional Communist Parties. Membership estimates were 100,000 members in Estonia at the end of 1988 and 250,000 in Latvia in 1989, in the case of *Sąjūdis* figures widely vary between 100,000 and up to 300,000 members.[31] In putting pressure on the

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regional Soviet structures, the Popular Fronts received political relevance, even before their power became manifest within the official structures of the Soviet Union with the elections first to the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow in March 1989 and second to the Supreme Councils of the single Soviet Republics in March 1990.

Among the political steps initiated by the national movements were declarations 'about sovereignty' issued by the Supreme Councils of the Baltic republics, and hence official Soviet bodies. The Estonian declaration of 18 November 1988 was signed by Arnold Rüütel, at that time president of the Supreme Council of the ESSR. The declaration referred to the national narrative that the Estonian people has been living already over 5,000 years on the Baltic rim and that Estonia before joining the Soviet Union had been a nationally homogenous country. During the following years, the declaration continued, a catastrophic situation emerged in demographical, environmental and economic terms, therefore the Estonian supreme body claimed to have the right of self-determination in accordance with international law.[32]

Similar declarations were issued by the Lithuanian and Latvian Supreme Councils in May and July 1989, respectively, with corresponding legal claims of self-determination. The Lithuanian declaration, which mentioned the illegal incorporation into the Soviet Union, was already prepared at the same time as the Estonian one, but then due to political pressure from Moscow, blocked by Algirdas Brazauskas, a reform communist and since October 1988 first secretary of the Lithuanian CP. The Latvian declaration referred to the national narrative of seven centuries of oppression by foreign powers. This was a traditional narrative among Estonians and Latvians from the period of the national awakenings, which originally meant the time before the independence of 1918, but was now also connected to Soviet rule.

All three Supreme Councils were dominated by the national movements after the elections of March 1990. In Estonia *Rahvarinne* received 43 out of 105 seats; together with the 25 members of the pro-independence faction *Vaba Eesti* ('Free Estonia') and smaller parties, supporters of independence controlled 77 seats. In Latvia, *Tautas fronte* won 134 out of 200 seats, and in Lithuania *Sajudis* gained 96 out of 141 mandates.[33]

All three Supreme Councils issued declarations of independence in the spring of 1990 with the restitution of national symbols. Lithuania was first on 11 March, then followed by Estonia and finally Latvia on 4 May. In Lithuania, the declaration claimed the beginning of full, *de facto* sovereignty and was answered by Moscow with economic sanctions and various activities of the army and special units. After this experience, the following declarations were rather indirect, claiming *de iure* independence and against the background of *de facto* occupation a transition period that should lead then to full independence.[34] Apart from these declarations all Supreme Councils named new governments in the spring of 1990, which were now led by representatives of the Popular Fronts such as Savisaar in Estonia, Kazimiera Prunskienė in Lithuania, and Ivars Godmanis in Latvia.

Although the popular movements were inclusive in political terms and did not limit themselves to the titular nations of the republics, the ideology of the national independence was clearly based on the respective national culture and history. In that respect, the Estonian and Latvian movements referred to the nineteenth-century national awakening and called the new ones a 'second' (in Estonia) or 'third' one (in Latvia). One of the most crucial issues of the national movements were laws on the official language with the intention to strengthen the national languages and cutting down the role of Russian, which had become the dominating language in Soviet times. In Estonia, such a law was adopted by the Supreme Council already at the end of 1988, and in

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Latvia in May 1989. This issue, thus, was not limited to nationalist factions of the national movements. In Lithuania, *Sąjūdis* demanded already in 1988 that inhabitants should show a 'determination to permanently live in Lithuania, respect for Lithuania's history, culture, and recognition of the Lithuanian language as the state language'.[35] This also explains why leading figures used a national rhetoric. This does not only hold for people like Landsbergis, but also for regional communist leaders with the reform oriented Brazauskas at first hand, who headed the separation of the Lithuanian branch from the CPSU at the end of 1989. In Estonia, Rüütel as President of the Supreme Court and Savisaar as prime minister represented *Vaba Eesti*, the pro-independence wing of CPE, which also opted for separation, whereas in Latvia the Communist Party was split in a reformist and conservative wing.

The Popular Fronts were no homogenous organisations, but also comprised more radical nationalist groups, which emerged in all Baltic republics: In Latvia, *Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība* (the 'National Independence Movement') was formed by members of the Environment Protection Club in June 1988, in Lithuania, *Lietuvos Laisvės Lyga* (the 'Freedom League') experienced harsh reactions by the Soviet authorities in September 1988, which then led to a closer cooperation with *Sąjūdis*. In Estonia, *Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei* (the 'National Independence Party'), founded in August 1988 by the group for the publication of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, can be regarded as the first real political party. Furthermore, it played a decisive role in initiating so-called 'Citizens' Committees', which will be addressed below.[36]

Political conflicts within the Baltic societies after the formation of the Popular Fronts arose from two issues. On the one hand from the opposition against the independence movements formed in 'inter'-movements: in Estonia first as *Interfront*, then from autumn 1988 under

the name of Inter-movement (*Interliikumine/Interdvizhenie*), Unity (*Edinstvo*) in Lithuania, and *Interfront* in Latvia. They emerged in the autumn of 1988 or early 1989 respectively, mainly within factories of a Soviet all-union relevance. The Estonian 'Interfront', however, failed to gain broader support even among the Russian-speaking population in Estonia, many of whom also participated in the independence movement. The confrontation between both movements became manifest on 15 May 1990 with an attempt by the Inter-movement to storm the seat of the Estonian Soviet in the castle on Toompea Hill and restore the Soviet flag in Tallinn after the declarations of independence. Finally, the participants of the demonstration found themselves surrounded by supporters of Estonian independence, mobilized by Savisaar via radio, but could leave the site without clashes between both groups. Similar incidents took place in Riga on the same day.[37]

The second source of conflict went beyond the political split between supporters of national independence and those who wanted to preserve the Soviet, as it was connected to the large Russian-speaking immigration into the Estonian and Latvian Soviet Republics after World War II, which by the vast majority of ethnic Estonians and Latvians was seen as a threat to national self-determination. Although the national movements did also comprise many Russian inhabitants, the restoration of independence seemed to be unthinkable without strengthening the titular nations. Apart from language legislation, the question of citizenship served as a means to stop or even undo the Soviet immigration. This was the agenda of the 'Citizens' Committees' (*Kodanike Komiteed, Pilsoņu komitejas*), which emerged as new institutions besides the Popular Fronts in Estonia and Latvia. In Estonia, they were initiated by Velliste from *Muinsuskaitse Selts* and formed on 24 February 1989, the anniversary of the independence declaration in 1918. These committees intended to re-establish Estonian citizenship by

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granting it only to citizens of the pre-war independent states and their descendants. This in fact created an electorate on mainly ethnic fundaments with the intention to exclude the post-war non-Estonian and non-Latvian immigrants. Both committee movements received support from the vast majority of ethnic Estonians and Latvians by early 1990. After elections based on the principle of pre-war citizenship to a 'Congress of Estonia', the Congress convened in March 1990 and claimed to be the only legitimate parliamentary body. Although more radical representatives of the Estonian Congress rejected cooperation with the Supreme Council, there was a significant overlapping between members of the Congress and the Supreme Council – 44 of the Council members also had mandates in the Congress. In negations between the Congress and the Supreme Council the latter acknowledged the claim of the Congress, but nevertheless served as a leading body during the transition period. In Latvia, relations between the Citizens' Committees and the Popular Front were more confrontational, as the committees initially demanded a boycott of the election to the Latvian Supreme Council in 1990, but – as their position was weaker than in Estonia – finally came to an agreement with the Popular Front, which promised to vote for independence after victory in the elections. In Lithuania, however, the situation was different: a citizenship law with a 'zero option' – meaning that all current residents of the Lithuanian SSR could apply for citizenship without further requirements – was already introduced in October 1989.[38] In effect, the vast majority of the inhabitants made use of the opportunity, with a more restrictive citizenship law introduced only at end of 1991.

The period from the spring of 1990 onwards revealed a division within the independence movements between the rather reform-oriented popular movements as umbrella organizations on the one hand, which initially tried to achieve changes within a reformed Soviet Union, and

more radical nationalist groups striving for immediate full independence and the restoration of the pre-war nation states on the other hand. This, however, was not so much a difference in goals, but rather one of strategy, as the Estonian Popular Front demanded full independence since October 1989 and the newly elected (initially still Soviet) Supreme Council re-established the pre-war state name of *Eesti Vabariik* in May 1990. A similar process can be observed in Latvia, where the Supreme Council unanimously but with absence of the members against independence, declared the restoration of Latvia on 4 May 1990.

The struggle for power with the Soviet authorities escalated in January 1991 with attacks by OMON, special forces of the Ministry of the Interior of the Soviet Union, on TV towers and the subsequent erection of barricades around the Supreme Councils, now dominated by the popular movements. In the spring of 1991, after the attacks by OMON troops in Vilnius and Riga, which left 19 people dead, in all three republics inclusive plebiscites on independence were held with overwhelming results supporting independence: 74% in Latvia, 78% in Estonia, and 90% in Lithuania.[39]

The time of power rivalry between the national movements and Moscow ended after the failed coup d'état in Moscow in August 1991. From that point onward, restitutionist politics clearly dominated in Estonia and Latvia and became most obvious in citizenship laws (1992 in Estonia, 1991 in Latvia), which excluded *de facto* large parts of the Russian-speaking groups through language barriers. In addition, in 1994 Latvia introduced a so-called 'window policy' largely restricting the naturalization process. In Lithuania, as a consequence of the 'zero-option' rule, the number of non-citizens was much lower than in Estonia and Latvia. Conflicts however arose regarding the Polish minority, which was blamed for supporting the coup against Gorbachev in 1991. This conflict had its historical background in the Polish occupation of the

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Vilnius region in 1920 and the subsequent annexation. Disputes referred to various aspects of minority politics, such as the change of administration districts, Lithuanisation of names etc., but all in all the level of national conflicts was significantly lower than in the two other states. In Estonia and Latvia, citizenship politics became a major concern of OSCE missions implemented in 1993. The situation has changed significantly after the EU accession in 2004, but in 2009 8% of the population of Estonia and 18% of Latvia's inhabitants were still non-citizens.[40]

After the re-establishment of independence, the Popular Fronts either ceased to exist (in Estonia) or tried to transform into political parties, however with limited success in both Latvia and Lithuania. Most successful was the Latvian liberal-conservative party *Latvijas Ceļš* ('Latvian Way'), which was formed in 1993 from former members of the Popular Front and had four prime ministers until 2002. Although there are differences between the political structures in the three Baltic nations, governments were formed on coalitions, which in various constellations included politicians from the Popular Fronts, the Communist parties as well as from rather nationalist parties like *Isamaa* ('Fatherland') in Estonia.

Conclusion

Concluding this brief overview on the Baltic national movements, it shall be addressed here whether these Baltic phenomena are to be classified as nationalism or neo-nationalism. Many observers and politicians tend to do so, partly based on (post-)Soviet convictions of alleged fascist tendencies in the region, partly in criticising tendencies of ethnic democracy.[41] Whereas it might be not so difficult to mark and dismantle

nationalist political opinions, an extensive judgement on why ethnic exclusive strategies gained so much support in the Baltic states demands more attention on comparative politics than can be provided here. Instead, I will return to Adam Michnik's approach to nationalism, who in 1991 pointed out that it would be a fundamental misunderstanding to call *Sąjūdis* a nationalist organization. According to Michnik, 'the aspirations to reclaim the national memory, to defend cultural identity, to have an independent state do not qualify as nationalism. Nationalism is not the struggle for one's own national rights, but a disregard for someone else's right to national and human dignity'.[42] With such an understanding, which is obviously shaped by his view on Poland addressed at the beginning, the classification of nationalism would not refer to the liberationist phase of the singing revolutions, but to the phase of consolidating power (among the victors) and the phase of reckoning (with the defeated) according to Michnik. Other authors like Andres Kasekamp, Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs introduced a distinction between the social or democratic movements of the Popular Fronts on the one hand and ethno-national groups with a nationalist agenda focussing on the immediate restoration of national independence on the other.[43] Although these groups were coexisting already before August 1991, the latter gained political relevance with the transformation into political parties, whereas the umbrella organisations of the Popular Fronts lost political weight as shown above.

If we apply the observations on nineteenth-century nationalism addressed at the beginning to the Baltic case, then it becomes obvious that there is not much explanatory sense in separating the Popular Fronts from an ethno-cultural nationalism. A similar conclusion is drawn by Mara Ladza: according to her, the focus on ethno-cultural nationalism in Latvia seems to be overemphasized, the participation in the independence movement was 'transethnic and transnational'. [44]

Nevertheless, even these broad 'transethnic' national movements referred first of all to the ethno-cultural symbols and languages of the small nations. In fact, there were hardly any alternative symbols that could be associated with the national movements in a similar way. Furthermore, the impact of folk cultures itself was a result of the Soviet support since the period of Stalinism on the one hand, as well as of national counter-narratives on the other. In the Estonian case, the idea of an alleged presence of Estonians on the Baltic rim for over 5,000 years was supported not least by the film director Lennart Meri, who then became the first president of the restored Estonian state. This deeply rooted ethnicization does not only refer to folk culture, but also to other fields of cultural activity, when the artist and architect Leo Lapin for instance claimed that 'Estonian architecture must be built by Estonian architects'.[45] If such ethnocentric notions were part of an emancipative agenda in Soviet times, they could also be used for implementing exclusive strategies, once the balance of power had changed. Similar developments could be shown for Latvia and Lithuania, revealing a general tendency of focusing on the titular nations' culture and history as means of exclusion since 1991.

Nevertheless, despite all similarities in the trajectories, which were shaped by Soviet politics in the region and produced by political institutions during the 'singing revolution', path dependencies remained important. They refer in particular to defining the national 'other' and related political strategies. Whereas in Estonia and Latvia the Russian-speaking minorities – except those who could prove pre-war Estonian or Latvian citizenship – were initially excluded from citizenship, there was no such citizenship issue in Lithuania. There, however, the relations with the Polish minority remained tense. Differences also occur in historical national narratives. Whereas the Estonian and Latvian discourses of suppressed small nations were quite similar, in Lithuania the relations

with Poland and the role of the Lithuanian Grand Duchy as a major European power in early modern history were regarded as crucial.

Should the Baltic developments then be regarded as specific regional phenomena in the Soviet context or as part of a new wave or tide of nationalism in Europe? Not only in their cultural forms, but also in their liberationist agenda, the Baltic national movements rather follow the path of nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries' national movements, as might also be observed in socialist Poland. With regard to actors and activities, the Soviet context and the stress on the restoration of the pre-1940 nation states in legal terms as well as of political culture, however, provided a specific historical and mental framework. In that respect, it would be most appropriate to discuss the ethno-national politics after the restored independence in 1991 as an issue of regional path dependencies as well as transnational issues including neighbouring states and supranational institutions.

Endnotes

[1] S. Kotkin, *Uncivil Society. 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York, NY, 2010).

[2] On 1848, see D. Langewiesche (ed.), *Die Revolutionen von 1848 in der europäischen Geschichte Ergebnisse und Nachwirkungen* (München, 2000); on small nations see the seminal study by M. Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge, 1985).

[3] A. Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley, CA, 1987); J. Hackmann, 'Civil Society against the State? Historical Experiences of Eastern

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Europe', in: N. Götz & J. Hackmann (eds.), *Civil Society in the Baltic Sea Region* (Aldershot, 2003), 49-62.

4 I'm referring here to: D. Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Beck'sche Reihe, 1399) (München, 2000); and on the article 'Volk, Nation', in: O. Brunner, W. Conze & R. Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 2004) vol. 7, 141-431; on social history see Hroch, *Das Europa der Nationen: die moderne Nationsbildung im europäischen Vergleich* (Synthesen, 2) (Göttingen, 2005), on ethnicity: A. D. Smith, *The Nation in History. Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Oxford, 2000).

5 On the history of the movements see for first orientation the respective paragraphs in: D. J. Smith, A. Pabriks, A. Purs e.a., *The Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London, 2002); A. Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Basingstoke, 2010); A. Plakans, *A Concise History of the Baltic States* (Cambridge, 2011). For a broader view on the national movements see: J. Ulfelder, 'Baltic Protest in the Gorbachev Era: Movement Content and Dynamics', in: *Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 3/3-4 (2004), 23-43; and M. R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge, 2002).

6 As reports by external observers see for instance M. Butenschön, *Estland, Lettland, Litauen. Das Baltikum auf dem langen Weg in die Freiheit* (Serie Piper, 1416) (München, 1992); A. Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven, CT, 1994); as scholarly publications in close connection with the 'singing revolution' see: J. Hiden & P. Salmon, *The Baltic Nations and Europe. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1991); and R. J. Misiunas & R. Taagepera, *The Baltic States. Years of Dependence 1940-1990* (London, 1993). On publications of activists see the list in: Brüggemann, K., '"One Day We Will Win Anyway": The Singing Revolution in the Soviet Baltic Republics', in: W. Mueller, M. Gehler & A. Suppan (eds.), *The Revolutions of 1989. A Handbook*. (Internationale Geschichte, 2) (Wien, 2015), 223-224.

7 Figures in the text are given mainly for the purpose of illustration; there are hardly any exact and reliable numbers referring to mass movements and demonstrations.

[8] Quoted following R. Taagepera, 'Estonia's Road to Independence', in: *Problems of Communism*, 38/6 (1989), 21.

[9] G. Šmidchens, *The Power of Song. Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution* (Seattle, WA, 2014), 249-250.

[10] H. Valk, 'Laulev Revolutsioon', in: *Sirp ja Vasar*, 17.6.1988 3; excerpts in English translation in: Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 242-243, see also K. Brüggemann & A. Kasekamp, ''Singing Oneself into a Nation'? Estonian Song Festivals as Rituals of Political Mobilisation', in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 20/2 (2014), 272.

[11] R. Ruutsoo, *Civil Society and Nation Building in Estonia and the Baltic States* (Acta Universitatis Lapponiensis, 49) (Rovaniemi, 2002). On the role of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact see J. Lipinsky, *Das Geheime Zusatzprotokoll zum deutsch-sowjwtischen Nichtangriffsvertrag vom 23. August 1939 und seine Entstehnungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von 1939 bis 1999* (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe III. Geschichte und ihre Hilfswissenschaften, 991) (Frankfurt am Main, 2004), 442-467.

[12] M. Lehti, 'Non-Reciprocal Region-building. Baltoscandia as a National Coordinate for the Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians', in: *NORDEUROPAforum*, 2 (1998), 19-47.

[13] J. Hackmann, 'Wo liegt das „Baltikum"? Entstehung, Verwendung und Semantik des Begriffs seit dem 19. Jahrhundert', in: A. Sommerlat-Michas (ed.), *Das Baltikum als Konstrukt (18.-19. Jahrhundert). Von einer Kolonialwahrnehmung zu einem nationalen Diskurs.* (Würzburg, 2015), 23-43.

[14] Figures following M. Lazda, 'Reconsidering Nationalism: The Baltic Case of Latvia in 1989', in: *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 22/4 (2009), 519; 'Russian' includes here Ukrainians and Belorussians as well.

[15] Detailed description in R. W. Smurr, *Perceptions of Nature, Expressions of Nation: An Environmental History of Estonia* (Köln 2009), ch. 6; N. R. Muižnieks, 'The Daugavpils Hydro Station and "Glasnost" in Latvia', in: *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 18/1 (1987), 63-70.

[16] Plakans, *A Concise History*, 389.

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[17] J. Lejnieks, *Rīga, kuras nav. Never-built Riga. Ein Riga, das es nie gegeben hat* (Rīga, 1998), 252-257; D. Stukuls, *From Opposition to Independence: Social Movements in Latvia, 1986-1991* (Working Paper Series, 569) (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007), 27.

[18] A. E. Senn, *Lithuania Awakening* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), 38, 75.

[19] Lazda, 'Reconsidering Nationalism', 523.

[20] T. Tannberg & A. Kivisiv (eds.), *Hirvepark 1987. 20 aastat kodanikualgatusest, mis muutis Eesti lähiajalugu* (Tallinn, 2007).

[21] Senn, *Lithuania Awakening*, 123.

[22] Plakans, *A Concise History*, 392.

[23] K. Brüggemann, '"One Day We Will Win Anyway", 244.

[24] K. Brüggemann & A. Kasekamp, ''Singing Oneself into a Nation'?, 271.

[25] Valk, Laulev Revolutsioon; translation following: Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 243.

[26] Brüggemann & Kasekamp, ''Singing Oneself into a Nation'?'. The social mood of these gatherings is nicely caught in the documentary *The Singing Revolution* by James and Maureen Castle Tusty (2007), although the general message of the film glorifying the protagonists and featuring folk culture may be discussed.

[27] Brüggemann & Kasekamp, ''Singing Oneself into a Nation'?', 272.

[28] Detailed description in Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 227-237; see also the Lithuanian documentary *How we Played the Revolution* by Giedrė Žickytė (2012) with an excellent analysis by the late Leonidas Donskis.

[29] Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 193-206.

[30] Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 179-182.

[31] Plakans, *A Concise History*, 393; Misiunas & Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 319; a RFE/RL background report from 1989 estimated 180,000 members of *Sąjūdis*.

[32] Estonian text in: Eesti Nõukogude Sotsialistliku Vabariigi Ülemnõukogu ja Valitsuse teataja, 25 November 1988, No. 685; English translation in: http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1991-2/baltic-independence/baltic-

independence-text/declaration-on-estonian-sovereignty/ [accessed 22 August 2016].

[33] Numbers on the situation in Lithuania vary due to a complicated election process, cf. Misiunas & Taagepera, *The Baltic States*, 330.

[34] Detailed account of the situation in Lithuania in: Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution*, 230-241.

[35] Quotation by Vytautas Sinkevičius, following D. Budrytė, 'From Ethnic Fear to Pragmatic Inclusiveness? Political Community Building in the Baltic States (1988-2004)', in: *Ethnicity Studies/Etniškumo studijos*, 1-2 (2011), 19.

[36] A. Kasekamp, 'Extreme-right parties in contemporary Estonia', in: *Patterns of Prejudice*, 37/4 (2003), 403-404.

[37] Šmidchens, *The Power of Song*, 314-315

[38] Budrytė, 'From Ethnic Fear to Pragmatic Inclusiveness?', 20.

[39] Budrytė, 'From Ethnic Fear to Pragmatic Inclusiveness?', 15.

[40] Lazda, 'Reconsidering Nationalism: The Baltic Case of Latvia in 1989', 523.

[41] G. Smith, 'The Ethnic Democracy Thesis and the Citizenship Question in Estonia and Latvia', in: *Nationalities Papers*, 24/2 (1996), 199-216.

[42] A. Michnik, 'Nationalism', in: *Social Research*, 58/4 (1991), 757-763.

[43] Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States*, 163-164; A. Pabriks & A. Purs, *Latvia: the Challenges of Change* (London, 2001), 54 (in: Smith e.a., *The Baltic States*).

[44] Lazda, 'Reconsidering Nationalism', 519.

[45] Quoted following K. Kodres, 'Sada aastat ehitamist Eestis: Ideid, probleeme ja lahendusi', in: *Ehituskunst*, 24-26 (1999), 10.